

MALAWI

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EDWARD WARREN HOLMES
Consul
Blantyre, Nyasaland (1963-1966)

Edward Warren Holmes was born in Beverly, Massachusetts in 1923. He received a bachelor's degree from Brown University in 1945 and a master's degree in international law from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1946. Mr. Holmes joined the Foreign Service in 1946. He served in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Israel, South Africa, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana, and Washington, DC. Mr. Holmes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

Q: You left [Ethiopia] in 1963 and went right to another African country.

HOLMES: That's right, direct transfer to Blantyre.

Q: In Malawi.

HOLMES: Well, it was then Nyasaland.

Q: It was still part of the federation, where...

HOLMES: Still part of the federation, which I have mentioned before.

Q: Where you had already predicted its fall. Did anybody say, well, here we are, still, or something like that?

HOLMES: Well, not really. I got to Blantyre, and the British governor was still there; it was still a colony (technically a protectorate, but it's about the same, really). But it was very, very clear that independence was coming. And it came within six months or so after my arrival.

Q: What were you doing there?

HOLMES: Well, I was a consul. You see, this was under the old structure. I was technically assigned to Salisbury, because this was rapidly changing. The British didn't like the idea of our having separate consulates in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland because that would indicate we thought the place was going to become independent. They wanted us to be in Salisbury, which was the capital of the federation. So technically I was assigned to Salisbury, but on detached duty to Blantyre. It was a fig leaf. By then, the fig leaf was very thin, although technically I was assigned to Salisbury (detailed to Blantyre).

But that didn't last long, because, as I say, when I arrived it was very clear, within a very short time, although the date hadn't been set, but it was clear that there was going to be independence. There had been serious riots in Blantyre. The British troops had fired and forty-five people were killed... [static] but once they... the whole federal structure of government, the civil service and so forth, ended.

Q: What were you doing, preparing for an embassy?

HOLMES: Yes, preparing for an embassy. But while I was there, I was consul in charge, it was called, at the consulate.

Q: Did you find yourself... advisor...

HOLMES: We had good relations with Dr. Banda. We had good relations with the British. But... I was preparing for an embassy, basically. At some point it was raised to a consulate general... queen, which had never been... And then, within, I think, ... or ten months or some date after independence came... Prince Philip came down... the British flag came down at midnight... up... and I became...

Q: ...

HOLMES: Not really... moral support. There was... I think he wanted moral support. He didn't ask for it... well, of course, he was... he was not in a position to ask... I met with him frequently, he came to my house on occasion... other times I'd talk to him on the phone... He wanted moral support.

Q: ... United States...

HOLMES: No, he never... He, of course, trained in the United States... lived in... many years. He was very... In a sense, he was called back as a figurehead by the young... But he took over; he was not a figurehead. He was a very strong... Now... There was an attempted revolt by the young Turks, and he put it down forcefully. He was not... shortly after... while I was still there, it happened.

Q: ...

HOLMES: No, I don't recall... He felt that we were in favor of what he was doing... moral support. We had to walk a little bit of a tightrope. After all, the British are our... allies... too strongly. I had very good relations with the governor... around the country... preparing... transition took place, although... He was...

Q: ...

HOLMES: ... Oh, well, that was one of those curious situations. Blantyre is and was a major city... commercial. It's still small; the whole place is small, everything's small. But Zomba was up in the highlands, and that was the British colonial capital, and that was about one hour's drive from Blantyre. Actually, I lived in Blantyre, but went to Zomba for talks with the governor. The governor lived there, as did the British administration. But Dr. Banda lived in Blantyre. So, I don't know what to say. As I say, I was assigned to Salisbury... to Blantyre, although he capital was in Zomba...

PIERRE SHOSTAL
Political Officer
Lilongwe (1967-1969)

Pierre Shostal was born in Paris in 1937. He graduated from Yale in 1956 and from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1958. His postings include Leopoldville, Kinshasa, Brussels, Lilongwe, Moscow, Kigali, Hamburg and Frankfurt. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 16, 1997.

Q: What were you doing in Malawi?

SHOSTAL: I was Political Officer at the Embassy there.

Q: Could you explain both where Malawi is and what the situation was at that time?

SHOSTAL: Malawi is in southeastern Africa, just north of Mozambique and just west of Tanzania. In other words, it's a landlocked country. To its west is Zambia. So, that sort of gives you the location. It's a rather small country, quite poor, dominated by one of the great East African lakes, Lake Nyasa. The time that I was there was a period of geographic isolation and also political isolation for Malawi. What do I mean by that? Well, first of all, the geographic isolation was reinforced by the war that was going on then in northern Mozambique, the anti-colonial war being waged in Mozambique. Also, that sense of isolation was further reinforced by the Rhodesian sanctions that were going on at that time. The international community had imposed economic sanctions to try and bring the self-proclaimed Government of Rhodesia to heel. Where that affected Malawi was that a lot of the traffic and transportation links southward ran through Rhodesia, so the combination of those factors, the Mozambique Civil War and the Rhodesian sanctions, which for example made it possible for us to travel to Rhodesia. During my tour in Malawi, that sense of isolation was reinforced by a political decision by the President of Malawi, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, to establish diplomatic relations with South Africa. This made Banda the odd-man out of black Africa.

Q: When you talk about Banda, you could put it in two parts: one, before you went there and when you got there, how did you view him?

SHOSTAL: Well, Banda was and actually is still alive and is now a very old man in prison, a really unique character. He was an African nationalist, in some respects one of the founding fathers of African nationalism, but he was also highly conservative and pragmatic, unlike the man who had been his mentor when both of them were in exile in the '40s and '50s in England, Kwame Nkrumah. When Banda returned to Africa from England, where he'd practiced medicine, in 1963 to become the first President of Malawi, he had very little patience for the kind of economic Marxism that people like in Nkrumah and other African nationalists at that time had. The result was that, although he copied some of their political ideas, for example one party rule, of people like Nkrumah, he gave them a very conservative cast that led him pretty quickly to part company with what was then called the Pan-African movement. Banda also realized that he had an opportunity for overcoming a certain amount of economic isolation through establishing relations with South Africa. South Africa was very eager to have a black African country recognize it and Banda got substantial economic benefits in terms of trade and assistance from South Africa. In particular, South Africa was able to realize Banda's dream of building a national

capital in his own home geographic area in Central Malawi. So, it was a rather interesting period to watch from that viewpoint, although rather far removed from the central stage of world affairs.

Q: What was your feeling at the time, the Embassy's and your's, of Banda?

SHOSTAL: Well, there was quite a split. On the whole, the leadership of our Embassy, the Ambassador and DCM were really quite favorable to Banda's ideas. Both of them were personally rather conservative people.

Q: Who were they?

SHOSTAL: The Ambassador was Marshall Jones who had been in EAP and Bill Barnsdale was the DCM. Barnsdale had really been an Italian hand up until that point. Both of them were really quite attracted to Banda's ideas. I was somewhat less enamored, because I saw this, our support of Banda's policy, as being out of step with what I thought at that time was the mainstream of African politics. But I also recognized that Malawi really was very much a sideshow, a very small country. Although, because of Banda's policy, a rather interesting one. And also, it was an interesting perch from which to observe what was going on in Mozambique, Rhodesia and South Africa.

Q: You mentioned a split between the old guard and the new guard in the Embassy, which often happens. I guess Nkrumah, was out by that time?

SHOSTAL: By that time Nkrumah, let me see, he was already out.

Q: Many of these had come away sort of inculcated by socialism from England and France. I mean looking at it from somebody who has never served there, these ideas sort of made a mess out of the whole economic system in Africa. Was this apparent and was this something we were looking at?

SHOSTAL: The failure of Nyerere's or, for that matter, Kaunda's, brand of African nationalism in Tanzania and Zambia was not really that apparent in the late '60s. One thing to keep in mind is that world commodity prices were still pretty high. The Vietnam War of course was raging and overall the countries were doing pretty well, particularly Zambia, by selling copper. So, I think that really became clear somewhat later.

Q: What were you doing as a political officer?

SHOSTAL: Well, I must confess, it was a country without an awful lot of political life, so there were certain limits to what you could do. There was a one party system and it really was tightly controlled, very personally controlled by Banda who--it was said--personally approved every government check for over 30 pounds. There was really not an awful lot to report about in terms of political debate and ideas. On the other hand, I got to know a lot of Malawians quite well, and, from that viewpoint, found my tour really quite rewarding. I had a chance to understand a little bit better how the society functioned from a sociological point of view. I think this was quite valuable.

Q: Can you talk a bit about a social life there? How did you meet Malawians and how did this work, particularly in such a tightly controlled country?

SHOSTAL: There weren't any restriction really on Malawians meeting Americans, or for that matter on Malawians being friendly with Americans. Banda was very pro-American. He'd studied the United States and admired the United States in many ways. So, that getting to know Malawians socially and personally was not a big problem. Getting them to open up and talk about their own political ideas was more difficult. I had really quite a number of African friends who were relatively open in talking about their own personal lives, their customs, that kind of thing.

Q: How would you entertain?

SHOSTAL: Well, very informally at home usually. They would come to my house, informally, usually sort of buffet-style events. We also often showed movies. So, that kind of thing was really very good. They came very readily and very rarely had no shows. And, they would invite us back, which in my experience in Africa is quite rare, because in most cases, our housing was much superior to their's. But, I was really very pleased and found it rewarding that we had as much personal contact as that. On the other hand, there was a very different kind of social life as well, a kind of last bastion or British colonial society. At that time, this is the late '60s, Banda still had quite a number of British expatriates working in his administration.

Q: As far as issues go, were there any particular issues with Malawi?

SHOSTAL: No, not for the U.S. The big issues as far as Malawians were concerned was trying to get the United States to give some economic aid. This was a period when we were cutting back drastically on economic aid to Africa. I think that reflects what we talked about in a previous section, mainly the loss of interest by the Soviet Union at that time. We certainly picked this up very quickly and I think said to ourselves, "Ah, the Soviets are not really trying to make gains in Africa, so why should we be spending a lot of money." This was, I think, compounded by the Vietnam War and the budgetary problems it created. So, that was the big issue, the bilateral issue, the fact that we were cutting back our aid presence and trying to take a regional approach to assistance to Africa. This did not work at all, because--for example--Malawi's interest and priorities were very different from those of its neighbors, Tanzania and Zambia. So, the bottom line was that the stream of assistance was drying up and I think this was one of the reasons that moved Banda to look to South Africa.

Q: Southern Rhodesia was under sanctions at the time, but was stuff coming in and stuff coming out? I mean, did you spend a lot of time, sort of sitting by the side of the road counting trucks and things like this?

SHOSTAL: No. We really didn't have responsibility for that kind of thing. In fact, it would have been rather difficult, because what was going in and out of Rhodesia was really going through Mozambique. Mozambique, or the Portuguese government there, was sympathetic to Rhodesia

and leakage in the sanction system was through Mozambique and of course, through South Africa.

Q: What about the situation in Mozambique? They were having a guerrilla war. How did we see the war at that particular time?

SHOSTAL: I think there was still the same kind of split vision that I talked about at our last session, mainly between the Europeanists heads who were concerned about not under-cutting the Portuguese too much, and the African Bureau which favored the liberation forces. By that time, however, the vehemence of the debate had subsided somewhat. I think there was quite a lot of concern at that point that the Mozambique nationalists forces were under communist influence and that tended to dilute any enthusiasm or support for them. I think, as far as the Portuguese were concerned, there was regret in the European Bureau that the Portuguese were wasting their resources. Of course the Portuguese regime was eventually brought down by the colonial wars.

Q: What was the impression you were getting from the sidelines of the Portuguese rule in Mozambique? The effect of the guerrilla war against them.

SHOSTAL: Malawi was very much affected, because the fighting blocked access to the Indian Ocean. Rail traffic during much of that period was interrupted, so it caused a certain amount of hardship in Malawi, although not really severe hardship. There was always the concern there would be a spill-over. For example, refugees from the combat area. This in fact did happen many years later, 20 years or so, when there was a big civil war among Mozambique factions themselves and where there were hundreds of thousands of refugees in Malawi.

Q: How about Tanzania? Did you get any look at Tanzania?

SHOSTAL: Tanzania was something less of an influence, simply because the communication lines for Malawi ran through Mozambique rather than Tanzania. The area between Northern Malawi and Tanzania was underdeveloped. So, there really was not an awful lot of impact. The big issue with Tanzania however, was the railroad that the Chinese were building.

Q: The Tanzam Railroad?

SHOSTAL: The Tanzam Railroad which connected Dar Es Salaam with the copper belt mining areas of Zambia. It was meant to avoid the necessity for Zambia to use Rhodesia as an export route. So, we watched that with quite a lot of interest, because it was a very, very big project.

Q: What was the feeling towards this project? The Chinese were building it then, were there feelings that they were gaining influence and what would this sort of influence mean?

SHOSTAL: I think that definitely was a concern. We were still thinking at that time in terms of the Chinese Communist as a hostile power; one opposed to the United States; one opposed to the international trading system as it operated, so there was concern that the Chinese, having made such a big investment there, would reap big political gains. Not only in Tanzania, but also in the rest of Africa. I think that the Chinese were probably also motivated by their competition with

the Soviets. With the Soviets at that time losing interest in Africa, I think the Chinese saw some political and propaganda benefits to be gained by that very big investment.

Q: Did you get any feel, I know I interviewed somebody, and I'm not sure exactly what time, but was in either Rwanda or Burundi and they were rather ticked off, because Tanzania with Nyerere who was spending most of his time castigating the United States was still getting considerable amount of American aid. They had friendly governments in Rwanda and Burundi and they weren't getting any. Did you get any?

SHOSTAL: That there was. That was something that the Malawian government would bring up with us frequently, saying, "We're your real friends and you're spending all this money on Tanzania." I think that reflected two things: one the large size and more strategic importance of Tanzania on the ocean routes, as well as a desire to compete with or keep our hand in the competition with the Chinese so that Tanzania not be completely open just to Chinese influence.

Q: Also, wasn't Nyerere a figure who would charm the pants off our leaders and have them take their wallets out of their pockets at the same time. He was doing this particularly with the European Socialist government and Scandinavia.

SHOSTAL: I think that's right. I think that American disillusionment probably started before the Europeans woke up, but I think that's true. He was an attractive figure and some of his ideas, at least when you listened to them, had a lot of appeal.

Q: During this time, did the war in Vietnam have any repercussions or did they ever bring it up?

SHOSTAL: The Malawians no. Within the Embassy, yes. Within the American community we had for example, a rather large Peace Corps contingent. There was a generational split along lines that you would expect. The older, more conservative leadership of the Embassy fully backed the war effort. Younger people were very skeptical and antagonistic toward the policy. So, that was really the major impact of the war.

Q: How effective was the Peace Corps? What were they up to?

SHOSTAL: They were involved mostly in agricultural development and in applied types of skills. I had a very good impression of the effectiveness and enthusiasm of the volunteers. They were bright, very motivated, learned the local language. I thought they did a wonderful job. Whenever I traveled around the country, which I did a lot, I was always impressed. They also seemed to really know what was going on, which was also useful.

Q: Malawi, was there a tribal split or was it more or less one country?

SHOSTAL: No, there are tribal splits of the country, as happens in Africa. The tribe from which the President came was favored. The Chewa, as Banda called them, came basically from central part of the country. There were people from the south who were somewhat different, many of them were Muslims. And, in the north they were still other people, many whom were distantly related to the Zulu, a branch which had migrated northward from South Africa in the 19th

century. So, there were tribal splits and the people who were not from Banda's tribal group were disfavored in terms of education, economic development, career opportunities, etc.

L. PAUL “JERRY” BREMER, III
Deputy Chief of Mission
Blantyre (1968-1971)

L. Paul Bremer III was born in Simsbury, Connecticut in 1941. He graduated from Yale University in 1963. He received his MBA from Harvard University in 1966 and then continued his education at Le Institut d'etudes Politiques de Paris. In 1966 he entered the Foreign Service and was sent to post in Kabul, Afghanistan as a General Services officer. He went onto Malawi in 1968 until 1971. During the '70s he held various domestic posts for the State Department including one as an assistant to Henry Kissinger from 1972-1976. He went to post in Oslo, Norway as DCM before returning to the States and serving in various capacities. He was appointed Ambassador of the Netherlands in 1983 and Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism and Coordinator for Counterterrorism in 1986. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1989. In 2003, he was appointed by President Bush as Presidential Envoy to Iraq under which he worked for Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in June 2008.

BREMER: In the summer of 1968. I was called up to the DCM's office about four months before our tour was due to end and handed a telegram that said, 'TM4 Bremer report to Blantyre in two weeks.' So I asked Arch Blood, the DCM, "What does this mean" He explained that it was "travel message" which said we were to take a "direct transfer" to the post in Blantyre, due there in two weeks. "Well", I wondered, "where is Blantyre?" and he said, "Damned if I know. Sounds kind of English." We looked it up in the list of Foreign Service posts and found it was in a place called Malawi which neither of us had heard of. "OK. So where's Malawi?" He replied that he didn't know either, but perhaps it was in Africa. Well we looked at the globe in his office and couldn't find any Malawi in Africa or anywhere else. So on a hunch, because Blantyre sounded kind of English, I called a friend at the British high commission and asked him, "Have you ever heard of a place called Blantyre?" He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I am supposed to be there in two weeks and I don't even know where it is." He said that it was the capital of what used to be called Nyasaland in the federation of Rhodesia. Since Malawi had become independent only in 1964, the DCM's globe had it marked as "Nyasaland" -- which at least solved the mystery of where we were headed.

Francie and I then went through one of those rushed routines of packing out and saying our farewells. The Embassy Admin people had to figure out how to get us and our household effects from Kabul to Blantyre. We broke our backs, we got to Blantyre, arrived there about ten days later. The DCM met me at the airport and his first words were, "What the hell are you doing here? We didn't expect you for a few more weeks." It turned out that the man I was to replace was still at post. I decided that was the last time I would pay attention to TM4 orders.

Q: This is a Foreign Service story that is repeated again and again.

You were there from when to when?

BREMER: We were there from the summer of '68 to the early spring of '71, just about three years.

Q: Let's talk about Malawi. What's its background, what was going on there at the time?

BREMER: Malawi, in Central Africa, had been a British colony until 1964 when it became independent in the rush of decolonization in Africa. It was being run then and for some years afterwards by Dr. Kamuzu Banda, a British educated medical doctor who came back to become the great independence leader of Malawi. Malawi in those days was a country of about five million people, at the time was one of the most heavily populated places on earth, I think second only to Hong Kong in terms of people per square mile; a small country. It is the place where Livingston made his name and Blantyre is the name of a Scottish city.

Q: Why did it have so many people in there?

BREMER: Well, it's fertile country. Then there was the fact that Banda, although he was a medical doctor, simply did not believe in family planning. He wanted to build his population as much as possible and encouraged people to have as many babies as possible. Perhaps 90% of the people are in agriculture. Maybe more. So there was the natural desire to have more hands to work the fields. Banda was encouraging a bigger population and so the population was growing very fast. Among other jobs, I was the post's population, or "family planning officer" or whatever it was called which was a thankless task. It never got off the ground.

Q: Were we, the United States at all interested in Malawi?

BREMER: Not that I could discern, though there were two aspects of Malawi that perhaps had some relevance. First of all, Malawi was at that time the only country in Africa that had relations with Taiwan which in those years America still recognized as the government of China. Taiwan had an Embassy there and was helping the Malawians establish something called Young Pioneers, like Boy Scouts. While we were there Banda became the first and only country in sub-Saharan Africa to establish relations with South Africa. One of the big events while we were there was a visit by then President Vorster to Malawi. It was the first time, I think, a South African president had been able to visit another African country. This did not endear Banda to other African Chiefs of State.

There is an interesting angle to that. When Banda was young, about 11 or 12, like many Malawians he left the country to work in the mines in South Africa. This is in the early part of the 20th century, probably around 1915. He worked there as Malawians did then and probably still do. When he was working in the mines as a teenager, an American Baptist missionary group offered him to send him to the United States for his education, where he went to college. Eventually he went to medical school in Britain.

Banda used to tell Americans his story, particularly American congressmen, black American congressmen who visited and were often outspokenly critical of his relations with South Africa. I remember hearing him tell these people how he had walked to South Africa and come to the US for school. "Look, when I was your age, Congressman, I went to school in the United States and I saw black men lynched at the school I was at and now, forty years later, I see what progress has been made in your country." This was after the Civil Rights Act had been signed in the United States. "I see that progress has been made, that whites and blacks can get along in the United States and who is to say," He would also add "who is to say that forty years from now blacks and whites can't get along in South Africa? Shouldn't we encourage this direction?"

In terms of American interests, I would say that I never found it a very compelling reason to have an embassy there. We did need a consular agent because there were about 750 Americans in the country, most of them missionaries from various denominations. Obviously, we had an obligation to look after them. Very few Malawians traveled to the United States so it wasn't as if it was a visa mill. It was a hard argument to make, in my view, that we needed an embassy there. I reached this conclusion early on and to show how incompletely I understood the mores of the Foreign Service, I committed this conclusion to writing in a memo to the DCM. The deafening silence from the "Front Office" sent a clear message.

Q: I think of a famous trip of in the early 60s. An Undersecretary traveled to Africa and he went to a couple of places and this one when things were beginning to get ready to open up and he made the decision we were going to have an embassy.

BREMER: It was a political decision. I felt as a taxpayer, it was really open to question. I could see no compelling national reason why we needed an embassy in every country and I certainly, after three years there, could not make the argument for one in Malawi.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

BREMER: Marshall Jones, who was a career diplomat. He'd been in the administrative cone and was our ambassador there. Bill Barnsdall was the deputy. Actually, in many ways it was the most fun job I had in the Foreign Service because the ambassador did whatever ambassadors did. -- I never could really figure that out, even after having been an ambassador. We had closed our AID mission and moved its responsibilities to a regional office in Zambia. So the DCM occupied himself largely by overseeing the residual AID programs which involved self-help money and a few leftover projects. And there was an administrative officer. So that made me the consular officer, the economic, the political, commercial officer. It was a great job.

Q: What were the Malawians like?

BREMER: Well, they were very different from the Afghans. They were much more outgoing and less reserved than the Afghans. Perhaps they were that way because the climate was more benign than in Afghanistan. The sub-Saharan African climate of Malawi has a fair degree of altitude; it's on the Rift Valley so it wasn't at all tropical except in the south. So the Malawians weren't going to starve to death which you could easily see happening in Afghanistan with very

rough topography. We had good Malawian friends; they were easier to get to know, to have to your house to dinner than the Afghans had been.

Q: Did the Malawians play a role in Central Africa? Some of these African nations have people who ended up as merchants or civil servants or what have you.

BREMER: The Malawian economy was and is almost entirely agricultural. When we were there, its main export crops were tobacco and tea, both of which were sold basically to the London market. When they had been colonists, the British had established both of those industries. But most of the Malawians were on a subsistence economy growing maize, cassava and cotton. The Malawians tended to export people to South Africa to work in the mines as they had done for a hundred years. It was and is a very poor country.

Q: Were the British sort of the predominant embassy there?

BREMER: Yes, the British still had a very strong residual presence. They ran the security forces, the guy in charge of the army, the guy in charge of the police; these were professional British officers seconded to the Malawians. They had advisers to the president in the capital which at that time was in Zomba and they were certainly the predominant factor.

Q: Were there any external threats there of any other powers or were the South Africans messing around?

BREMER: No. The main threat, which was just a very small threat on the horizon at that time, that became a big threat, was the insurgency in Mozambique against the Portuguese; Mozambique was still a Portuguese colony and FRELIMO (Liberation Front of Mozambique), the independence movement, was operating mostly in the northern part of Mozambique and there was occasional spillover into Malawi. It became much more serious after we left. Banda was pretty strict. He didn't want to have these FRELIMO guys operating in Malawi so he did his best to keep them out.

Q: While you were doing this while you were there, the civil rights movement was an ongoing thing. How did that, you mentioned Banda was familiar with that. Was that something that we were sort of showing what we were trying to do or not or was that a theme?

BREMER: No, it was not a particular theme.

Q: You are in Africa and this was the time, the '60s was the era of the discovery of Africa by the United States and particularly the State Department. Did you feel attracted to Africa or not?

BREMER: Francie and I liked it a lot. We liked the people a lot and as I said they were easier to get to know than the Afghans. We enjoyed our time there; it was a fun post for us. I didn't feel one way or the other about whether I was going to make my career in Africa. I did not have the idea that by joining the Foreign Service I was making effectively a choice to be a missionary. If you want to be a missionary, be a missionary. We were there to help advance American interests and I just didn't find that American interests in Malawi were very compelling.

Q: What about Vietnam going hot and heavy while you were there? How did you feel about that?

BREMER: It didn't really feature in the discussions with the Malawians. The government of Malawi tended to be supportive of the United States in places like the U.N. when votes came up. Malawi was a very poor country and they pretty much concentrated on trying to develop themselves, in a misguided way, because of Banda's attitude towards population.

We had a pretty substantial Peace Corps group there as we had in Afghanistan. Francie and I had a Landrover, and we often went "up country" to visit the Peace Corps volunteers, which we enjoyed a lot. There was a lot of anti-war feeling among volunteers which wasn't too surprising. It wasn't an issue with the Malawians though.

JAMES P. THURBER, JR.
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Blantyre (1969-1971)

Mr. James P. Thurber was born in Milton, Massachusetts. He graduated from Stanford University in 1950 and joined the USIS in 1967. He served in Tanzania, Malawi, Nigeria, Pakistan, Canada, and Washington D.C. Mr. Thurber was interviewed by Emily Thurber in 1990.

THURBER: By October of 1969, we were on our way again, this time by plane, ship traveling being a thing of the past, to Malawi. It was just at a time that the Fly America Act was being pushed, one of those cycles, and to comply with that and also to see our son, who was at school in Switzerland, we took five extra days to get to Malawi that we could have cut down to one day by using a non-U.S. carrier.

The government, of course, paid some of the per diem for five extra days and the travel on the non-U.S. carriers to get across Europe and down to Athens where we could pick up TWA.

Malawi, where I was Public Affairs Officer, was fun. It was my first PAOship. I had the place to myself. I did have an assistant for part of the time I was there, but it was a very, very small post in a country that meant almost nothing to the United States. It did have a little role to play in the north/south relationship, which I'll get into in a minute.

In those days, USIS Malawi was located in Blantyre about a mile away from the embassy in three adjoining converted storefronts. As with other posts, our job was to tell America's story abroad and to make friends of the Malawians.

The latter was not a problem. Malawians loved the United States. They loved Americans. They were more conservative and anti-Communist than most Americans are. They often took us to task for not being fierce enough in our programs, such as in Vietnam and against the Soviet Union.

We spent as much time as we could traveling. I hooked up with the Peace Corps, which was quite active in Malawi, visiting with them and using them as conduits to local government officials up country.

There was a small aid program, a \$50,000 ambassador's contingency fund, which the ambassador assigned to me and one other embassy officer. We did a great deal in the self-help program with this \$50,000 and then going back for openings, dedications, and so forth, met people that way.

One interesting point about Malawi, which I alluded to earlier, was its proximity to South Africa and Rhodesia, and the role that it played as a go-between among the black and the white nations of Africa.

About five miles away from the embassy was the Blantyre Airport and there was a restaurant on the second floor, if you want to call it a restaurant, with a nice balcony which also served as a waving bay. Frequently, several of us from the embassy would go down to the airport for lunch and sit up on the balcony eating a variety of steak sandwiches, watching the airplanes' arrival and departure.

There were a long row of VIP lounges to the right of the tarmac and, as we sat there, we would watch a plane from South Africa come in and perhaps Vorster get out of it, and then a plane from Tanzania come in and Nyerere get out of it. The two would disappear into these lounges, converse for an hour or so, and then come out, get in their planes and fly off.

We were allowed to be there because, publicly, we kept our mouths shut and said nothing about what we had seen. Of course, all of this was reported back to Washington, but it was interesting to see in the days when, publicly, these leaders were haranguing each other, that they actually were meeting and talking with representatives from the other side, and Malawi was the location for this.

If there was any cause for us to be in Malawi, it was for that operation and I wasn't doing USIA work when I was down there watching what was going on. Outside of that, there was no reason for USIA to be in Malawi and they shouldn't be there today. I say that with no rancor, because I really enjoyed our time there but, realistically, I think it is a waste of funds.

We had an excellent embassy staff there, a former administrative officer, Marshall P. Jones, as our ambassador, who was laid back and ran the embassy exactly as one should be run in a very, very small, insignificant developing country; a deputy, who has now left the Foreign Service, but was excellent in his field; and an assistant who did the econ and political reporting, L. Paul Bremer, III, known as Jerry, who rose quickly through the ranks and last served in an ambassadorial position in Europe.

In any case, we, as an embassy group, seemed to get along very well together. There were, if I remember, eight other embassies in Malawi, all there in Blantyre, although Zomba was the capital, about 50 miles away.

There was a great deal of entertaining among ourselves. At every cocktail party, every national day and at other events, we would see all our friends at the cocktail party and then everybody would descend on the one decent restaurant in town, a Chinese restaurant, for dinner, so these affairs often lasted well into the night. We got to know the French, British and so forth extremely well.

There were a lot of Brits around. Malawi had not thrown out the ex-pats and instead were using them to good advantage, to try and get the country off on solid footing. I think Malawi was probably one of the last countries in Africa to send their ex-pats packing.

JOHN A. BUCHE
Deputy Chief of Mission
Blantyre (1970-1972)

Born and raised in Indiana, Mr. Burch studied at St. Meinrad Seminary, Purdue University and the University of Tübingen, Germany. After service in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service, where he served primarily in African countries, including Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger and Zambia. Other assignments took Mr. Buche to Canada, Germany, Austria and Switzerland as well as to the State Department in Washington. He was an Amharic language specialist. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 3, 1999.

Q: So in 1970, where did you go?

BUCHÉ: I was supposed to go, as I mentioned, to Hargeisa, Somalia, but in a cost-cutting exercise the Department closed the post. I think Anike was relieved, since we had two adopted infants by the time I completed my studies at Northwestern. Our son, John, was born in 1968, and our daughter, Christina, was born in 1969, both in November. Anike was understandably concerned about the health conditions and medical facilities for the children in Hargeisa. I had been there several times from Ethiopia, and was familiar with the city. It was the former capital of British Somaliland and had about 40,000 residents and one hospital. There was a Consulate located in Hargeisa. The Peace Corps had a program in northern Somalia, so there was a resident Peace Corps doctor and nurse for the Volunteers. There was also an office of the Agency for International Development with two American officers. I was scheduled to be the resident Consul. I had heard from David Shinn that Hargeisa was likely to be closed, but until the closing was official, I could not bid for another posting. David kept me informed about possible job openings in Africa. Since I had benefitted from a year of African studies at the university, it was logical that I seek a posting on that continent. David called me one day to ask whether I would be interested in going to Blantyre, Malawi as the Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: Go where?

BUCHÉ: Blantyre, Malawi. At that time it was the capital. I was delighted, so that is where I was assigned.

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

BUCHE: I arrived in August of 1970, and stayed two years to August 1972.

Q: To 1972?

BUCHE: Yes, 1972. I guess we could get started on what Malawi was like. The position suddenly came open because the DCM, Chips Chester, resigned to take a job on Capitol Hill. I was without an assignment, so I went to Blantyre. It was a post in a country that on the surface was just as pleasant as one could imagine in Africa - beautiful temperate weather, fertile soil, a mixture of cultivated fields, savanna, and forests, nice rolling hills, some mountains, a large lake, excellent housing, decent medical facilities, and apparent peace and calm. Blantyre was named after a place in Scotland. It was the de-facto capital after independence in 1962. (Zomba, the colonial capital, still had the President's official residence, several ministries, and the British High Commission.) The President at the independence celebrations announced that the new capital would be built in the Central Region of the country, at Lilongwe, near his native village.) Hastings Kamuzu Banda was the President. The Malawi Congress Party was the only political organization permitted; Banda was Chairman.

After gaining absolute power in a show down with several opposing Ministers in his cabinet, Banda arranged to be elected President-for-Life. Banda went around in three-piece well-tailored suits and a homburg. He idolized many aspects of British culture, excluding their ideals of democracy and fair play. He was a tyrant and a dictator, who had peculiar ideas and hang-ups, and who tolerated no deviation or criticism. He used Israeli-trained thugs, the "Young Pioneers," as his enforcers throughout the country. There were contingents of Young Pioneers at every level of Malawian society. They served as informers and also had the power to arrest. They were loathed and feared by most elements of society, including the army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, politicians, merchants, peasants, et al. They were akin to the Ton-Ton Macoutes of Duvalier's Haiti. While the Young Pioneers were as ubiquitous as the Stasi, there was at least a highly-centralized command and control structure in East Germany. The Young Pioneers swore absolute fealty and obedience to H. Kamuzu Banda, but in their day-to-day activities, they were often unsupervised. They often used their power to bully, to extort, or to seek revenge for personal ends.

The judicial system was controlled by Banda, so there was seldom any protection in the courts for those accused of "disloyalty" to him. "Disloyalty" was one of the most serious offenses in Malawi. The definition of "disloyalty" was whatever the President or his circle decided. Persons accused of disloyalty were not brought to trial. Some simply disappeared without trace; a few big names were killed in suspicious "traffic accidents"; many perished while trying "to escape" from detention; others languished in prison until disease or "accidents" snuffed out their lives. There was a reign of terror in Malawi. Malawians were afraid and very careful about what they could say, and not just the government employees or politicians, but even the household servants, taxi drivers, waiters, retail clerks, et al. Completely off-limits was any criticism, even the slightest joke, about President-for-Life Banda. Being overheard by the wrong person could be fatal.

Banda, however, was not widely criticized in the West and in other African nations because of his brutal oppression of internal dissent. He was lambasted because of the open trade and diplomatic relationship with South Africa. Banda was widely ridiculed and lampooned externally because of his 1970 edict that all females over six years of age in the country had to wear skirts or wrap-arounds that extended beyond the calves of their legs. No repeat no slacks were permitted, except for Indians and Pakistanis when dressing in their native costume. What a woman wore or did not wear above her waist was immaterial to Banda.

Banda was really serious about his dress code. Dozens of foreign women were expelled or refused entry into the country if they were caught “inappropriately” dressed. There was no immunity for the diplomatic corps. The wives and daughters of the diplomats, plus any female diplomats, had to abandon their normal mode of dress and buy long skirts. They were not pleased with that, but there was no alternative. The wife of the Zambian Ambassador was declared *persona non grata* after being observed on a picnic caught in slacks. Since she was not East Asian, she was in contravention of the code. An elderly Baptist missionary from South Carolina was seen on the Mission compound (by a Young Pioneer) carrying a broom, mop, and bucket from her house to the next-door neighbor’s. She had completely forgotten about the ban. She was expelled, despite my representations for leniency to the official in charge of the Young Pioneers, Albert Muwalo.

On the other hand, the Malawians were willing to talk about their customs, geography, sociology, or history, as long as there was no mention of current politics. One exceptional and positive aspect of life in Malawi in the early 1970s was the small amount of corruption in the financial sense, as was traditionally practiced in the rest of Africa. In other words, payments were receipted. If you were stopped for a traffic violation, the policeman would give you a ticket and file an account, but he did not collect the money. One could argue the matter with the policeman, but offering a bribe would have been a big mistake. Taxes were collected in a relatively objective manner by a well-trained, closely-monitored bureaucracy. Funds from foreign governments or international organizations for economic development projects were scrupulously accounted for. The Embassy managed two major economic development projects, the construction of a 110 kilometer (69 miles) road and a technical-training program at U.S. universities for future teachers.

The Embassy also ran a micro-development program that annually approved twenty to twenty-five small “self-help” projects submitted by committees or groups of elders in rural areas for additional classrooms, teachers’ houses, cattle-dipping tanks, or clinics. The self-help requests were first vetted by the Malawi Government Development Office to ensure internal coordination with the appropriate ministries. The USG donated funds to cover imported materials (windows, tin roofing, plumbing, etc.) and the local people provided labor, cement, lumber, etc. Our contributions were about \$5,000 per self-help project. The accounting on the Malawian side for both the two large projects and the self-help grants was detailed and accurate. Our auditors and those from the Malawi Government inspected the projects and compared receipts with quantities/qualities of materials. There were no significant discrepancies. Our auditors and engineers (from the AID Regional Office in Nairobi) frequently told us how far superior the Malawi accounting systems were to those of the surrounding countries. Fiscal honesty and accountability was a particular trait of Banda. Torture and murder did not seem to offend his conscience, but financial irregularities by civil servants, politicians, or businessmen infuriated

him. He considered such acts as “disloyalty”, and thus severely punishable. The Auditor General and the Minister of Finance were Scotsmen, as were several of the senior officers in both departments. The auditors had power to go on short notice into any government office to look at the books. So there was very little petty corruption.

The financial malfeasance took place on a much higher level. The sole political party in the country, the Malawi Congress Party, gained enormous economic power and wealth by seeking a minority interest in every financial enterprise in the country. Businesses would seek to keep the amount as low as possible. There were, of course, no legislation or regulations on the subject, so how many shares should be “donated” was “negotiated”. Failure to comply meant closing the business, since permits, licenses, contracts, sales to government, etc. would be canceled. Some businessmen refused to comply and left the country; others were forced out. The hardest hit were the Asians. They would reach an agreement about the percentage of shares to be “donated” to the MCP, only to discover that they had to increase the number the next year. Dividends or profits would accrue to the Party. The money was used to pay Party expenses, including the Young Pioneers, and for whatever purposes Banda decided. The process was a national rip-off and extortion scheme. The Government’s money was sacrosanct; there was no direct stealing of Government funds. The country as a whole, however, suffered thereby. Businesses tended to raise their prices to compensate for their losses from having to give away a percentage of their company. In addition to the funds from business ownership, the Party collected membership dues from every Malawian. Everyone had to become a card-carrying member and keep the dues up to date. People would be asked by Young Pioneers to show their Party card on the street, in a bus, at a restaurant, etc. Failure to produce a card could result in a trip to a local Party office, a jail, or a fine.

I have to leave the session now.

Q: Well, we'll note here we've got you in Malawi, 1970-72. You've talked about how Banda operated, about how he kept a lid on, and we'll pick up from there.

Today is the 7th of December, 1999. We've talked a bit about Malawi, but what was your main line of work when you were there?

BUCHE: I had one of the most interesting jobs that I have ever encountered. I wore three hats. I was the DCM; secondly, I was the AID Director; and thirdly, I was for many months the Peace Corps Director.

Q: Oh, boy.

BUCHE: The way this came about is that the Peace Corps was forced out of Malawi by Banda because he was concerned about the dangerous ideas that were being passed from the Peace Corps teachers to their students - such things as democracy, free press, political parties, discussions of that sort. So he just decided to get rid of the Peace Corps teachers. That was about 90% of the PCV's in Malawi. The Peace Corps Director left in protest, as well as for the fact that

there would not be much for him to do after the expulsions. There were about a dozen Peace Corps Volunteers who were not instantly expelled. These were Volunteers who were in non-teaching positions. They had technical jobs in the ministries. They were permitted by Banda to finish their terms before departing. Half of them decided to leave in solidarity with their PCV teaching colleagues. The remaining five or six stayed for personal reasons - usually because of Malawian fiancées. One of the PCVs who was expelled was Paul Theroux. He took his revenge on Banda, the Young Pioneers, and the Party by satirizing them in some short stories.

Q: Paul Theroux is quite a well-known travel author, mainly.

BUCHE: Yes, he was teaching English in one of the high schools in Malawi, and after being expelled, wrote some short stories about Malawi with Banda and company as the butt of some pretty vicious humor. The reason I was the AID Director is that there was an effort to consolidate the AID programs in southern and eastern Africa into a regional approach. AID technicians, accountants, lawyers, engineers, and others were centralized in a Regional Office at Mbabane, Swaziland or Nairobi, Kenya to support the AID projects throughout the region. DCM's at five embassies in southern Africa replaced the AID directors and managed the projects locally. Whenever the embassies needed help or advice, they telephoned or cabled Nairobi or Mbabane. If the issue could be worked out over the phone, fine; if not, an AID official or team would arrange to come to the country.

After a few months it was clear that my responsibilities as the AID director were taking much more time than my responsibilities as DCM. This was not a problem, however, because there was not much happening politically in the country, and we had a really first-rate staff. Some of the very best officers with whom I would ever work in the Foreign Service were with me in Blantyre. Some of them went on to much higher positions. One of them was Jerry Bremer, who was our political officer. He went to Kissinger's personal staff, was named as Ambassador to the Netherlands, and later became an Assistant Secretary for Anti-Terrorist Activities. Another was Bert Moore, who was the administrative officer and went high in his field. Our US Information Officer was Jim Thurber. He reached the upper ranks of the USIA bureaucracy in his area. Our locally-hired employees, the Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), were dedicated, talented Malawians. Unlike in Ethiopia, where Anike and I seldom socialized off-hours with the FSNs, we found several of the Malawian employees quite interesting and compatible. Our consular assistant, Mrs. Rosemary Argente, knew almost all the major players in politics, business, and academia. She also understood the nuances of Malawi politics. She was so valuable to the Embassy.

Q: Your ambassador?

BUCHE: Was Bill Burdett. He was a Middle Eastern specialist, including North Africa and Turkey. Blantyre was his last assignment. After decades of turmoil and chaos in various countries where he was DCM, Chargé, or Political Counselor, he wanted a quiet final assignment - and he got it. Ambassador Burdett carried out his duties responsibly and with a skill that comes from many years of experience. The entire staff really liked and admired him and his wife, Marlys (a former Foreign Service secretary).

Q: Looking at the map, Malawi thrusts right inside Mozambique. What was happening in Mozambique?

BUCHE: Well, there was an insurgency against the Portuguese colonial regime that had ruled the country for centuries.

Q: That's what I was going to say. I would have thought that you would be up to your neck in reporting on the insurgency and what was going on there.

BUCHE: We were doing some reporting in normal channels on information that we would get from the Malawi Government, the British High Commission, and the South Africans. We were under restraints from the Department not to be aggressive in pursuing leads or information on the insurgency outside of diplomatic contacts. The bulk of the reporting on the struggle between Portugal and Frelimo was done by the Agency. The CIA had a big operation in Malawi. The Chief of Station was Jim Warrick. He was relatively young to head such a large operation, but he was bright, alert, politically savvy, and had great self confidence.

Q: Was there any problem with Banda and company to have this CIA operation?

BUCHE: Parts of it were declared. The CIA station chief was declared to the Malawi Government, and there were certain programs where they worked together with the Malawi Intelligence Service. It was to our mutual interests to know what was going on with the insurgency and with the Portuguese counterinsurgency measures. As you can imagine, with Malawi stuck, in a sense, as a finger into Mozambique, there was a lot of sloshing over of operations and some firefights that got into Malawi territory. Both sides, the Portuguese and Frelimo, would apologize to the Malawi Government and give assurances it would not happen again. Malawi was scarcely able to defend itself against large-scale incursions by either Portuguese or Frelimo units. Malawi, of course, recognized this, and tried to persuade both sides to stay out of Malawi. Both sides recognized if one side really antagonized Malawi to a large extent, Banda's Government might move from its neutral position toward helping the other. So there was a mutual incentive for both sides to avoid antagonizing Malawi. On the other hand, Malawi depended economically on Portugal/Mozambique for use of the ports and on Frelimo to allow transit through the areas they controlled. Banda felt more at ease with the Portuguese than with Frelimo, because the latter was a Marxist-based insurgency and an unknown quantity as far as he was concerned. He also realized that the Portuguese probably were not going to be able to hold on in the long run, and he did not want to be on the losing side. Philosophically, he may have been rooting for the Portuguese, but he was realistic. Also, the strength of Frelimo was basically in the central and northern parts of Mozambique, and this is where Malawi had its main transport links to the coastal ports.

Q: What about Tanzania? Malawi abuts on Tanzania. What was your impression of developments there? We are talking about 1971-72?

BUCHE: It was the time under Nyerere. A lot of international development aid was going into Tanzania. At that time Nyerere was the "darling" of the Nordics, the World Bank, the Christian

churches, and even the U.S.G. This really upset Banda. He repeatedly proclaimed that most of the money given to Tanzania would be wasted. It's pouring water into the sand."

Q: It does seem to me he was absolutely right.

BUCHÉ: Well, very often what he said about Tanzania was factually correct. He weakened his arguments, however, by personal attacks on Nyerere. Banda despised him. He was angry that the West liked Nyerere, and he could not see why the West was reluctant to put more money into his Malawi. Banda saw the development assistance issue from his own optic. He was a staunch friend of the West and made sure that foreign assistance funds granted to Malawi would not be wasted. Besides, he refused to recognize Beijing or allow the Soviets or any Warsaw Pact country to open an embassy in Malawi. Yet, the West (with the exception of the UK) was hesitant to fund bilateral assistance projects in the country. They much preferred to put money into "socialist" Tanzania.

On several occasions, Banda summoned Ambassador Burdett and me to State House to berate the U.S.G. for helping Tanzania build a road, a bridge, or some other project. His theme was the same each time: If the U.S. Government would put more money into Malawi, you know the money would not be frittered away or disappear; it will be well spent, and the project will be well maintained. Twenty years later you will still have something to show with pride. If the U.S. Government and the World Bank give money to Tanzania, they will have nothing to show for it in ten years. It will be wasted or stolen. We knew what Banda was saying was correct, but we also had to defend our Government's policies, as well as explain to him why Malawi was low on the priority list for U.S. assistance, despite its excellent use and accountability of the funds. We said that there is not more money coming to Malawi - and we had to choose the best diplomatic language - because many in our Congress are opposed to South Africa and its system of apartheid. Since Malawi had diplomatic relations with South Africa, there was the belief in Congress that Malawi was wrong in not maintaining the Africa-wide ban on formal relations with South Africa. When the policy makers in Washington divided the African-assistance pie, they were conscious of the negative reputation of Malawi in Congress, the American churches, and the press. We assured Banda that we kept Washington aware of the good use by Malawi of American assistance. He was not satisfied with our explanations, but there was not much he could do. He certainly was not going to change his policy toward South Africa. Not only did Malawi receive millions of dollars from Pretoria each year in assistance, but Banda believed that he had a morally correct policy toward South Africa.

He did not approve of apartheid, but criticized the policy. He maintained that race relations would improve in South Africa if there were a dialogue between the people in the country and between African states and South Africa. He frequently proclaimed that many African states secretly traded with South Africa, but only Malawi openly published trade data on the transactions. What Banda could not comprehend was that his policies of repression through the Young Pioneers, his edicts against long hair, short skirts, slacks, or God forbid! shorts on women, and rock and roll, his extortion of merchants, particularly the Indians and Pakistanis, plus his cultivation of the South Africans made him a pariah in the eyes of Western governments. Of course, putting money into Tanzania turned out to be the folly Banda had predicted. As we all learned by the end of the Cold War, most African assistance projects turned sour. Assistance to

Africa was usually politically motivated, not the result of cold, economic analyses. We were going for headlines and PR points rather than solid projects. We were not alone. The Russians, the Chinese and so many other donors were pouring money into Africa. As I would learn personally years later from the Chinese Ambassador to Zambia (his previous assignment was Ambassador to Tanzania), Beijing continued to lavish money on Tanzania despite a stream of warnings from the Chinese Embassy in Dar Es Salaam that the Chinese-financed projects were heading toward failures because of local corruption, malfeasance, and incompetence

Q: Well, particularly the Nordic countries.

BUCHE: They adopted Tanzania and other East African countries.

Q: Nyerere was a charmer. He was probably the worst administrator and in many ways, a tyrant on his own, I mean in the nicest possible fashion, but he forced people onto these disastrous collective farms.

BUCHE: Well, in Zambia - we were putting money into Zambia, too. Kaunda was very close to Nyerere, but Kaunda, at least, did not get into collective farms. He did enough other dumb things from an economic and political point of view that the result was that we and other donors poured money into the proverbial rat hole - nothing really took. I think both in Tanzania and in Zambia the corruption was quite enormous. It was just blatant and ubiquitous, whereas in Malawi it was different. There was corruption at the very top in Malawi, but you didn't get pecked to death by sparrows. Foreign aid was well accounted for. The private sector, however, had to pay Banda and his Malawi Congress Party.

Q: Did anybody replace the Indian merchant class out in the countryside?

BUCHE: Eventually, when the Indians and Pakistanis were forced to give up their stores, Africans in good stead with the MCP took over. The net losers were the customers because the new owners were not really businesspeople. Some of them went out of business, and others just raised prices. The losers were the people out in the countryside.

Q: Well, this generally is what happens, that often those that take over the stores do not stock them. They basically sell off the stock and then sit there and wait for something to happen, no investment.

BUCHE: The people who took over were basically the local politicians, police chiefs, or civil servants with good Party connections.. They were not interested in the running of stores and making a little bit of profit every day. They wanted quick profits. The Malawi Congress Party had a supermarket chain - I forget the name of it - but they did fairly well in the big cities, since there were no competitors allowed. As the small "Indian shops" in the countryside went out of business from greed and mismanagement, the MCP decided to extend its supermarket chain. Most were eventually closed because there were not enough sales to support the large stores. The people in the countryside were again without access to such basic things as salt, sugar, batteries, soap, medicines, canned goods, cooking oil, etc. They had to depend on wandering traders who

would sell them something from the rear of a pickup truck, which meant the price was much higher.

Q: Was there anything else we should touch on before we move on?

BUCHE: Well, I think we pretty much have covered Malawi. I want to mention that Banda asked the Peace Corps to return, but at a much more senior level. He did not want secondary-school teachers, but surgeons, dermatologists, teaching nurses, air-traffic controllers, heavy-duty equipment mechanics, et al. Washington was anxious to try new directions for older Peace Corps Volunteers, and gave priority to filling Banda's shopping list. Within a year following the banishment of the PCV schoolteachers, the new group began arriving. They filled regular Malawi Government positions, so they were entitled to the perks of their rank. All received government housing; some even had cars and drivers assigned to them. The new group was obligated to spend only one year in the Peace Corps, so there was a heavy turnover. Malawi gained some highly competent professionals at bargain rates; the Americans gained the experience of living in a third-world country and contributing to its development. Several mentioned to me that they gained professionally because they were forced to work with a significantly lower level of technology and had to use their intuition, intelligence, and wit to compensate.

I also wanted to mention that the AID-financed road was completed and dedicated. I had to resolve many problems along the way, including working out a tax and fee dispute with the Beira Port Authority so that our heavy equipment could be released, obtaining speedy replacements for contractor personnel who quit or were expelled from the country (usually for racist remarks), and gaining agreement on changes in specifications or acceptances of work performed. As pleased as I was to be heavily involved in the successful completion of the road construction project, I was even more thrilled to return to Malawi on a visit ten years later and see that our road was still in good condition.

As I was leaving Malawi, the diplomatic community was of the opinion that Banda was in his last years of power. Once again foreigners underestimated the ability and determination of African dictators to maintain power. Banda held on for over a decade before being driven from office.

I despised Banda and his oppressive regime. I personally knew several Malawians who were arrested, tortured, and killed during my posting to that country. They were, in some cases my neighbors, in other cases, Ministry of External Affairs officials with whom I dealt. I regarded them as honest, dedicated, competent civil servants. They met their deaths because they were accused of disloyalty to President-for-Life H. Kamuzu Banda. In each case, the men were taken from their home at night and were not seen again by their family or friends. Inquiries about their location or the charges against them were fruitless. There was no information on where they were held, no public trials, no lawyers to defend them, and no verdict publicized. Several weeks or months after their arrest, their wives were told they had "died in prison" or had been "killed while trying to escape". The wives were also told where they had been buried. Since they were government officials, they lived in government-supplied housing. After their deaths, the families were evicted from the housing. In a few of the cases, the wives also worked for the government;

they were fired. Who their accusers were and for what motives, I do not know. We all heard many stories that the easiest way to avenge someone in Malawi, to get a promotion or a better house, or to acquire a man's coveted wife was to concoct some examples of his "criticism" of Banda or the Party and denounce him in secret to the Security People for "disloyalty". Not all such victims were executed, but by the time they got out of prison, they had suffered greatly.

Paradoxically, the greatest number of accusers and victims were Party officials, including some from the highest ranks. There was a feeling among the foreigners (and probably also among many Malawians) of Schadenfreude, when the official in charge of the Young Pioneers, Albert Muwalo, probably the most-feared man in the country, was accused of "disloyalty". He was arrested, tortured, and killed, like so many of his victims! Many of us concluded that Banda and his niece, Miss Kazimira, had arranged the execution to eliminate a powerful, potential rival. We had the impression that Banda deliberately fomented suspicion and distrust among the top people in the Party against each other to ensure their total dependence on him. He created insecurity and hyper-vigilance, and only he could "protect" them against the inevitable charges of "disloyalty" from their colleagues (and rivals). The stakes were very, very high, and led to desperate and despicable methods for self-protection. It was a combination of Stalinism, the NKVD, the Stasi, the Taliban, and the Red Guards in lovely, scenic Malawi.

Q: Well, I would have thought that because of this system, it would mean that all of you at the Embassy would deal very carefully so that you did not hurt the people you were dealing with by pushing for something which might get the people you were having to work with in the ministries into trouble.

BUCHE: We were quite concerned about that. We recognized that to have a meeting or a discussion with a minister or an official could put him or her into jeopardy, so there would be other people present. The conversation would be very formal. I cannot recall any real substantive, free-wheeling, private talk with a minister or high official. I do not think that Ambassador Burdett ever mentioned to me that he had such a conversation. It was always so formal. When there was a reception, we would not dare out of concern for our Malawian interlocutors to talk or ask questions about anything other than the weather, boating, the fishing on Lake Malawi, soccer matches, game parks, or what was happening in the United States. They seemed to be interested in learning what was happening in the United States, and we would tell them, because that was a safe subject. The agents and informers for the Malawian intelligence services were ubiquitous and aggressive. Malawians lived in fear about what might happen to them. They just could not take the risk of being close to foreigners.

Q: Were the Soviets making any inroads?

BUCHE: The Soviets did not have a chance in Malawi. They were active in Zambia and Tanzania, but they were not in Malawi. Ditto for Beijing. The Chinese from the mainland were represented in the other two countries with large embassies and several large economic development projects, including the Tanzam railroad. Taiwan sent a large embassy staff and several hundred technical advisers to Malawi. Banda made no effort to hide his determination to keep "socialism and communism" out of Malawi. I do not think the Soviets or Chinese made much of an effort to initiate diplomatic relations with Banda. They knew it would be fruitless. I

am sure the Chinese kept tabs on what the Taiwanese were doing in Malawi, since they were so massively represented in two neighboring countries.

Q: You left there when? 1972?

BUCHÉ: I have to think. Yes, I did leave in 1972.

HERMAN J. ROSSI III
Economic Officer
Blantyre (1970-1972)

Mr. Rossi was born in Florida and raised in Idaho. He was educated at Gonzaga University and Washington State University. In 1965, he entered the Foreign Service, specializing primarily in economic and African affairs. During his career, Mr. Rossi served in Kinshasa, Blantyre, Rome, Pretoria, Monrovia, Kingston and Libreville, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. He was Economic Counselor at several of his posts. In his Washington assignments, Mr. Rossi dealt with both African and Economic matters. Mr. Rossi was interviewed by Peter Eicher in 2007.

ROSSI: I got the six-month training course in late, second half, of 1970. It was rigorous and exhausting. It was more exhausting because my twins were born part way through that course and we were in a very small apartment. Six people living in a two bedroom apartment including four children was tough. It was, of course, even tougher on my wife than it was on me.

The course was interesting. It was designed to give us the equivalent of an undergraduate major in economics in a rather short time. Based on the GRE test results, they succeeded quite well. Math was the hardest part of course. Most of us had not had much math and by that time, math had become an important part of the study of economics. The instructors did a good job of gradually getting us into the higher level of math needed. I did reasonably well in the course; I think I scored in the middle of the class. Interestingly I did not need most of the math I was taught because most of my subsequent foreign service work was in third world countries where economic models were not really very useful

During the course, I had been assigned to Malawi.

Q: Did you choose that?

ROSSI: Sort of, yes I did. I'd gotten to know the personnel officer. I originally had been going to Kabul. However someone a little more senior who had worked in the secretariat said he wanted Kabul, so he got the position. I looked at what's left, and Malawi seemed to be the best. It turned out to be a very good choice. Malawi, with four small children, was good because you could get household help inexpensively there.

It occurs to me my kids will be mad at me if I do this narrative of my career and not mention all their names since they were with me through many of my posts. So my wife and I arrived in Malawi with my sons Christopher, Edward and Michael and my daughter Marianne. As I mentioned, Michael and Marianne are twins. At the time we arrived in Malawi, the twins were about four months old and all the children were under four years old.

Compared to the Congo, Malawi was a fairly congenial place to live. The capital, Blantyre, was on plateau about 3500 feet, so it was not as hot as some of the other places. Hastings Banda, the President/dictator ruled Malawi with an iron hand but, unlike Mobutu, he had a fair amount of economic sense so the economy and the infrastructure ran fairly well. Of course, the country had never had the political upheavals and civil wars which had marked the Congo. Malawi was and is a poor country but then it was surprisingly well managed. Later on, Banda started to lose some of his economic good sense as he got older and the weight of absolute power started to corrupt him but during my tour the country still ran well.

Malawi wasn't a wealthy country at all. It was a lot of small farmers and some tobacco and tea plantations, and a few things like that which were run by expatriates, British mainly with a few Rhodesians. However it was a far cry from the Congo in stability, order and infrastructure.

Q: But Banda was also a dictator?

ROSSI: That's right. Banda was an absolute dictator. Almost all my African tours were in countries run by dictators of various types. Banda was older when he came to power. He left the economy to some degree alone, but he was becoming—particularly the last part of my tour—more erratic on the political side. People were being arrested for no good reason, including civil servants who I had dealt with. Someone with a grudge would carry a story back to Banda that some civil servant had said something against him. That's all it took. The person just vanished into prison and perhaps never to be seen again.

Thus I remember Malawi as a beautiful country with wonderful people but one where the political situation left a bad taste in my mouth. It was a lesson for me in the kind of abuse which an absolute dictatorship is capable of, particularly the unpredictability and lack of any real rule of law. On the other hand, if you were an American diplomat, it could be a congenial place. The Embassy had a house on Lake Malawi. It also had a small house on Zomba plateau which was one of the higher plateaus (6500ft) where the British had planted pine forests. It resembled in some ways a forest in our Pacific northwest. Both the lake house and the Zomba house could be used by Embassy personnel in rotation.

It was very different from Kinshasa in that it was a very small embassy. We only had ten or so Americans and only about five State officers, including the ambassador. We had no marines. We had a Peace Corps contingent. We had no AID mission. AID had pulled out of Malawi. They had a policy then of concentrating on the larger countries. We still had a couple aid projects but no AID personnel. As I mentioned, Malawi was a very poor country but what wealth existed was fairly well spread around. Maize was the main staple of the country. Almost no one was starving.

I made a number of Malawian friends, something that had been more difficult in the Congo. Many of these Malawians were from the northern region who seemed to be the best educated Malawians. The north is where the missionaries had worked most intensively and thus became the best educated. However the down side of this was that Banda seemed to have a special resentment against civil servants from the northern region. Thus the northerners, many of whom I knew well, were taking the brunt of Banda's arbitrary arrests, firings and demotions. None of them were plotting against the regime or anything like that. Banda just did not trust northerners.

Banda was pro-Western, but was becoming more suspicious and paranoid as he got older. Nevertheless, I remember the Malawians as probably the friendliest, hardest-working and most intelligent people I met in Africa

Q: And you were the economic officer?

ROSSI: I was the single economic/political officer. In other words, I did all the economic and political work which the Ambassador and DCM did not want to handle. In practice, I did a lot more economic than political work. I also did the consular work part time for the most of my tour. I was jack of all trades. It was fascinating from that point of view. Unlike the Congo, Malawi did not rank very high on the U.S. foreign policy spectrum, even in the Africa bureau, so we were left alone for one thing. We didn't get many resources, either.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ROSSI: William Burdett. He was not an Africa hand. He came out of EUR and previously had been DCM at Ankara. I recall him as a true gentleman - more typical of the old school Foreign Service. He was very helpful to me in my work, and he and his wife were very good to my family.

I'm trying to think of the two DCM's during my tour. John Buche was the first and Jim Farber was the second DCM. Both of them were Africa hands and were real gentlemen; they were both a pleasure to work for. Both they and their wives went out of their way to help me and my family. I had lots of little kids, so I needed more support than would normally be the case. I have fond memories of the whole staff at Blantyre.

It was a congenial tour except for the bad taste left by Banda and his increasingly authoritarian ways.

WILLIAM C. BURDETT
Ambassador
Malawi (1970-1974)

Ambassador William C. Burdett's Foreign Service career included positions in New Zealand, Iraq, and Washington, DC, and as an ambassador to Malawi. He was interviewed by Richard Nethercut on December 16, 1988.

Q: After your service in London I see that you were in the State Department for another four years and then went to Ankara as Minister Counselor at the Embassy and during this period served as Charge for several lengths of time. Could you highlight some of the problems that you encountered in this assignment and what you consider to be some of the most important aspects you were involved in?

BURDETT: Cyprus was one of the most difficult problems in relations with Turkey. A major crisis developed soon after my arrival in Ankara in late 1967. The Turks made obvious preparations for a military invasion with troops boarded on transports. To avert a landing President Johnson assigned Cyrus Vance as Presidential Envoy to Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. "Frank" negotiations ensued. Turkish President Sunay postponed the landing to give Vance time to make one more effort with Makarios. Happily Makarios accepted, in effect, the Turkish terms and the invasion was called off. The next time the Turkish troops landed and we're still suffering the consequences. The Turks felt we let them down in failing to oblige Makarios to meet his commitments.

Q: During your assignment to Turkey you had three stints as Chargé d'Affaires and so during two of those times you then reverted to the position of Deputy Chief of Mission. Could you describe a bit of the transition process that you went through as two new Ambassadors came in the course of your assignment to Ankara?

BURDETT: Service as Chargé is inherently difficult, but lots of fun. The uncertain time element weighs upon you. You are one man short at the top; members of the Country Team are "restless", although in Turkey most cooperative, when your term is short and your authority less clear cut than that of the Ambassador; you lack time for your own policy input and for developing your own tactics to execute policy.

The assignment of Robert Komer, prominently involved in the rural pacification program in Vietnam caused us difficulties. His name had appeared frequently in the Turkish press. At the time there was a growing leftist movement in Turkey and vocal opposition to our Vietnam policy, especially on the part of university students. A large demonstration greeted Komer's arrival, and we were obliged to stop his plane and unload far out on the airfield. It was, of course, a considerable embarrassment and irritating to Komer. A few days later in the official limousine with flags flying, he drove against staff advice to make calls on the university Rector. During this meeting Turkish students seized and burned the limousine. Both incidents made his mission more difficult. A lesson is the need to take into account the global repercussions of US policies even in the assignment process.

Q: In summing up your assignment to Ankara then, were there some principle impressions you gathered that influenced you in your subsequent assignment as Ambassador to Malawi?

BURDETT: There is a great gulf between Turkey and Malawi. Our policies toward each are completely different. To finish with Turkey, I developed a great respect for the Turks. They are strongly anti-Russian, not just anti-Communist, and I believe can be counted upon in terms of Western defense. They are a stubborn, proud people who respect the slogan, "An enemy of my

friend, is my enemy." They have been disappointed in the United States because of our perceived bias on the question of Cyprus in favor of Greece. Their enmity with Greece is deep-seated. The Turks have major economic problems and have been grateful for US aid in the economic field. They have made good use of our economic and military aid and contribute in a major way to NATO. Often overlooked is their assistance in the intelligence field.

Q: Fine. Let's turn now to your appointment as a Chief of Mission and could you describe how that came about and how you felt about being assigned to a country with which you presumably had not had a great deal of contact in the past?

BURDETT: The assignment to Malawi came out of the blue. Apparently the Department was under instructions from Secretary Kissinger to assign senior officers as Chief of Mission and to place officers in areas where they had not previously served in the belief that they would then be less likely to become advocates of a particular country. My assignment to Malawi was the most placid of my career without the stimulation of participating in formulating and executing policies to cope with national security concerns. The chief success of that assignment was inducing President Banda to support the US policy towards Vietnam, including by voting with us in the UN.

Q: Let's backtrack just a moment if we might. You mentioned that you were assigned really out of your area of previous experience and specialization to a post in Africa partly in connection with Secretary Kissinger's Global Outlook Policy. I wonder how you felt toward this assignment? How you prepared for it, and then your impressions as a Chief of Mission in an African post which must have contrasted very sharply with the other posts that you had served in?

BURDETT: I was disappointed to go to a post in an area about which I knew little and had not previously developed an interest. I did not see much in the way of opportunities for useful service, for meaningful service, in Malawi. There was really no alternative but to accept an assignment of that kind. Kissinger apparently was concerned at the number of officers in the Service with senior rank, I was then a Career Minister, and wanted those people matched with so-called senior assignments that in theory matched the rank. In fact, in the Foreign Service the title often has little relationship to the substantive importance of the job.

Q: Then when you arrived in Malawi what type of activities did you find the most rewarding, and most stimulating, and what was it like to be an Ambassador to a small African post?

BURDETT: Malawi is run almost entirely by President Banda. He is an autocrat who does not tolerate opposition. Educated by American missionaries in Malawi, he eventually graduated as a medical doctor from an American college. I was fortunate to establish a good working relationship with him. This is the key to working in an African country like Malawi. Once the word gets out to other officials that you are in good standing with the President, things are easy to accomplish. Our emphasis in Malawi was: 1) on developing economic programs to help this terribly poor nation. 2) on traveling around the country, both for reporting purposes and for public relations purposes to show the people that Americans were interested in them; 3) and most important, on obtaining the support of Malawi for major US foreign policies, especially Vietnam.

Malawi is different from other African countries. Banda personally concentrated on the welfare of his own people--that is, finding ways to help the peasant farmer to grow enough food to feed himself and family and to provide some education and health facilities. He did not involve himself in regional politics as did many of his neighbors. He was not a vocal opponent of white regimes in Southern Africa. Thus he was unpopular among many African leaders and in certain US circles including AF because he was considered to be subservient to South Africa. He took the position that, "I will sup with the devil if he will help me care for my people." That was and, as I understand from the press, remains his main focus. He has done a lot for his people with few resources.

Q: There were various components of that mission and were there any particular problems you had in this respect while you were Ambassador there?

BURDETT: Before my time we had a Peace Corps program in Malawi. The volunteers, however, became involved in local politics. They resented the autocratic nature of President Banda's regime and were in effect talking, and in some cases demonstrating, in favor of greater political freedom. This was intolerable to President Banda, and he threw the Peace Corps out of the country. I was able, once good relations were established with Banda, to suggest to him that Peace Corps volunteers could make a useful contribution to Malawi's economic and social needs. We did this by pointing out that in contrast to earlier generalists, the Peace Corps now had specialists in various fields who were in a sense the equivalent of AID technicians. Thus to meet his needs in agriculture or schools, or medicine, he could request from us X number of volunteers in a designated field. We would then request volunteers and he would have a chance to see their resumes. He agreed to this. This new type of volunteer proved quite successful and won the approval of many Malawians.

Q: That's a very interesting instance you might say of personal diplomacy. Did you find that being in a smaller post that was not a matter of major interest to the United States, and had no crises of major proportions, gave you more leeway to do things as a Chief of Mission than you would have say when you were Charge in Ankara?

BURDETT: There was a noticeable lack of pressure and thus time to visit all parts of the country and to try to become familiar with what one would call the mundane problems that Malawi faced as a developing nation. The main focus of our political reporting was on the conflict between black and white regimes in Southern Africa. This was facilitated by Malawi's status as a "neutral". We were able to report on the rebellion in Mozambique against the Portuguese and on Rhodesia; and we reported extensively on Malawi's different relationship to South Africa.

Q: In meetings with other Chiefs of Mission in the southern part of Africa did you find that you tended to see the problems similarly with respect particularly to South Africa, or were there some divergence of views within the Chiefs of Mission as to what US policies should be?

BURDETT: In meetings with American Chiefs of Mission there were strong differences. I felt that colleagues and officers of AF were emotionally committed to the efforts of the more vocal black leaders (Nyerere and Kaunda were favorites) to overthrow the remaining white regimes; that they equated US national interests with the ambitions of those leaders. There was a tendency

to stretch NSC directives, to lend support to the "liberation" campaign, especially to justify the use of force. Insufficient attention was given to the effects on stability in Southern Africa in which the US had an important stake, to the consequences of economic disruption, to the vociferous opposition of these African leaders to major US global policies, and to the opportunities for communist exploitation of their Marxist doctrines. In turn I was regarded as an "outsider" in the AF club, lacking sensitivity to the aspirations of blacks, and tending to condone the oppression of blacks by whites. I was thought to reflect the demeaning attitude of that "South African puppet" Banda.

Within Malawi there was wide divergence of opinions and interests among the Chiefs of Mission. Representatives included--the Ambassador of Zambia strongly opposed to the white regimes especially South Africa; the Israeli representative, one of the few in Africa, generally supportive of South Africa; an active South Africa Charge. The British High Commissioner had his own problems in protecting the large British colony remaining in Malawi and extensive British commercial relations. The Republic of China had an able Ambassador and a very effective agricultural assistance team. The mixture added interest to the assignment and provided reporting opportunities.

Q: You mentioned that one of your achievements as Ambassador to Malawi was the support that President Banda and his government gave to US policies with regard to Vietnam. I would think that would be rather unusual for an African head of state to take that position at that time. Could you explain a little more about how Kamuzu Banda related to his other African chiefs of state?

BURDETT: I believe President Banda was the only African Chief of State to support US policy towards Vietnam, at least publicly. Personally he was strongly anti-Communist. He had ties to the US from his childhood. He valued the economic aid we were able to provide him. His predisposition was probably reinforced by his disagreements with neighboring African heads of state. His approach was always pragmatic, not ideological. Wisely, he refrained from taking part in an ideological or battle of words against South Africa. This put him into conflict with people like Kaunda and Nyerere and who at the same time were vocal critics of our Vietnam policy. On the general question of white South Africa, Banda was often isolated and by some regarded as an Uncle Tom. Malawi, however, benefitted from its connections with South Africa in terms of aid, the immigration of Malawians to work in South African mines, and transport facilities through South Africa. This meant more to President Banda than thumbing his nose at South Africa.

Q: I notice that prior to your service both in Ankara and Malawi that you had had two years as a senior Foreign Service Inspector. Would you please give me some impressions you had of that experience and perhaps some comments how it affected your subsequent assignments in Ankara or as Ambassador?

BURDETT: The Foreign Service Inspection tour was an extremely pleasant one personally for me and for my wife, in that we were able to see parts of the world unknown to us and to become acquainted with peoples of different cultures. The experience was professionally valuable in that one was able to see how successful Chiefs of Mission operated and also to become aware of the deficiencies of those who were not so good. I believe the Foreign Service Inspection Corps plays a very important role in evaluating the operational efficiency of a mission and, as was

emphasized by our Inspector General, attempting to evaluate from a distance the appropriateness of US policies toward a given country. The problem faced by the Inspectors in my time was that their recommendations were often ignored both by the posts inspected and the bureaus at home. This was particularly true when one ventured to criticize the so-called strong Ambassadors, or when one differed with policies dear to a particular bureau.

Q: Could you give some examples of that if you feel it is possible?

BURDETT: Giving examples gets very much into personalities which I would prefer to avoid. Instead I will give an example of a highly efficient operation conducted by Ambassador Bill Sullivan in Laos. He had an extraordinarily complex job in supporting the US war effort in Vietnam. I thought he did a marvelous job in carrying out the true role of a Chief of Mission, that is, in directing the totality of the US effort encompassing traditional diplomatic and consular functions, the AID program, covert operations, and the para-military. For example, I can remember a staff meeting when word was received that US pilots had been shot down in a given area. In an amazingly rapid time Bill had US rescue helicopters on the way to pick up those downed pilots. I know that is an extreme example but the point to emphasize is the importance of the Ambassador taking total control of the mission and trying to coordinate not just the State Department operations but that of innumerable other agencies attached to modern day missions. The Inspector can do a useful job in assessing from the outside the success of an Ambassador in this respect. I believe he can be of assistance to the Ambassador, egos permitting, in making suggestions to him about his total Country Team effort.

Another aspect of the Inspection process is the nuts-and-bolts one, evaluating the job done by the post in carrying out regulations and things of that sort, and the adequacy of administrative support. I regard this function as less important but necessary. At times we found over-staffing and recommended cuts, usually resisted strongly by the post.

Q: Yes. I had a similar impression as an Inspector that it was perhaps helpful to embassies in remote areas and Foreign Service posts there to get the feeling that they had access to perhaps another point of view or to people who were going back to the State Department who could reflect some of their views particularly if maybe they felt that they didn't get a full and complete hearing within the post itself.

BURDETT: That is certainly true, especially with respect to small isolated posts. In these circumstances you may have one senior officer and then a number of juniors. The senior officer often wishes and perhaps benefits from an opportunity to talk with one of his own age and range of experience. This overcomes his sense of isolation and perhaps breaks down prejudices he may have developed.

I would mention one other aspect of the inspection process, efficiency reports. It is easier for an outsider to provide a frank, objective report, and the Inspector has the benefit of exposure to a wide cross section of officers enabling him to evaluate relative performance. We made a practice of showing the rated officer his report in draft, and took into account his comments in the final report. "Public Members" were attached to our teams and provided a valuable, different perspective. Sometimes an Inspector detects instances of unfairness in personnel ratings. I found

on the whole that rating officers made a strong effort to be fair and objective, but there were instances of prejudice. The tendency was to err on the side of leniency. As you suggest, the Inspector provided an opportunity to officers who felt aggrieved to bare their frustrations and sometimes the Inspector was able to point out that the officer himself was in the wrong.

Q: To revert to one of the earlier points you made about the function of the Inspection Corps, that of looking at the conduct of foreign policy particularly with respect to the bureau in Washington and to the posts in the field, did you feel that there were any major difficulties in transmitting policy or in the relationship between the Foreign Service posts and the Department?

BURDETT: In the best circumstances policies were worked out in close consultation and were mutually understood and supported. At times there were strong disagreements between a post and the Department. Persons serving overseas felt intensely about local causes and were inclined to bend policies approved at the top levels in Washington. More frequently Washington sought to micromanage the carrying out of policy, to impose excessive administrative burdens, and to oblige posts to conform to US fads without regard to local conditions. The theoretical authority of a Chief of Mission was often undercut. For example, in Malawi I sought to close the Defense Attaché office. Under Pentagon pressure the Department refused to support the proposal.

EDDIE DEERFIELD
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Blantyre (1971-1973)

Mr. Deerfield was born in Nebraska and raised in Nebraska and Illinois. He was educated at the University of Illinois and Northwestern University. After service in the US Army Air Corps in WWII and work with a Chicago TV station, Mr. Deerfield joined the USIA Foreign Service in 1966 serving abroad in Madras, Islamabad, Blantyre, Vancouver, Kampala, Lagos and Calcutta. Mr. Deerfield submitted his personal memoir in 2012.

DEERFIELD: My third posting was at the American Embassy in Blantyre, Malawi in East Central Africa. H. Kamuzu Banda was the self-styled “President for Life” when I arrived in 1971 as Public Affairs Officer. At best, he was a benevolent dictator but not keen on having democracy preached in his country. I arranged exchange programs bringing in American professors to lecture at the University of Malawi and sending local leaders to the United States on various grants. We conducted a program on the life of Martin Luther King; a space program on the Apollo mission, an exhibition honoring Malawi’s leading soap stone artists opened by the mayor of the city. There was a presentation of books to Chancellor College of the University of Malawi and even a gift of a motorcycle to the country’s Red Cross Society. In retrospect, I believe that my most effective action was in publishing a 20- page monthly magazine called USA News. The contents were selected to emphasize the advantages of living in a democracy. The publication was circulated across a wide spectrum of Malawian society and generated many favorable comments from readers. This advocacy of democratic principles was a continuing

thorn in President Banda's side since he had already declared himself president for life. But, the closest I came to being terminated in Malawi was not due to presidential action.

While fishing alone on Lake Malawi about a mile off shore, a sudden storm overturned my boat. I wasn't wearing a life jacket but there was one in the boat and I managed to retrieve it in the water. That was about five in the afternoon. It took me three hours fighting the stormy waves to reach a rocky outcrop in a bay just off shore. It was pitch dark by then. I planned to spend the night on those rocks rather than take a chance of walking through the jungle to find the nearest residence. Mary Lee had sent out the alarm when I failed to return and about 10 o'clock that night she was on a boat with a powerful search light. She spotted me on the rocks and the boat took me aboard. The next day the Malawi Times carried a story of "near disaster" for an American diplomat and it was picked up by the Reuters news agency. The story commented that the bay I reached was infested by crocodiles and snakes. I continued my duck hunting with Malawi friends but my days of fishing on Lake Malawi were over.

ROBERT A. STEVENSON
Ambassador
Malawi (1974-1978)

Ambassador Robert A. Stevenson joined the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included posts in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Chile, Colombia, and an ambassadorship to Malawi. Ambassador Stevenson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: You were nominated to be ambassador to Malawi in 1974. You served there until 1978. Could you explain what the situation was in Malawi when you were there?

STEVENSON: Yes. Of course, Malawi is of very little substantive interest to the United States, almost no substantive problems there. We had about 300 missionaries in the country, and that was largely the American presence, plus British American Tobacco Company had a few people, because Malawi is a big producer of bright leaf cigarette tobacco and dark fired tobacco. When I got there, of course, President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who is still president, was in full control, and he is a benevolent dictator for the majority of Malawians. But for some, he's a cruel, cruel dictator. He hates the Jehovah's Witnesses with a passion, and they get very rough treatment. Other African presidents have had problems with Jehovah's Witnesses, so he's not alone in this, but his reaction is pretty rough.

Q: Any Americans?

STEVENSON: No. The American Jehovah's Witnesses had long been expelled. They'd been out of the country. So these were the nationals.

Q: You must have breathed a sign of relief.

STEVENSON: Oh, yeah, that there were no Americans involved. President Banda expelled people very quickly. He gave 48 hours to get out of the country, and that was that, and he did it for very trivial things. In one case, we did have an American contractor there. They were building roads under an AID loan. We did have a couple of big AID loans there when I got there in '74, to build highways. We didn't have much of any other AID program.

We had built their Bunda Agricultural College, but we were out of that, and that was because of the first Jehovah's Witnesses' trouble when two or three of them were beaten to death on the property of the Bunda Agricultural College, and the American AID-appointed Director of the college had marched right in to the Governor and in effect said, "I won't have this. Killing these people on Bunda premises must stop," and he was given 48 hours to leave the country. So that was our last--well, there was an American advisor there, but he wasn't under AID. He was hired by Bunda. But the Director had gone.

So they were building highways. The manager in the country, an American, picked up some "subversive literature," in other words, some literature critical of President Banda, from one of the truck drivers who had come back with some equipment from Tanzania and Zambia, I guess. So he turned it in to the Malawian police, and was immediately hauled in and asked where he got it. He told them where he had gotten it, but nevertheless, for the fact that he had done this, he was given 48 hours to leave the country. So the American company representative came to me and said, "He's a damn good foreman and there's no reason in the world to expel him. Can't we get him back?"

I said, "I'll try to do the best I can." So I went to see the president's secretary and talked to him about it and reviewed the whole thing. I said, "Rather than expel the man, I would have thought that you would have thanked him because he was trying to be cooperative and turn this stuff over to you. Isn't there any possibility you could let him back?" He'd been gone then about two weeks.

And the Secretary turned to me and said, "Well, I understand what you've told me, but, no, we can't let him back. To let him back would be to admit that our President was wrong." (Laughter) And that's the way the country was run.

Q: Did you have any relations with President Banda?

STEVENSON: Very good, as a matter of fact. We hit it off fine. He loved to talk about the States. He had been educated here at Wilberforce Academy in Ohio, and then he'd gone to Indiana U. for two years, and he would have finished at Indiana, but a professor at the University of Chicago was looking for somebody who knew Chinyanza. That was the language of that area. He was doing a study of it, and a professor friend of his at Indiana had said, "We have a student here, Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Maybe he could come over to Chicago and help you." So he transferred to Chicago for his junior and senior years, and helped this professor with Chinyanza. (Now called Chichewa)

As a result, he is a great grammarian in the language, just as a Latin fellow might be really good at Latin. At the same time, he doesn't speak it so fluently anymore. And all of his speeches in Malawi are in English. He speaks in English and has standing beside him a translator who

translates everything he says into Chichewa. Every now and then he will correct the translator and the crowd will all titter and laugh when he says, "You should have said, 'Okoli maluna, not so and so.'" And he'll tell why. But nevertheless, he speaks in English.

He's an interesting old man. He runs the country efficiently. Malawi is one of the best run of the black African countries, not any question. But he can be cruel.

After I left, two of the ministers were shot by the police, two of the ministers whom I knew quite well, and one who had given the farewell address when I left. They were both assassinated by the police. That's left a pretty bitter taste in my mouth. But the old man did like me.

One time they had picked up one of our staff members, a Malawian staff member, and they'd put him in jail. He was a rather naive young man who worked for our library. We had two libraries there in Malawi that were very heavily patronized by the Malawian students. This young fellow had been approached by a South African white communist and asked if he had a certain book. He'd met him at a meeting of librarians. The South African asked him if he had such and such a book? And he'd told him he did and that he'd mail him a copy. He didn't know anything about this white South African. So he mailed him a copy of the book, and that got him into correspondence, and the Malawian police were watching this. From South African intelligence, they knew that this guy to whom he had written was a communist. So they arrested him.

It took me a while to figure all this out, but I went to see the old man. We were under some heat from USIA to get him out, and I said, "You know, I'm going back on consultation, and I want to try to get some help for Malawi. I have a problem, because you're holding this fellow." I went over what I've just told you. I thought I was doing a good job of it, but the old man drew back in his chair. He always received you one on one in this nice office that he had. He said, "What? Don't try to blackmail me! I don't need your aid. You can take your aid and stuff it! No way will I take action based on what you've told me."

Well, I was, naturally, quite taken aback, but I said, "Well, Your Excellency, you know, I'm really on the spot on this thing. If you can't do it for any other reason, would you do it for me personally?"

He looked at me. "All right. For you I'll do it." (Laughter) I mean, that was it. He runs the place like an old-fashioned African chief. Fear and respect is what he wants. But if you work with him, you can get along fine.

Q: You are saying that our economic interests were minor. Did we have any other political interests in the area?

STEVENSON: No. This is what made it pretty dull for me after being at very politically active posts for most of my life. We don't have any political interests there at all. Since I've left, I think an oil company is doing some oil exploration there. I had wondered that none of them had done it before. But we had some professors there. There is that beautiful big lake, Lake Malawi, which is bigger than Lake Erie. That's a big lake. It's a beautiful, pristine body of water. We had

professors from Princeton studying there, studying the lake and its marine life. UNDP had some programs.

Q: Could you swim in it or was there bilharzia?

STEVENSON: No, there wasn't bilharzia in the lake. You could swim in the lake. And none of our adults got bilharzia. Some of the children got it, and we thought maybe they got it from playing in the puddles at the edge of the lake. That type of thing. But in the lake itself, where you had wave action and sandy bottoms, you didn't have bilharzia.

Q: I take it that when you were dealing with Malawi, you dealt with Banda, and that was it.

STEVENSON: Yes, that was it.

Q: The foreign ministry was not much of an operative appendage to the government.

STEVENSON: We used to see them, and they wanted us to go through them to the President. But when I presented my credentials, the President said, "If you ever need to see me on any important business, don't hesitate to contact me directly." Well, I didn't abuse that, but on the few occasions when I did need to see him urgently, I didn't bother going through the Foreign Office. I just called the president's secretary and she gave me an appointment immediately.

Q: What was the situation in the neighboring state of Mozambique? Were they undergoing the civil war that's still going on?

STEVENSON: Yes, and the refugees were beginning to come in. I saw the first of the refugees down in the south. There were also about 25,000 Jehovah's Witnesses who had fled to Mozambique when they were being persecuted in Malawi, and had set up a huge village just across the border. When FRELIMO came to power in Mozambique, they chased them out of the country back into Malawi. I saw those poor people walking along the highway, carrying all their belongings, the little kids carrying pots and pans, camped out. I just happened to be up there by chance. This highway runs right along the border, and they were walking. I said to myself, "What the hell is going on?" All these thousands of people streaming along on foot.

So I had my driver stop the car, and he asked this intelligent-looking young woman, and she said, "We're all Jehovah's Witnesses who were living in Mozambique. We were driven out of the country."

I said, "Ask them where they're going."

She said, "We're trying to make our way back to our old villages."

Of course, President Banda, the next day, had a thing released in the paper, "Anyone who gives these people succor is an enemy of the state." Poor devils. They confiscated their bicycles. About 300 bicycles were taken from them. They were later auctioned by the police. Quite a few of them were later tried, about 2,000 of them were put in prison for two years.

I worked hard on that one and tried, as best I could. They did work out some sort of a reasonable *modus vivendi* just before I left, and I gather from the current ambassador that they still have some problems, but they haven't flared up like they did just before I got there, when a number of them were killed. It's never gotten that bad. I think the Jehovah's Witnesses agreed to buy Party Cards and agreed to one or two other little things, and the government said, "Okay, if you'll do that, we won't insist on you doing the other things." But you know, they wouldn't send their kids to schools, they wouldn't salute the flag, they wouldn't buy party cards, they wouldn't sing the national anthem, these things that Banda made so much of and the people in his new country. I've always felt that if the old man ran an open, democratic election, he'd be elected.

There was an opposition, and when he dies there's going to be some bloodletting, but right now, even now, I think he could win a free election.

Q: Did you get any instructions from Washington, or were things quiet as far as American interests were concerned? "Don't bother us and we won't bother you."

STEVENSON: That's exactly the way it was. I had a lousy young desk officer who didn't know his ass from first base, and he was trying to run policy back on this end, and didn't know what the hell was going on. For example, on human rights, the old man had some--

Q: This is now the Carter Administration.

STEVENSON: Under Carter. Right. As you said, Malawi ran along and it functioned and there were minimal problems. They didn't have important copper like Zambia or the problems of southern Rhodesia or Mozambique. So they were pretty much just left alone and they'd let this desk officer pretty much run things. So he sent out a human rights report for us, and we were told to look at it, but that we really couldn't correct it.

The old man has some ideas--I mean, he didn't like long hair on men. He didn't want hair down below the ears on men. He wanted ladies' skirts to cover the knees. Apparently the knees are very sexy in that part of Africa. They didn't mind some deep cleavage, but they did want the knees covered. There were one or two other little things like that, and he had them all in the human rights report. I said, "This is a crock of bull. He's got every right. If this is what the society of Malawi wants, and this is African custom, if they want the dresses to cover the knees, I don't really think that's a human rights question. And they want the hair on men cut so it doesn't hang way down."

Q: He was imposing American standards.

STEVENSON: Yes. I got Washington to take out almost everything. Then they criticized the old man for his wealth. I said, "Yes, he is very wealthy, but he hasn't stolen it. He's made it in commercial ventures. He's a big tobacco grower. He's probably used his position to get some of the land, but he hasn't stolen the land. He employs thousands of people on his tobacco estates." It turns out that he was the world's largest single grower of flue-cured tobacco--old Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. That's big! It's 10,000 acres of flue-cured tobacco. I said, "Look. How does that

differ from a certain president we had and his TV stations down in Texas? Do you want him to follow Jesus' advice to the rich young ruler?" And they shut up on that one, too. They left about one thing in it, but they backwatered on the others.

We moved the capital city, you know, from Blantyre, which was the old place that Livingston had come to and where the first missionary--

Q: This was Dr. Livingston, the explorer.

STEVENSON: David Livingston. The capital city was moved to a new capital up at Lilongwe, 220 miles to the north, while I was there, and that was kind of interesting, moving the chancery and getting set up in a new area, with a new residence and new chancery and so forth. That was an interesting experience. My wife and I enjoyed Malawi from the standpoint of living, the culture, the people, friendly people, a new culture for us, a new environment.

The old president, like I say, I could see him when I needed to, and we personally hit it off fine. I really scored brownie points with him by giving him about a pound and a half of American hybrid sweet corn seed. (Laughter) He really was appreciative for that, because they didn't have that kind. He had eaten American sweet corn when he lived in the U.S., so he missed it. At one time, on his birthday, he'd always have a big soiree, British style with a band playing in the old governor general's house and so forth, and each member of the diplomatic corps together with his wife would be taken under a fig tree to talk to the old man and his "official hostess". So we went to talk to him. I said to myself, "What in the hell am I going to talk to him about?" So I asked him, "Did you get so you liked American sweet corn when you lived in the U.S.?" (Because I'd begun growing it in my garden there).

"Yeah, I liked it very much!"

"How would you like some seed?"

"That would be great!" We talked some more. So I gave him some seed.

About a year later his secretary pulled me aside at a social deal and said, "Oh, that sweet corn seed that you gave to the president, the corn is so good. We like it so much."

I said, "The president likes it?"

"Oh, yes! We grow it in the Zomba garden." They had this big walled garden.

He lives like a prince. But he doesn't graft and he doesn't have Swiss bank accounts, and if his ministers and officials are dishonest, he slaps them in the pokey. I have to say there are a lot of positive things to say about the old man. I regret his cruelty. The sycophancy has changed him. I mean, he doesn't deal in reality. Like "Papa Doc" Duvalier in Haiti before he died, really believed only a silver bullet could do him in. (Laughter) President Banda is really pretty carried away. His ego won't stand any bruising. He never goes to any African meetings anymore, because his ego won't stand it.

Q: He can't stand to be with people who consider themselves his equal.

STEVENSON: That's right, or might criticize, where he'd have to defend anything. So he just avoids contact. He runs the place pretty shrewdly vis-à-vis Mozambique. He's been quite clever. I thought maybe they'd gang up and do him in. You know, they did talk about it a couple of years or so ago as was learned when that plane crashed. They found some papers or something indicating that they'd wondered if they should do something about Banda.

Q: Who wanted to?

STEVENSON: The fellow that was killed. Samora Machel had gone to Zimbabwe for a meeting and his plane crashed. Remember? And he was killed. Stemming out of that was something indicating that they'd talked about doing something.

But Banda was clever. When Frelimo first came to power in Mozambique, they destroyed the medical system. Maybe it was inevitable. At any rate, it was destroyed. Some of the ministers had health problems, and Banda sent word to them, "You're welcome to come over here. You can come over to my hospital any time." So I think the mayor of Maputo and a minister or two came over and took treatment in Malawi hospitals. So he's been clever. Now he has an ambassador in Maputo. So the old boy plays his cards pretty well.

They used to say he was a South African puppet. Not at all. The South Africans had to treat him very carefully, and he got some help from South Africa, but it wasn't all that big. The Canadians and ourselves gave him more help than the South Africans did. The West Germans gave him a lot of help. The European Economic Community had a good program down there. The Canadians built \$50 million or \$70 million worth of railroad in the country. So the South African help was pretty small, but he did have relations with South Africa. He told me once that he made a state visit to South Africa and he thought he was the first black man that many of those white South Africans had ever sat down with at a dinner table, and he thought that was good. Well, I'm not saying it wasn't. It probably was good.

I have to tell you one more story about him. Just before I left, he had a big banquet in his new palace. He has this beautiful big palace in Blantyre called Sanjika Palace, cost about \$12 million to build, and I think that would be the one thing I might be kind of critical of him in the way of spending money that should have gone into development. Twelve-million dollars went to build this Sanjika Palace. I think another big palace is being built in Lilongwe for him now.

Anyway, he had a reception for the Diplomatic Corps, and I was the Deputy Dean at the time. The Taiwanese Ambassador was the Dean, so I was seated next to the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress Party. He was on one side and the Dean on the other side. The Malawi Congress Party man tapped me on the shoulder and said, "His Excellency is talking to you." The band was playing and this was a big banquet hall. With the band playing, you couldn't hear a thing. He said, "The president is talking to you." I could see the president had leaned forward and was saying something to me. I concentrated my attention on his face. I listened and said to

myself, "My God, it sounds like Latin!" Then he repeated, "Omnia Gallia en tres partes dividia est."

I said, "Julius Caesar!"

"Aha! Aha!" I said with jovial satisfaction, "I'm re-reading my high school Latin." And I think he's the only president in Africa that would be reading his high school Latin. Or any Latin for that matter. That's the only Latin I could remember incidentally, from my two years in High School.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you find the staff at the embassy?

STEVENSON: Good staff.

Q: This was your first look. What was your impression of the Africanists in the Foreign Service, as opposed to the Latin Americanists? Did you get much of a sampling of them in your travelings around to meetings and also your own embassy?

STEVENSON: I don't recall anything--that is any significant differences. I was impressed with the people in Africa. I went to an ambassadorial conference--well, to one early on in Lusaka, and then later in Azerbaijan. I was well impressed with my fellow colleagues and then on my own staff. My first DCM, I guess you would say, was an Africanist. He had served in the Congo, and he was good and knew his stuff. My second DCM also had some north and central Africa experience. My last one also had had one tour. They were the key ones. The rest were pretty much junior officers who came out there.

We had a nice setup in Malawi. It was certainly a pleasant place to start as a junior officer, because you could get a shot at a lot of different jobs and you had good living conditions. We had nice housing, an acre of garden around each place. I made a point personally of planting papaya trees at each place, so everybody had their own papayas. We really lived very well.

I had inherited an Ambassadorial lodge, nothing fancy, but a rustic lodge up on top of the Zomba plateau that the AID people had leased for 25 years before Malawian independence. Since we no longer had an AID mission, we had this lodge, and everybody on the staff could use it, but the Ambassador controlled it. It was a pleasant get-away spot and a useful place to entertain people from time to time. That was at about 6,000 feet altitude, so it was very cool and the air delightfully fresh.

Then we had a cottage at the lake. All in all, Malawi was a sleeper in terms of living. It was a nice little post. In terms of substance, I was chafing before I left there. I was ready to get out and hoped I could go back to something more substantive in Latin America.

GILBERT H. SHEINBAUM
Deputy Chief of Mission

Lilongwe (1976-1978)

Gilbert H. Sheinbaum was born in New York on April 20, 1929. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from New York University in 1950 and served in the U.S. military from 1951-1953. Mr. Sheinbaum entered the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Laos, Vietnam, Denmark, Madagascar, Malawi, the Philippines, and Switzerland. This interview was conducted by Tom Dunnigan on September 6, 1995.

Q: *Well, you then were assigned directly to Malawi?*

SHEINBAUM: I actually left Madagascar without an onward assignment. And it was the wrong time. It was the middle of the winter here and there wasn't any suitable job left so I hung around the Department. That's when I had three weeks in BEX in San Francisco and in Boston. Although Malawi as DCM was not so appealing -- it turned out to be a good choice.

Q: *Bob Stevenson was the Ambassador there?*

SHEINBAUM: He was the first one there.

Q: *What were our problems with Malawi then or did we have any?*

SHEINBAUM: We did have some. [President H. Kamuzu] Banda had arrested -- or detained -- about two thousand political figures in the past couple of years and we were very unhappy about that. We had therefore suspended our AID program and our Peace Corps program. In the mid-1960s, the largest Peace Corps program in the world was in Malawi: four hundred volunteers -- most of whom were teaching English. One of whom was Paul Theroux, the author.

Q: *Oh, he writes nice travel books and other things.*

SHEINBAUM: Well, the thing is he got on the outs with the powers-that-be there because he wrote some things rather critical in those days. He was accused of associating with the wrong people and thus gave a bad name to the Peace Corps as far as Banda was concerned. Banda was consequently very reluctant to continue so we let the program wind down. We had three volunteers there when I arrived, two of whom -- a husband and wife -- were working in the nature conservatory right in Lilongwe.

Q: *Having been the largest Peace Corps project in the world?*

SHEINBAUM: That's right. And then . . . he released one group. But he had made a major mistake, Banda. In February, before I arrived (I arrived in July), his goons had walked into our USIS library and arrested one of our locals. And without any protest from the embassy. USIS was clearly designated -- by the Malawians -- as diplomatic territory. Then Bob Stevenson refused please by the DCM to let this be known to Washington. He reportedly said, "I can handle it." He had made, apparently, a misstep earlier on, but somehow the word got back about this error of judgment and he got rapped over the knuckles. Yet the Department extended his stay

there for nine more months anyway -- he had friends in Personnel where he had served as a Director just before Malawi. At any rate, at the time I arrived in early July 1977, that week Banda released all the rest except for a handful -- like sixty political detainees, and the sixty were guys he had had in for a long period of time. Since we had cut off our AID program and our Peace Corps program over the detentions, I said to Bob Stevenson, "We've got to do something." He didn't want to do anything about it, afraid of getting rapped over the knuckles again for approaching a subject that might be taboo. Well, I thought this was wrong. Coincidentally, about a week or two later, we had a request from the Malawi government to send advisors to a conference in Lilongwe they were having -- a conference to solicit development aid for specific projects. They wanted to see if the U.S. could provide some very assistance along the lines of what we had provided in previous years. I said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with us attending this." Bob resisted but I was able to get the word to the regional AID people in Nairobi, and they were all for it. We attended, and we got a modest AID program going. We didn't have an AID mission there, so for two years, I was, in effect, the AID director.

Q: DCM and AID Director.

SHEINBAUM: Right. And in addition to the AID, we had been getting some word from Washington to see if we could resume our Peace Corps program. Number one: I had to figure out how to overcome Banda's resistance, and Bob Stevenson was reluctant to take it up too strongly with Banda because he knew the history of that Paul Theroux thing. There was a lot of interest on the part of the Peace Corps, and I felt that it would be suitable for the Peace Corps because the Malawians had made full use of the Peace Corps people previously. I was Chargé for about nine months in between Bob Stevenson and Hal Horan and I remember National Day in July 1978, when I was Chargé and Banda had already said to me that he'd at least think about bringing the Peace Corps back. He kept talking about "you know, these young people aren't very mature." I remember Inger and I were greeting him and his escort, Mrs. Kadzamira, whom Inger knew quite well, in a ceremonial tent in Zomba and we talked about this and that, Inger talking with Mrs. Kadzamira while I was talking with Banda. I said to him, "I'd really like you to think about the Peace Corps." And he started whining again about maturity, and I replied, "You know, just because a guy is old doesn't make him mature and just because somebody is young doesn't make him immature." The next day I got the word -- okay. So I had to serve as Peace Corps Director although I didn't have any volunteers. A Director came out with the first batch of about 35 six months later. There were about seventy-five or eighty volunteers by the time I left and they've done quite well, I understand.

Q: But it was your dropping this hint in Banda's ear.

SHEINBAUM: It was funny, I just happened to fall onto that and that worked out well.

Q: And, of course, he wasn't a young man himself.

SHEINBAUM: No. And I wanted to say this about Malawi, when I said it turned out to be a good assignment. If I hadn't had the AID and the Peace Corps things it would have been Dullsville. We also had small children; they were one and four when we got to Malawi, and it was perfect for that reason. I could spend a lot of time with the children. We lived only five

minutes away from the Embassy. We had a pool next to our house. Everybody lived well there, nice brick houses with nice grounds. It was a very nice arrangement. We had a couple of embassy recreational houses -- one on the lake and one up in the mountains, on top of Zomba plateau, that were for the Ambassador's use and, of course, were for the use of the rest of the staff at other times. It worked out very nicely so it was a good two years.

HAROLD E. HORAN
Ambassador
Malawi (1979-1980)

Ambassador Harold E. Horan joined the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included posts in Iran, Italy, Mali, and Liberia, and an ambassadorship to Malawi. Ambassador Horan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: We're talking about 1978 and you became an ambassador to Malawi. How did this come about?

HORAN: I don't know. I just got a phone call saying, "You've been named to be ambassador to Malawi. Of course, I don't know how the process works, but I first started getting hints in Liberia that I was on a list for something. I didn't get that. Then a list for something, and I didn't get that. Actually, as a matter of fact, I was ready to retire. Bev Carter said to me, "You'd be a fool to retire. You're going to be an ambassador in a little while if you just hold still."

In those days -- this was the beginning of the Carter Administration, wasn't it -- in any case, in those days little places like Malawi were seen still as places where you sent career officers. So I guess I just became the State Department's candidate and off I went. I guess I was seen as having done a fairly good job in managing Monrovia. We got a great efficiency report from the inspectors. That probably didn't hurt, and being deputy to Bev Carter probably didn't hurt as well, because he was a man who had tremendous respect from his colleagues in the State Department, and elsewhere.

So all those things -- as I say, I don't know what the process is really. I know what the official process is, but how does it sort of perk up through the system?

Q: Did you have any instructions before you went to Malawi, or did you go off there and keep the flag flying?

HORAN: I came back and did my orientation, we had very, very few issues with Malawi. The only serious issue we had with Malawi, and, once again, it was perking when I got there, was to reinstate the Peace Corps. The President, Kamuzu Banda, who's a very strict man, very conservative man, had kicked the Peace Corps out during the '60s because he didn't like hippies. He didn't like our dress, our long hair, our dress style, our lifestyle. He said, "I don't want my people to be exposed to this." So he kicked the Peace Corps out, and this damaged our relations.

By the time I came on the scene, we were working through a system to reinstate the Peace Corps, whereby the Peace Corps would pay for a Malawian official to be present in the United States during the selection process. So he could certify to his government that, "Yes, these people are fine. I've talked to them, I know them, I've seen them." I think I preceded the Peace Corps by maybe a couple of months, but, in any case, we sort of came together. So getting the Peace Corps installed and in place was one of the issues that we had.

Q: *Why did we care?*

HORAN: Because we're that kind of a country. We don't like for somebody else to beat up on us, do we. The Peace Corps would say, "This isn't an appropriate activity on the part of a country with which we presumably have friendly relations." So there was this bureaucratic drive, I suppose, in Washington to . . .

Q: *Malawi represented a blank on the map.*

HORAN: A blank on the map, I suppose. So the Peace Corps came in and, while I was there, functioned very well. I think it's probably still functioning very well.

Q: *Could you describe Malawi a bit to me. I know very little about it.*

HORAN: It's a small country of about 5 million people, it has no mineral resources whatsoever. It has Lake Malawi, which is one of the three largest lakes in the world, it has abundance of fishing, and it's an agricultural state. There may be some coal up north, it's not worth trying to get to it. There are no mineral resources in Malawi. Malawi is fortunate to have had Banda, who recognized this.

Q: *I've heard Hastings quite a bit.*

HORAN: Hastings is the name he used in London as a doctor, but then he changed it to Kamuzu at mid-course when he was head of state, and still is, of course, head of state in Malawi.

So it's a small country with very little tribal tension, very little tension with its neighbors, with the exception of a little tension with Tanzania. It's a country in which the President of the country decided, "I'm going to keep my people down on the farm growing crops." If you'll read the literature, you'll see that, with a couple of exceptions when there had been droughts, Malawi has been one of the few countries in Africa able to feed itself. It's a country which is a one party state and it's run by Kamuzu Banda. There's no important decision and very few decisions period that are made at the government level that are not made by Kamuzu Banda. He maintains, or he did, the portfolio of minister of foreign affairs, he maintained the portfolio of minister of agriculture. There may be one or two others. He was not the kind of leader who came in and kicked out all foreign ex-pats. When I was there, there were still expatriates who were still permanent under secretaries.

Q: *They were from where?*

HORAN: England. It was a British colony. They were still running the ministries of government. Banda said to his people, "I will give you the jobs as soon as you can do them." But he just was not going to act in the style of some of the other leaders who said, "Okay. The ex-pats have got to go, and all these jobs are going to be given to native Malawians."

There were two things that he did when he gained independence from the British. One is that he determined, as I say, to keep the people on the farm, and he was not going to allow the cities, and there weren't many cities anyway, to grow into these terrible urban areas with lots of urban slums. There was really only one city and that was the capitol, Bamako, which was in the south, south center. He wanted to open up the rest of the country, so he built one long road -- Malawi's a narrow, long, little strip of land -- from the south to the north, and he moved the capitol to the center of the country. He said, "If we leave the capitol in Bamako, then all the development will focus on Bamako. All the economic assistance from others, our own growth will be Bamako." So he moved the capitol to Lilongwe.

He tried to get seed money from his Western friends to this, and they said, "Well, you don't need a new capitol. You're a poor little country, why do you need to start building buildings in Lilongwe, this place out in the middle of nowhere?" So he went to South Africa and he got the money from the South Africans. Of course, as you know, he is the lone man out there. He's always had diplomatic relations with South Africa. He's not willing to rant and rave publicly about South Africa, or join that group of southern African states who are always railing against apartheid. He's opposed to it, but he says, "Look I've got to live with South Africa. Look at me. I'm right here. They're important to me and I've got to live with South Africa."

Q: We have a map on the wall. Just for the record, Banda made, you say, the two decisions. We're talking about the 1980s, after rather extensive foreign aid programs, American and others. Two great failures have been seen as far as this foreign aid to Africa. One was that it tended to undercut native agriculture, and with that it concentrated so much of the population in the large cities, which were unable to feed themselves, and native agriculture was sort of disturbed. He seemed to have made the right decisions for a small country.

HORAN: It sounds like that. Some of the IMF reports that I have heard about, because, of course, I don't follow Malawi closely now since I'm out of the service anyway. I don't have access to all this information. He's always given high marks for that, although there may be some human rights abuses there. I understand that Malawi's literacy rate is not all that great.

One other thing he did in the same context of not expelling expatriates from ministries, he didn't expel the agriculturalists, the British who were growing tobacco, and growing cotton, and growing tea. As I say, it's a very rich country in agriculture.

When I was there, his neighbor, Zambia, which is right next door -- here's country that went a different route -- they decided to exploit their copper resources and buy food from somebody else. So when the copper prices fell out of sight, they had problems. The United Nations wanted to hurry and put a fast fix of maize into Zambia, and they heard that Malawi had a surplus of something like 15,000 tons of maize, which is not a lot of maize, but it was right there. It was sitting in their granaries, and ready for shipment to an area like Zambia, which is just a short

drive down the road, and fairly decent roads at that, by African standards (and by Washington D.C. standards).

So the United Nations authorities went to the Malawians and said, "We want to buy this 15,000 surplus tons of grain that you have."

They said, "Well, you'll have to get the okay from the President." As I told you, these kinds of decisions were made by the President.

The story goes -- and I don't have this first hand -- that when Banda heard that they wanted to buy the grain, he said, "Who needs the grain?"

They said, "Well, Kaunda needs the grain. He's got a drought up there."

He said, "Well, give it to my friend Kaunda."

So, I make the case that Malawi had one of the first African aid programs.

Q: How did you deal with Banda?

HORAN: Rarely. I rarely saw him. I dealt with him through his key advisors. He had two that I knew and worked with closely. One was the man who was in charge of the Civil Service. That's his title, he was director of the Civil Service. He was Banda's trouble-shooter. Banda had a permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, but he was not effective. The other was a man by the name Maluzi and he was the minister of government for the party, and he was also very influential with Banda. So those two men were the men I dealt with, not Banda himself. Banda didn't see foreign dignitaries. I quickly realized that there was no reason for me to try to change that attitude, that I could deal just as well -- we didn't have that many problems anyway -- through these people as with Banda.

The only thing I wanted to see was, and it's all we needed in the two years that I was there, to have a high-level U.S. Government visit to Malawi, because it had been a long time since there had been one. I don't even remember when there was one.

So I went after Dick Moose, who was Assistant Secretary of State, and said, "You really need to come to Malawi. You're going to Rhodesia all the time, you're going to southern Africa all the time, you need to come to Malawi. That's all we need, just a visit, just to go pay a call on the President. That's all we need."

He finally took me up on that, and got even with me because he decided to have a small conference of all the U.S. ambassadors in southern Africa in Lilongwe in my residence, my office building. So I had my colleagues from around southern Africa and Dick Moose. Dick and I paid a call on the President, and that was it.

Q: Coming back, you were there during the Carter Administration and human rights were important. Malawi was labeled not free. There are various gradations of outfits in Malawi

because it's one party system and considered not free, and there had been the expulsion, hadn't there, of many of the Asians at that point?

HORAN: No. It was the mistreatment of the Seventh Day Adventists.

Q: *Did you have to deal with these problems?*

HORAN: In the first place, Banda has a poor reputation in this country among the liberals, because of his relationships with the South Africans, because of his refusal to speak out publicly on the issues that southern Africans care about and that Americans care about. That is to say, independence for Namibia, and particularly apartheid in South Africa, his strict rules about society, women couldn't wear slacks or men couldn't have their hair long, there was censorship of books. This has eased up considerably since I was there. For example, the Green Revolution wasn't allowed into the country -- you know, this is one of the standard books about improving agricultural growth -- because of the word "revolution." This was just a knee-jerk reaction, probably from some little censor who was there, and, of course, he'd be censoring films and this sort of thing. So there was this kind of atmosphere that didn't sit well in this country.

The only real serious problem I had with Malawi was that one day we woke up to find out that one of our most loyal local employees at the USIS Cultural Center had been arrested and incarcerated with no charges. Well, the hostages were in Iran, Washington was nervous about this sort of thing. We had no jurisdiction over him, he was a Malawian. But USIA just raised hell, "What's Horan doing about getting this guy out of jail?"

Well, what I did was -- first of all, little by little, because he was given access to his family, we were able to piece together the story that he'd been picked up because somebody had found a book of his, which was a diary, in which he had derogatory things to say about the President, which you just didn't do. I don't suppose you do it today.

My task was to get him free. Now, if I had gone to Banda, he would have said to me, "Look, it's none of your business, ambassador. He's a Malawian. I'll work this thing out as I see fit. We'll let the process go through." I would have, in my judgment, put a stiff board in his back. So what did I do? I went to Johnny N'Guiri, this person I was telling you about who was in charge of the Civil Service, I said, "John, you've got to help me. I've got a serious problem. We've got to get this fellow out of jail as soon as we can. It's really creating problems back in the States."

He said, "Don't talk to me about this. Go see the Under Secretary for Foreign affairs."

I said, "John, you know you're the one I've got to talk to."

Afterward, I left him alone. I let him work out the problem and then, little by little, this thing straightened itself out, and, lo and behold, one day out of the clear blue sky the USIS employee - - whose name escapes me -- was released and came back to work. He wasn't abused, apparently, in jail. He was fed, this sort of thing.

That was the only real human rights problem, because by the time I got there the Seventh Day Adventists problem had been resolved.

Q: How effective was the Peace Corps while you there?

HORAN: It was small. It was small on purpose, very low key. We had a Peace Corps director who was himself very low key. It's hard for me to assess how effective they were, because what we really were concerned with was that they be, in their personal conduct, holier than the holy, so that we wouldn't raise up this problem -- they were being watched obviously -- of Banda's suspicion of the attitudes of young Americans.

Q: They were all aware of the problem?

HORAN: They were all aware of the problem. Ernie Yancey spent a lot of time -- he was the Peace Corps director -- within country. He would hold twice-yearly meetings with the volunteers in a local spot where they would all come together. I can't remember, I think their numbers must have been 20 or so, so you can't have a lot of impact. Many of them were teachers, there were some in health care as well, some in agriculture. I just don't remember that. But that was the main thrust, was to get the think going, not to go too fast.

One thing we had in our favor was that the deputy Peace Corps director had been in Malawi himself as a Peace Corps volunteer earlier and he had married a Malawian, and she had contacts within the government so it was a nice good tie there. He had good contacts himself in the society, so he could use those contacts to see if something was going wrong.

Q: How was your staff in Malawi? It was small, obviously.

HORAN: I had a DCM and economic officer. The DCM was a political officer. I had an administrative officer. The economic officer was also the Consular officer. But we had a military attaché.

Q: [Laughter] What did the military attaché do?

HORAN: Well, that's interesting. What the military attaché did was to be in the area. No neighboring countries wanted a military attaché. Zambia didn't want a military attaché, obviously Mozambique wasn't interested in a military attaché, South Africa had it's own attaché, Tanzania wasn't interested in military attaché, Banda didn't care, so that was fine with him. As a matter of fact, when I was named ambassador, I was wooed by the Defense Department because there had been some questions to whether we really needed a Defense attaché and Defense wanted to have a presence in that area of the world. I said, "Well, it's not going to give me any problem. As long as the attaché can get along with me, it's fine with me." As a matter of fact, he was finally allowed to make a couple trips to Zambia just to talk to his counterparts in Zambia. So our relations with Malawi at that level were good as long as he was not perceived as meddling in the affairs of Malawi, which he was not.

Q: Did you find yourself there with, you might say, interesting neighbors in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia? Were you sort of a listening post or not?

HORAN: Only in Mozambique. We had a consulate down in Bamako whose job was to look, to the extent they could, at Mozambique. But as far as Zambia and Tanzania, no. We had ambassadors there who were perfectly qualified to take care of their own. One thing, you know, an ambassador doesn't like is to get advice from another ambassador. [Laughter] There have been some famous cases. I hope you have some of them on your tapes.

It's funny, you know, going to Malawi was initially very frustrating because there really wasn't that much to do. I finally realized that the reason I was there, as I mentioned earlier to you, was that I was a presence. Banda used the diplomatic corps as evidence of nationhood, and he did lots of public events, lots of public speaking, opening sugar mills, watching his women dance, arriving at the airports, going out inspecting the crops. You were always on the road following Banda around. When I realized that that's what I was there for was to follow Banda around, and, obviously, deal with embassy's problems as well -- and I had a good strong DCM -- I got comfortable with myself.

STEDMAN HOWARD
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Lilongwe (1981-1984)

Mr. Howard was born in New York and raised in New York and Massachusetts. He was educated at Wake Forest College (Illinois); Worcester Junior College; University of Massachusetts; and the University of Maine. He joined the United States Information Agency in 1971 in Washington and served there, dealing with management matters, including the Voice of America (VOA). Mr. Howard also served abroad as Public Affairs Officer in Abidjan, Lilongwe (Malawi) and Kampala. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: So, in '81 you went where?

HOWARD: In '81, I had bid on several Admin jobs, one in Vienna, one in Caracas and I got a call offering me two jobs in Africa. One was assistant cultural affairs officer for exchanges in Lagos and the other was public affairs officer in Lilongwe and I said that's no choice. Where is Lilongwe? So, I went to Malawi. I thought I had known Africa. So I began to figure out where was Malawi, in the southern part of East Africa. So I went and I was the PAO, and I was sent there because it was basically a management problem post. It had moved from an industrial banking center city to a brand new capital and left the university plus the media, plus the major contact base 250 miles away behind it in a funny branch post. They had taken the American officers, had taken one-third of the FSNs and they had left a PAO and a regional librarian. The regional librarian was in the original post, but he was gone most of the time. There was a major management problem. What I discovered was they wanted to close it and they wouldn't tell me. They waited

until after I got there and I had only been there about a week and they said, well, we have to close this.

Q: Who wanted to close it?

HOWARD: USIA.

Q: Back here in Washington?

HOWARD: Yes.

Q: As you looked at it, should it have been closed? It sounds like it should have been the one to be open.

HOWARD: If they weren't going to staff it with a full time American officer I said yes, we should close it because it is not working the way it should. Malawi is not a rational base and Blantyre is no longer a rational base to keep a regional officer. It's nice to have him there, but he neither serves my purposes as a branch public affairs officer nor does he have the access, the hubbing routes. So, you really have to redraw the regional librarian routes and they did that. They canceled that, closed that job. They did not give me an additional American officer and they said close the branch post in Blantyre, which I did. I gave away a library that actually had been equipped from the old Kampala library and all the books in the place were 12 or 13 years old and they said Property of the U.S. Information Service in Kampala, Uganda. We gave them away. The President had formed this funny little private prep school called Kamuzu Academy and his chief consort had seen the Library of Congress once and was so impressed that she had him build a duplicate. We became the major collection of books to open their Kamuzu Academy, the miniature Library of Congress.

It was interesting because I had to then turn around and deal with the proposition that 75% of my working audience was 250 miles away. Three campuses at the university of four. The only one that was in Lilongwe the capital city was the AG School, with whom I did very little business. All of the government owned media were in Blantyre, which was 250 miles away. The cultural and sports community were in Blantyre, so I spent a lot of time on the road. The artistic community was largely in Blantyre. Lilongwe was a kind of a midwestern town, which sort of surprised by the fact that it was the capital, but nobody lived there and all the offices were somewhere else. It had shell buildings, they had a whole government complex, brand new.

Q: What was the government there? Who was the head of it?

HOWARD: His Excellency Hastings Banda was very much in control with a set of close minions around him who governed one factor or sector or another, very much a closed corporation. That's the way it worked. We didn't have very many disputes and indeed it was more keeping the idea alive of democracy and free flow of information than making any material progress.

Q: Were there any restrictions on you?

HOWARD: On how I operated?

Q: On how you operated. I mean if we're promoting democracy in a country that is a one-man country.

HOWARD: You couldn't practice political science, that was wrong. I could not get foreign journalists permission to enter the country unless, as my friend the director of information would say, unless their visits would be determined to be useful. I said you and I read the word useful, I can guarantee you that they would not be useful. I said they will come and see what they see and report as they see it without hindrance. It may or may not be helpful depending on what they see and how they see it. He said, you couldn't assure that they would be helpful? I said, no I certainly can't. Americans who were educated in Pittsburgh. How can you come back and tell me I'm going to guarantee an American journalist is going to do this. So, he would deny them entry. A very much closed thing. They would work around this. For one thing I took the psychology professors out of the Fulbright program at the university and put in history professors and lawyers and so we taught the rule of law. We taught the constitution in history classes. Every month, I had a sequestered editors' luncheon in a Chinese restaurant at a big table in a back room.

I wasn't working against the police; they would have a luncheon there the day before with their equipment in hand. I would check that there was no interference and I would proceed with my lunch. I was able to get the editors, the primary media managers to open up in an open discussion around the table. There were eight of us. They could as they wished invite four other people. I could invite two. I would periodically bring the ambassador or I would bring a program visitor or whatever just to suit my own purposes. The discussion would be wide-ranging. There would be no quotes, no stories and nothing would be attributable. Only one person published anything that made even a passing reference to it and that person was eliminated from the luncheon from then on because that was the only place that they felt confident that they could speak out about conditions and situations without getting their butts nailed.

Q: How did you view these because in one way you're performing a political officer type job, you know, I mean sounding out these.

HOWARD: Well, these were my contacts.

Q: Your contacts, but how did this translate to their operation?

HOWARD: I built a cadre of contacts and friends who would both feed me information and who kept alive the thought that there could be a free flow of information and a free media. I don't think any of them failed to have and know where it was, the copy of the pamphlet that contained the constitution and the declaration of independence. I had seen it in two houses that I had visited. We had distributed them, the USIA pamphlets 5x8. They have the complete text and they have a bit of commentary in the back and it's in English.

Years later, '93, '92 or '93 when we were in Zambia, I went back to Malawi for a visit. I found a moderate number of, there was an explosion of publications: newspapers, magazines, broadsheets, yellow journalism, just an astounding array of unfettered publication with the death of Banda and the advent of an elected government, a democratically elected government. Most of the people running them were people who had been at the round table or were graduates of the round table. They were acolytes who came with some of the senior managers. I had known the last three Malawi ambassadors to Washington in succession because they came from the university.

Q: So, it was a long-term investment.

HOWARD: It is. I had a question in class the other day: what was the major problem that USIA's people encountered coming into State and my answer was that it was two-fold. Part of it was perspective. I found USIA people willing to make 10, 15, 20, 25-year investments without any expectation of an immediate return. I found State people were lucky to do something they couldn't see a return in on 90, 120 or 180 days. So they weren't relatively understanding or accepting of the fact that we were going to spend 10 or 15 grand to send someone to the U.S. today who wouldn't show up in the political spectrum for another 10 years. We were regarded as useless because the minister who sat in his 60s today in office, we wouldn't send him an IV grant because he was too old. They said, but he governs the way we're going to deal with this treaty and I said fine, but we needed to have talked to him 10 or 15 years ago and a lot of the time we did, so the investment has been made and now it is paying off. I said, the investment is his third run assistant because I want to be ready in the next 10 years from now. That was something that wasn't readily understood. It's a timeline, a long-term timeline.

I discovered this in Zambia when we're dealing with the court system. I went in with what would be regarded as some fairly intrusive things. In some cases could get me bounced for interfering in the internal affairs of a foreign government. I was going to invite American lawyers and experts in to discuss overhauling various parts of the court system and the justice system. Instead I found open armed reception from people who knew exactly what I was talking about and even had names of Americans they wanted suggested. I was taken a little bit aback. I went back and checked all of the exchanges records that went back to 1960. I discovered that my predecessors going back to '78 had concentratedly tagged a third of their international visitor grantees and longer term grant programs to the legal fraternity. So, when you go to the supreme court, the high court the management court, people knew what they were talking about. The chief justice had been back on three such programs and knew that he wanted to build a judicial college in the southwest.

Q: You got there in '81. This is the advent of the Reagan administration and Charlie Wick. He's a very interesting character.

HOWARD: He dragged us kicking and screaming into the 20th Century. He made us recognize that live television, international satellite television was a reality. We felt he was obsessed. We felt that he and Snyder, his arch television sidekick, Ken Snyder, was the evil villain from New York media who didn't understand diplomacy. Charlie thought if it could broadcast on world news then it was worth doing, but it wasn't. Whole bunches of things like programs. You

combine Wick's single minded focus on television and the electronic media and the Reagan administration's espousal of the Heritage Foundation philosophies. Basically we got a lot of appointees directly from the Heritage Foundation who influenced the book program, who influenced the English teaching program, who had a great deal of influence on how the exchange program was run. Charlie said if they're our friends we'll send it, if they're not our friends we won't. This applied to Americans going out. It was probably the deepest penetration of political operatives in the agency that it had ever seen. Yet today you go over to building SA-44 and you can almost put your hand on the wall and hear the walls whisper "where is Charlie when we need him?"

Q: Yes because he's got buddies.

HOWARD: He was the last, well, he was a Reagan buddy, that's how he did it. He was the last director of any influence. Generally a very lackluster, quite disappointing series of directors after that.

Q: How did that impact hit you?

HOWARD: Impact of what, Charlie?

Q: Of Charlie. Or were you too far out of the.

HOWARD: It did and it didn't. There was a noticeable shift in priorities. Reinhardt had the most profound management impact on USIA of any director in the modern line, because he basically resolved the question which had riven USIA of who runs the place, the field or Washington. For which there is no question in State, Washington runs it. But USIA, who drives the train was often a big question because the resources were 60% in the field and 40% Washington. Reinhardt said that the field runs it. The field will develop a plan, it will be detailed, it will tell us what the problem is, and tell us what the situation is, what the problem is, what you're going to do about it, what you need to have to get it done. If we accept your plan, you'll get what you need. You won't hear about the stuff you didn't ask for. USIA's domestic components will shake themselves down around the collective demands from the plan. It will all be computerized and digested and if you have a product that no one has asked for you're going to go out of business. Buggy whips are no longer. We will no longer advertise buggy whips because as much intrinsic value as they might have, there is no program, nobody wants them, can't sell it, can't do it.

Charlie reversed this. The Reagan administration had a lot of centrally driven policies and tactics and products they wanted out there. The classic example is let Poland be Poland. We all had to use that. In Malawi, it had absolutely no relevance whatsoever. We also thought that the Reagan policy that Chet Crocker espoused, which was constructive engagement in Southern Africa, was creating such a furor that it was a deadly disaster. The word back from Washington was shut up and sell the product. That's what came on the truck, that's what you move. I must say looking back at it even 15 or 20 years later, let alone 25, he was dead right.

Q: Yes, it worked.

HOWARD: It untied, unraveled all of these little knots around the continent. What have we got, we've got three new democracies and no wars. Governments turned two and three times. We have one disaster in the middle, which is Zimbabwe. You've got one quasi disaster in Angola, but even it is coming around. You've got absolutely an astounding success story in Mozambique from a government standpoint. Zambia has turned twice. It is muddling through in typical African fashion. Malawi has turned twice.

Q: When you say turned you mean?

HOWARD: Rolled over electorally without incident. They've had two successive elections for heads of state. We now have actually new heads of state in most countries, who have gotten there without killing the old chief.

Q: Talking about constructive engagement from the prospective of Malawi when you got there, what was your initial impression? Was this a good thing?

HOWARD: Salable? Constructive engagement? I don't know that I had at that point understood all of its implications. I understood what it was. Basically the Carter administration threw human rights spitballs over the fence at the Afrikaners and Reagan said, well, we're going to stop that, we're going to talk to them. This offended all of the major black African leadership in Southern Africa. They wanted to make sure that we did as much verbal damage to South Africa as possible. Notably Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda. Maseru said zip, Banda said zip because Banda and Maseru, of course, ran an economy which was in the rand monetary area, and it was the only country on the continent that makes a profit and makes a profit with South African banking connections, and makes it on the diamond connections with De Beers. Malawi was the only country in the region that had an embassy in South African. The only black African country with a South African ambassador, a Taiwanese ambassador and an Israeli ambassador. So, he was odd man out all around and basically Banda said I'm a realist. There is no action in Southern Africa without cooperation with the Afrikaners. We reached an accommodation. I don't agree with apartheid and I told them that, they don't agree with the way I run my country, they told me that, but we agreed to disagree, and we agreed that there are areas for cooperation. So, basically, they kept Malawi alive. It also made Banda a pariah in the neighborhood.

Q: Who was your ambassador when you were in Malawi?

HOWARD: At first there was no ambassador for about the better part of seven or eight months and had not been for about a year and a half before that. One of the Horans and I can't remember, I want to think Hal.

Q: Probably Hal, because I don't think Hume was down there.

HOWARD: It wasn't Hume. I think it was Hal and he'd gone. John Burroughs came to be ambassador and he was there for much of the three years of my tour.

Q: How was your relationship with him?

HOWARD: Excellent. He was very laid back. I think I could have kept him more informed. There was nothing that we were doing that was going to produce a major problem. I don't know that I spent a lot of time telling him exactly what we were doing, just that we were running exchange programs and he knew who was going, and I involved him in the receptions and departures. So, he was generally aware of what we were up to, but not minutely on a daily basis.

Q: Did you have any problem with the selection program? Was Banda saying I want my nephew to go and that sort of thing?

HOWARD: No, what they said was, we've observed the system as it functions in Kenya with each foreign country building its own favorite cadre in our government and so you've built factions. We will not have that in Malawi. You will submit blind grant proposals to the government to the office of the presidents in cabinet. We will tell you who will go. We sat with the office of presidents in cabinet. Both John Burroughs and I said sorry that ain't the way it works. We will tell you who will travel. We worked out a system whereby we would submit what were ostensibly blank grants, but came with a suggested name listed formally under separate channel. The understanding was that if you really understand that if you don't want them to travel, they aren't traveling. And you will understand it if we don't want them to travel, they won't travel. Neither of us will explain to the other why and it worked. I would submit the grants to them and then I would go off with John and the secretary and president of the cabinet and we had lunch somewhere and I handed him the nominee list and he handed me his nominee list and we'd go through and square things up.

Q: What was in it for them? The government for an exchange program because you know, as they point out we are inserting a pro-American cadre into the government over a period of time.

HOWARD: We used it in very segmented ways. I used it with the media. This was not a broad-brush program. Today there is more distribution of these grants throughout the embassy than there ever was in any of my posts at the outset. In that case, there was a year in which I used every single one of the IV grants to advance a university linkage agenda. So we sent whole delegations of university officials back here to negotiate linkage agreements with the University of Indiana, Massachusetts and Cornell all on international visitor grants, on country grants. I used more than a whole allocation. The year after that we did some work with the court system, not quite so many people came, about half media and court system. Every once in a while just before a major election, we would send political party people. They were very much for a defined objective program. Usually it was with the connivance of the lower level. We did name the candidates, but we also needed to have people that have some say coming back and I needed John's agreement that these people would be able to come back and get them into their job, and they did. We also used the Fulbright program to build faculty at the university so there was never any disagreement over who we were going to send.

Q: Well, I take it that you had a problem to overcome, i.e., Banda and company. At the same time you were able to get things done.

HOWARD: Eminently sensible folk that worked for him, understood how to get done what they wanted to get done.

Q: I take it you came to have a very positive feeling about the Malawians, the people there as far as working with them.

HOWARD: Oh, I was delighted. I have several good friends that persist to today. I thought that they did an enormous amount with very little. If anybody learned recycling from anybody, it was that I learned recycling from the Malawians. Nothing stayed and I'm pretty good about stripping things of any useful parts before they go out, and they made my trash can look like it was a refuse, an enormous parts camp. I remember inviting two of my own staff over to go through my trash can and tell me what was useful and it just stunned them at how much useful stuff I had actually thrown out and not seen the utility of. Everything, tin cans to metal plates. Basically it improved my recycling. The Malawians had nothing and they made a lot of it. They had a middling classification of tea just enough to get their own tea classification established with the Brits. They have macadamia nuts in sufficient quantities to make a market but not sufficient to control a market or drive it. They produce enough coffee to have achieved a similar grade, but they do not have any threats for the world coffee market. They produce tobacco, which is of a second grade and generally makes its market as the result of the disasters occurring in other countries with primary markets. So, they are fill ins. They are a wrapper. They are a filler tobacco. They are, you name it. They are workarounds. Zimbabwe has primary tobacco, or did. Malawians now picks up the market slack with a slightly, actually it was the Zimbabwe farmers who came up and are now working in Malawi producing the kind of tobacco in Malawi that they used to be able to produce in Zimbabwe. The problem with Malawi is less arable land. It's a far more hilly and mountainous country and the Malawians are ingenious. The Zimbabwean will circumvent a hill or will go around it and the Malawi will farm up and over it and down each side and will adapt the fields in growth rows to match the topography. Malawians are quite proud of who they are and what they have. They have a natural pride to even go to straw huts in the middle of the dirt surround. It is the neatest straw hut and the neatest dirt surrounding you have ever seen, not the trash that prevails in South Africa or that typifies a trip through the countryside in most African countries. It's different. Admittedly, this is different. This is Banda of 25 years ago and our last look at it was 10 years ago in '94, we took a trip back with our kids to show them where I met my wife in Malawi.

Q: What was she doing there?

HOWARD: She was a Peace Corps volunteer. I was convinced that we had problems in the embassy because no one understood what we were doing so I did a series of briefings for everybody including the Peace Corps volunteers and that was the last time I got to do it. She didn't want to look at the incoming Peace Corps class. She said, no, you send the CAO to do that.

Q: When did you leave Malawi?

HOWARD: In '84. I went in March of '81 and we left in August of '84. Three and a half years.

ROBERT J. KOTT

**Deputy Chief of Mission
Lilongwe (1981-1984)**

Mr. Kott was born and raised in New York City. He earned degrees from St. John's University in New York City and from the University of Oregon. After service with the Peace Corps in India, Mr. Kott joined the Foreign Service in 1971. An African specialist, Mr. Kott served in, Togo and Cameroon as Economic and Political Officer and in Malawi and Senegal as Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served in Indonesia and Canada. Mr. Kott was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Okay, so in the summer of 1981 you went to Lilongwe, Malawi as Deputy Chief of Mission?

KOTT: Yes. It was a nice break for me. I was a new O2 officer, what was that – old O5?

Q: O4.

KOTT: O4. Thirty-five, thirty-six years old and was fortunate enough to be selected by the Ambassador designate and the Department, I think in combination, to be his deputy. And I looked forward to that challenge, it was something that I wanted after having served two postings in Africa already and being very much in the mid-mid level. This was a relatively small post, it would be a management challenge. I looked forward to it. It proved to be one of my favorite assignments actually.

Q: Who was the Ambassador, and why don't you talk just little bit more about the composition of the mission, before we talk more about Malawi?

KOTT: Sure. Ambassador designate, John Burroughs, not a career Foreign Service Officer, but a career civil servant, having been largely a personnel list in the United States Navy as a civilian, and then over at the State Department where, it may have been his one and only post at State, was as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Equal Employment Opportunity, EEO. From there he was selected and appointed as Ambassador and confirmed to Lilongwe. John Burroughs is a truly fine gentleman, African American, he arrived at post perhaps two or three weeks before I got there on a direct transfer from Yaoundé and we served effectively three years together because he left the post about a month before I did, three years subsequent. The mission consisted of I believe seven U.S. Government agencies, surprisingly for a small, little outpost like Malawi. About 28 direct-hire Americans, as I recall, and I can't recall the number of national employees.

Lilongwe is a relatively new city carved out of nothing. Africa's Canberra, or Brasilia if you will, on a much smaller scale of course, the capital having been moved from the old British capital of Zomba, not Blantyre, which most people think is the capital of Malawi. Blantyre is the largest city such as it is and is the commercial center. But technically Zomba is the capital and, when I was there, the Parliament still met at Zomba. The President had a residence in Zomba, but of course the President had residences all over the country, including one that was being build, a rather ornate palace, in Lilongwe, but he chose to live in Blantyre most of the year. That's where

Hastings Kamuzu Banda did live even though as I said the Parliament met in Zomba. The administrative and political capital was transferred to Lilongwe and the diplomatic capital as well was Lilongwe.

Q: And the name before it became Malawi?

KOTT: Nyasaland. Under the British. The British influenced it very strongly, just as the French influence is generally considered strong in much of West Africa and Francophone part of the world, similarly the British influence is strong in places like Malawi. But, even during my time there, from '81 – '84, a declining influence, not as all pervasive influence, as the French influence was in a place like Cameroon. The French didn't want to let go. I think the British saw the handwriting on the wall and the sun was setting.

Q: Were there still substantial number of British nationals in the country?

KOTT: Yes, a reasonable number, but at the sufferance of the Malawian government. Malawian government hired a lot of British ex-pats on contract to serve in all kinds of positions in the government, let alone in the private center, we are just talking about the government for a minute. I recall dealing on a diplomatic basis with one very high-ranking official of the Malawian government, who in fact was a white Brit. I would say he was in a very top tier, he was probably sort of a Deputy Secretary level, in the President's Office, the Office that supported the President. And so it went, down through the government. There was even what they called a Permanent Secretary, which would be like a Deputy Minister, who was British and was there for many years in the Ministry of Works, Public Works. I still remember his name, Roger King. Good friends of ours. And so it went throughout the government, it was pervasive. Hastings Banda was not anti-British, he was anti-colonial. He welcomed the British presence, and as long as he needed those people to perform various aspects of state-craft and governance, he hired them. In the commercial field such as it was, the British predominated. But Malawi is a very small and insignificant country and economy of course.

Q: Are there any farms, British-owned property, land?

KOTT: Absolutely. The major agricultural produce at least from an export point of view in Malawi was of course tobacco. Malawi is a producer of various sorts of tobacco, largely Virginia leaf type tobacco and in fact is one of only three countries that uses the American auction system, if you remember the old Lucky Strike commercial, when you were young fellow, on television. Zimbabwe being the other one and the U.S., of course. Large producer of very good, fine quality tobacco, of course now it's a no-no today, but anyway. Some of the farms were British owned. Now I think, Malawinisation, call it what you will, they had to sell off certain parcels of land to the President and his people, but basically within the realm of the realistic there were many firms that were still owned and operated by English ex-pats. And some Zimbabweans.

Q: And of course, Malawi is a part of the Commonwealth, and so the British High Commissioner and other High Commissioners were presumably present in the country?

KOTT: That's right. Although it was a very small diplomatic corps where I was there, there were only about 12 Embassies.

Q: Resident.

KOTT: That's right. I think there were only two other African embassies, one being their neighbor Zambia, a very important representation for the Malawians of course, since they were once both part of the Federation of what effectively was the old Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Northern Rhodesia would become Zambia, Southern Rhodesia would become Zimbabwe and Nyasaland becoming Malawi. Hastings Banda used to call it the Stupid Federation. He hated Stupid Federation, which is probably how he got his start in politics, by advocating the dissolution of the Federation and the creation of three independent countries, which eventually came to pass.

Q: We'll have you talk some more about your relationship with Hastings and some other of these people, but maybe let me back up just a second. This is the beginning of Reagan administration. Ambassador Burroughs was a nominee of President Reagan. You want to say just a few words about, in terms of U.S. policy toward Malawi, toward southern Africa? Is this an area of much interest in terms of the State Department, or what were the main objectives, goals of the mission at that time?

KOTT: Chet Crockett became the Assistant Secretary for African affairs in the Reagan administration and he announced very clearly and pursued very vigorously three basic objectives as I recall. One was helping to end apartheid in South Africa. Second was getting the Russian and Cubans out of Angola, and third was helping to bring peace and end to the civil war in Mozambique. That's what the focus of Chet's incumbency was. Many people in the African Bureau at the time would say that the rest of Africa was up for grabs, and the Deputy Secretaries basically ran the policies in the various other geographic quarters of Africa, having divided it up amongst themselves. And Chet focused almost uniquely on southern Africa. Now, there was something called the Contact Group, as you may recall. Grouping of nations, certainly the Brits and ourselves and others that worked on virtually all of these issues.

Q: Portugal I think was...

KOTT: Yes, I think Portugal, I don't know if the Russians were, I can't remember, but it was a very vigorous and diplomatic grouping that met regularly in various places, in various capitals, in New York, what have you, to work on these problems. The Malawians were not part of that. And were really on the fringes of what was going in the southern Africa with the exception of perhaps Mozambique. Again, Mozambique being one of their neighbors, the civil war certainly had an impact on Malawi in as much as many refugees came across the borders which, Hastings Banda basically turned the blind eye to and allowed the insurgent forces, the Manamo forces to come across, not to establish military training camps but sort of to take safe haven when being pursued, to allow them to bring across their wounded, to patch them up in local hospitals and clinics, that sort of thing. Whether or not he was giving over the to the rebels is tremendously open question and one that we were very much engaged in monitoring.

The politics of Malawi is something that I ought to address a little bit. You can almost sum it up by saying that the 12 embassies that were represented in Malawi, none of them were communist. No communists were allowed into Malawi. So there was no Russian Embassy, there was no PRC Embassy, but there were the following three embassies: a Taiwanese Embassy, an Israeli Embassy and a South African Embassy, an apartheid South African Embassy. So of 12 embassies, three so called “renegade” counties of the day in many people’s views were represented in Malawi. It was the only black African country to have a South African flag flying over a diplomatic mission. I did see a South African flag flying in Lusaka, capital of Zambia. The South Africans had a trade office there. Now, whether they conducted other affairs, out of the trade office, presumably they did. But nominally it was a trade office. But Lilongwe had the only South African Embassy with an accredited ambassador and full staff, and it was one of the very few countries, I can’t say the only country in black Africa, because I think, perhaps, and the memory serves me poorly but I think maybe Gabon or the Ivory Coast under Houphouet may have had an Israeli embassy at the time I just don’t recall. But certainly no more than two or three African countries had an Israeli Ambassador resident, and Malawi did. Again, Taiwan was not exactly, didn’t enjoy a very wide representation in Africa in those days. Most African countries were in those days enamored with the PRC model of development. And PRC held sway. So, Taiwan, again very rare representation in Africa, in those days. It’s changed of course now.

Q: Did your Embassy have pretty extensive contact with those Embassies?

KOTT: Absolutely. We had contacts with virtually all of the Embassies, all 12, but some more than the others. The British. The French, they weren’t terribly important players. Germans were important because they provided a lot of aid. I think they provided the most amount of aid per capita of any country that was represented. The Zambians were important for obvious reasons, being neighbors. The Mozambicans established I think the week I left so I really can’t address that from a diplomatic perspective because they weren’t there when I was there. The South Africans were the great friends of the Malawians. When Malawi, prior to my arrival, had a drought and one of the rare years when it could not feed itself, that is something that Banda took pride in, that they were self sufficient in maize to make mealie meal, the basic food substance that people eat. The South Africans flew in corn, just as they flew in petrol. Malawi didn’t need a lot of petrol, oil products, but they actually flew it in by plane. Great friends of Malawians.

Q: I assume there was no presence of the ANC (African National Congress) from South Africa, as there was in some other eastern African countries?

KOTT: No, I don’t think that Banda would have tolerated any overt presence by the ANC. Certainly there was no official representation, absolutely none. Banda was something of an outcast. He did not go to the OAU meetings. He would send a representative to go. I remember briefing his representatives before the OAU meetings to bring them up to snuff on what the issues were going to be. But, Banda kept to himself and his politics were clearly out of line and out of sync with African politics of the day.

Q: Before we go further, let me ask if Angola or any of the parties to the civil war in Angola were present in Malawi?

KOTT: No. We were not a player. It was a pretty quiet assignment, other than the Mozambique watch. And that was a passive watch. We would just report on any incursions into Malawi, refugees' flows, that sort of thing. Most of our reporting was really domestic. Such as it was. Not terribly important, I don't think that it kept Washington's attention, but it was lot of fun being there.

Q: Was Ambassador Burroughs there most of the time over the three years, were you Chargé quite a bit of the time, to what extent did you have contact yourself with President Hastings Banda, and why don't you talk a little bit more about him as well?

KOTT: Okay. Well, John Burroughs was very much in residence for most of the three years, except when he went on leave, so, no, I didn't act as Chargé for more than two months at any one stretch. It was not a long term Chargé thing, no. But it was fun doing it. Except I remember once when I was Chargé, I was also PAO (Public Affairs Officer), I was Vice Consul, a political officer, which I was normally in any case because we didn't have a political officer, anything except the AID officer. That's what you get a small post, even though it was 28 Americans, sometimes it all devolves to one or two people. John was, as I said, a non-career Foreign Service Ambassador. One who, I thought, was rather wise. He understood that he was neither a Foreign Service Officer nor the Africanist at post, so he looked for counsel and advice from others, including me. We had a very good, close relationship. I fairly enjoyed my professional and social relationship with John Burroughs and his charming wife Audrey Burroughs. John I think after the three years went, well he went back to Washington for a while but then he became the US Consul General in Cape Town. A rather interesting assignment as a black man, with African-American spouse. And ultimately went on to his last post, I believe was in Kampala, Uganda, as Ambassador. So he had an interesting if not brief career with the State Department. Politics of Malawi?

Q: Yes, and to what extent did you meet with Banda and talk little bit more about him?

KOTT: Well I didn't, the Ambassador did, but not all that frequently. Again, Banda was physically separated, having lived in those days in Blantyre where we had a small branch office. A rather unique arrangement. It was not a Consulate, it was called just the Embassy Branch Office in Blantyre and it was staffed by one Foreign Service Officer and one support staff and they issued visas and reported generally on economic and commercial developments and any kinds of consular matters to the Embassy. We were on a rotating basis to go down and visit with them. I would do it in context of my overall supervisory duties as Deputy Chief of Mission. I would do some commercial work while I was there, little political work, whatever. Every few weeks, once twice a month, once every other month sometimes, whatever. We didn't really see the President. The President really didn't interact with the diplomatic corps as a matter of course. He received credentials and would receive a demarche under extreme circumstances. He had an office in Lilongwe which was called The Office of the President and a Cabinet, staffed by his most senior civil servant and that was effectively the most senior level we dealt with. The Foreign Minister was the President, the Minister of Agriculture was the President, the Minister of Defense was the President, and he was also the Minister of the Public Works I believe. So, he held four portfolios at that time.

Q: Now he was not elected – or was he?

KOTT: Hastings Banda was President for Life. He went by the sobriquet of “HE”, “HE” standing for “His Excellency”. But when a Malawian addressed the President or the fact of the President in public, a Malawian had to say the following, when addressing the President: “His Excellency, the Life President, Ngwazi Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda”. And they had to say it all, just like that, so any time you were making a speech and referring to the president you had to say it, “His Excellency, the Life President, Ngwazi Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda,” quite a mouthful. He was an autocrat. Some would say a benevolent dictator. More or less. Unless you head went above the political waterline, in which case it might get lopped off, as it did with a couple of ministers while we were there. But generally, it was not a totalitarian type arrangement. It was an autocratic arrangement, for sure, it was a dictatorship but generally a benevolent one.

People were free to pursue daily life in relatively normal circumstances. You could get a shop, you could worship, he was very proud of that, you could worship in whatever faith you believed. There was not freedom of the press, certainly. The press was heavily censored. As was the radio. I think there was no television. But Banda was on all fashioned man. He used to like to preach the virtues of living Latin and Greek. And indeed he himself spoke Latin, if not Greek. He established Kamuzu Academy, a boarding school in the middle of nowhere, which was modeled on the Etonian model and very select students that were attending this school, which was built and opened while we were there by the way, had to wear blazers and bowlers and ties, as if they were little Etonians. And the students there learned Latin and the classics and Greek.

I remember Chet Crocker, who had persuaded him to make a stop off, this was a lot of doing, to make a very short stop in Malawi, just to acknowledge Banda, to acknowledge our friendly relations. I mean, our relations with Malawi weren't all that important, but at least to acknowledge that we had very good relations with Malawi. Crocker was flying, as I recall from Tanzania, which was one of the members of the Contact Group down to somewhere in southern Africa, either Zimbabwe, Lusaka, or to South Africa itself. And he was in a private chartered plane. So we got him to stop off. The President was in residence in Kasungu. So, the Ambassador and I drove out there and Chet landed there on this dirt strip and the Ambassador and Chet went off with Chet's aid, Peter Eicher, went off to meet him, and I didn't. Peter Eicher wrote up a telegram to Washington which at least started out rather humorously because it talked about how when Chet walked into the meeting, Banda started speaking in Latin to Chet, and Chet responded in Latin and they went on for about 15 minutes much to the dismay of John Burroughs and to Peter Eicher, because I don't know what he made out of it all, but he wrote a rather humorous telegram beginning something like “Tea with Kamuzu at Kasungu”. That I think was the title of the telegram.

Q: How old was Hastings Banda at the time?

KOTT: No one really knows for sure. We estimated I think in the mid '80s that he would have been in his late 80s. Or mid '80s. Mid '80s to late '80s. There was a biography, it was unavailable in Malawi, it was banned in essence. I think it was by Phillip Johnson, British. I read the book, it was a very interesting book. He claimed that Banda was born I think in 1898, 1899.

No one really knows for sure. No one kept records in those days. Banda was born in the central part of Malawi, I think probably around Kasungu, I think that's his home town. Legend has it that he walked to South Africa where he got himself an education and eventually made his way to the U.S. where he went to Meharry Medical College and became a medical doctor. Went back, not to Malawi which was Nyasaland then of course, but went to Scotland to further his medical studies and then opened a practice in London where he was for many, many years and where he started getting involved in the independence movement by funding the nationalists who were in country. Banda never having stepped foot in country since the day he left as a young man for South Africa. So he was probably out of the country... let's say he left when he was 16 or 18 years old, let's say that was in 1916 and came back in what 1957, '56, '58, '59, or something like that, just before independence, became the first Prime Minister then a President and then had himself declared Life President of Malawi. So there was no election, that was a long way of telling you there were no elections in Malawi. For president. There were allegedly parliamentary elections, but in my day there was only one party, that was the Malawi Congress Party.

Q: At what extent were opposition figures or people speaking out for change or human rights...?

KOTT: They were all in exile. Banda had exiled a number of them. Some of them were imprisoned, some of them perished at the hands of Banda. One of the most prominent dissidents, so labeled by the Malawi government, was a former minister, back from the early days of independence, in the '60s I think Malawi got independence on July 5th or 6th 1964. This fellow's name was Orton Chirwa, and he was, as I said, a minister in the government, spoke up against some of Banda's policy when I guess Banda was Prime Minister of the day, and in essence I guess had to flee or was banned. Left the country, lived I understand in Tanzania for a while and eventually in Zambia. How active he was as a dissident, I am not sure, but we would hear occasionally of tracks coming into the country, dissident tracks, denouncing Banda and his one party rule, etc, etc. Well, low and behold, during our watch one Christmas season it was announced that Orton Chirwa had been captured. Apparently he had been lured back into the country under some kind of a promise or scam or whatever, foolishly from his perspective obviously, was apprehended and imprisoned. And over the period of next year, year and a half a case was made against him as a traitor and he was tried not in a modern day civil court but in a tribal traditional court. This went on, and the appeal process went on and in essence it all ended up that Orton Chirwa was sentenced to death with his wife.

As it were, Orton Chirwa had a daughter living in Washington, D.C. and she or some of her friends or cronies or whatever, managed to get their story to the Washington Post. And so the Chirwa story became a minor cause célèbre and for a while front page news, or at least for section news in Washington Post and it caught the attention needless to say of Uncle Sam, particularly the State Department and we all of the sudden started getting inundated with cables asking us to make demarches, coming from Washington of course. Saying that justice had to be done, human rights, etc, etc, fair trials and ultimately that Orton Chirwa should be spared and not hung as he was condemned under the verdict of the court, the tribal court. This played out over the period of time, and it played out actually right up until the end of John Burroughs and my tenure. We made a number of demarches to the Foreign Ministry and other parts of the government, principally the Office of the President and the Cabinet. John Burroughs left for a change of stations, departed post, I became Chargé for my last month there, and I figured, "Well,

what the heck, let's have some fun with this. What can they do? Throw me out of the country?" I was going to leave in a month's time anyway. All that would result is that I'd miss my farewell party and the 4th of July reception.

So I went in, as I suspect with some prodding from Washington but perhaps I carried it a little bit further and I went in to see, in fact, the chief civil servant, the Secretary to the President and the Cabinet of the day and I made a demarche, again based on Washington's destructions but stronger than Washington would have it delivered. And I remember saying to my interlocutor that of course we weren't trying to interfere in Malawian affairs, that we respect the right of the government to conduct its business at it saw fit. However, as they knew, there was tremendous concern on the part of the western nations, the Germans, the French, perhaps a bit less, the British, very strongly, and ourselves, and we did by the way, the diplomatic representatives did act in concert on this, but I think I was probably out front and I said quite frankly that they could do what they wanted but if Orton Chirwa got hung, that I could assure him that we, the U.S., would cut all aid immediately to Malawi. And that I could assure him that we would press that case on our allies. And that was significant. Because the Malawian government depended on foreign aid for its existence, quite frankly. It was a very poor country. And as I told you earlier, the Germans were the largest single contributor, and they were in our court on this as well. So it became something of a minor, a little cause célèbre in our little world of diplomacy out there.

But the fact was that about two weeks later I was summoned over to see the Secretary to the President and the Cabinet. And he said, "I want to tell you something. His Excellency, the Life President Ngwazi Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, has decided to spare the life of Orton Chirwa and Mrs. Chirwa." And he wanted to tell me that in advance, because I had come in and made this demarche several weeks ago and that he was going to collect the balance of the diplomatic corps the following day to tell them the same thing. But he wanted me to know in advance. I thought that this was a minor coup that I was able to report back to Washington. I am not sure that did Orton Chirwa an awful lot of good because being condemned to a life in prison in a Malawian jail is probably a fate worse than death actually. But in fact he did spare his life and that of his wife actually and I understand he died several years ago, of natural cause, but in prison.

Q: I assume that the State Department, and his daughter was pleased?

KOTT: I didn't get any reaction, I got on a plane and went on home leave.

Q: It was right at the end?

KOTT: Yes, literally, I left probably two weeks later, or a week later.

Q: You mentioned your threat was that we would have to cut off aid. Were we giving a substantial amount of aid? I don't think you talked about that.

KOTT: I think it was something in the order of, at the high point, maybe 25 million dollars, roughly, give or take a couple of million which was in those days, given the size of the country and its relative unimportance for the U.S. if you will, I think John Burroughs and I got, if you want to call this a triumph, I think we were able to effectively double the amount of aid that

flowed to Malawi, at least on paper, during the three years that we were there. I think when we first came it was more in the magnitude of 12 million dollars, and we left with magnitude of 25 millions dollars. On the per capita basis that was not an awful lot, there were six million Malawians in those days. And it was used for good purposes. Supporting the agricultural sector, for example.

Q: Was your main argument that it would be well used, that it was needed or was it...?

KOTT: Absolutely well used. Almost a virtual absence of corruption in government. Very unique in Africa. Again, Banda being not only an autocrat but a self proclaimed pious man who was an elder in the Church of Scotland, and was very proud of it. And the Church of Scotland of course was the church that Livingston and the others belonged to, who were in essence the white founders, if I can use that term, of contemporary or at least colonial Malawi, Nyasaland. And Banda having lived in Scotland and then in England, was very British. He was very pro-UK.

Q: Could you also argue that although Malawi was perhaps small in population and small land area, it was in kind of a strategic central position or you didn't really...?

KOTT: I don't think so. That would be a stretch. We said that Malawi was a country that would offer us and our allies support. Their voting record in the United Nations, and I remember there was a yearly State Department report on voting records, the Cold War voting records of our friends and not such good friends. Malawi always ranked very high. It was 90% of the time with us. He was very proud of that. That counted in those days, and that counted on the aid score and tally sheets as well. So in that sense strategic, not in a geopolitical sense. But certainly on a diplomatic sense. They were good friends. I mean the fact that they would host the Israelis, the white South African government of the day, the Taiwanese, these were our friends in those days. And still are in some cases.

Q: And you certainly, apparently, couldn't really argue that if we were not to give more aid that they would receive assistance from the Soviets or the Chinese?

KOTT: No. It was more quid pro quo. It was reward time. And it wasn't an awful lot of money in the scope of things. We would make the case every year to make sure that the level stayed up, if not to increase it. Washington understood that, number one: Malawi was a friend, and that it was deserving of serious consideration politically. Again, the voting record in the UN, the fact that it supported these "rogue states" that we were friends with, etc, etc. "Rogue states" as defined in Africa of course, in African terms. And that it utilized aid effectively. As I said there was a virtual absence of corruption in Malawi, largely due to personality and the autocratic style as well of Hastings Banda. Ministers were basically honest government civil servants. They didn't dare go on the take because they knew they'd get thrown in prison. And the way they were treated by the government, by Hastings Banda was absolutely cavalier. Chickens today, feathers tomorrow. If Banda, for whatever whimsical reason, wanted to get rid of one of his ministers, he simply dismissed him. Sent the moving truck to the ministers government provided house, took away the keys to the cars, the Mercedes, packed up his effects in the moving truck, put the kids in the front seat and sent the guy back to the village. And that was it. Here today, gone tomorrow. Ministers only earned a salary of something like eight or nine thousand dollars a year. But they

would give them perks like a Mercedes and a house. Banda expected everybody in the country to own a plot of land, to grow their own food, to be self sufficient in food and that obtained to ministers. Ministers would leave the capital on the weekends, go back to their villages, do a little politicking I suppose, and also work in their fields, allegedly. But, for the most part, there was no corruption and the aid money was not going into live pockets.

Q: Germany was also a substantial donor for Malawi. Who else was and were the multilateral agencies active, the World Bank?

KOTT: Yes, they were, and they lent to Malawi mostly for infrastructure project. I think the German aid was mostly for infrastructure projects, like roads. And they needed them. There is nothing wrong with that. Ours was I think, we were back in the time of basic human needs, or just coming out of that, Jimmy Carter basic human needs, the AID focus was still probably finding its way around a little bit. I think ours was more I rural production, agriculture, health, maternal shelter, health, family planning, that sort of thing. Not on infrastructure for the most part. Germans, World Bank, ourselves, South Africans.

Q: Japan?

KOTT: Japan, I can't remember the figure but I suspect it was. I'll tell you something that really is anomalous. Japan had more volunteers from the Japanese volunteer agency, equivalent of our Peace Corps, in Malawi than they had in any other country in Africa. Even though they didn't have a diplomatic representation on the ground. They had over a hundred volunteers. We had I think approximately 70 or 80 on average, Peace Corps volunteers in the country. But Japan had more. Other countries had volunteers as well, but on much less of scale.

Q: Did we have a Self Help Program?

KOTT: Yes, we did. I think a rather effective one. Also one of the highest amounts being dolled out by Washington to an African country. About a 100,000 dollars. Which is peanuts, but it's effective. We didn't need it as much in Malawi as we needed it perhaps in some other places, in terms of whatever little political influence we got out of it. But certainly the Malawian people did. Schools. Small scale agriculture projects, culverts and that sort of thing. Five thousand dollars per project on average.

Q: How big a town, city was Lilongwe?

KOTT: Not very big. As I said, it was a new city. The population of Malawi in those say was six million, it has probably doubled since. Blantyre, the largest city, probably no more than a quarter of a million, probably at most, and Lilongwe, I suspect didn't have more than a hundred thousand. I am guessing, but, it wasn't a very big city. Downtown was two blocks long.

Q: You mentioned the Embassy Branch Office in Blantyre, headed by a Foreign Service Officer. But you would go there pretty often.

KOTT: Yes, and other officers in the Embassy, I would encourage them to get down there, the Economic Officer, to look at the commercial scene.

Q: There was an Economic Officer as such, but you acted as Political Officer?

KOTT: Yes, right. I did the political portfolio except when the Ambassador got involved, which, he pretty much was hands-off. He did more of the representational sort of thing. I did the political, we had an Economic/Commercial Officer, who also did the consular, sort of what I did in Togo. And we had an Administrative Officer. And interestingly, the Administrative Officer, who I helped bring to post, from Cameroon where I worked with him, he was one of the GSOs, not the principal GSO in Yaoundé when I was there at my previous post, Roger Meece, came out to Malawi because I helped persuade him and the Department to have him sent there. He was our Administrative Officer, and he was a very fine Administrative Officer. Roger now, just recently went back to Malawi as His Excellency, the U.S. Ambassador to Malawi. I was delighted to learn that, we had a dinner for Roger the night before he left. I was unable to make his swearing in because I was traveling myself, but it came full circle.

Q: Well, I've heard he's very capable. I don't know him myself, but I hadn't realized that he had served in country before, and that going back now to Malawi, that obviously is a posting that makes a lot of sense.

KOTT: We had a PAO. We had about four or five person AID shop. We had a Defense Attaché, interestingly, who was very active. Totally unfortunate that the Defense Attaché who was at post for at least two out of the three years that I was in Malawi, Lieutenant Colonel Ken Crabtree, subsequently died in a tragic terrorist act in Namibia, along with Dennis Keogh, Foreign Service Officer. Dennis was the head of the U.S. Liaison Office in Namibia and Ken who had transferred back to Fort Bragg, he was a Special Forces Officer, a very fine officer, loved Africa; the Liaison Offices needed a TDY Military Officer. Ken stuck up his hand in true Ken spirit, and went out there and he and Dennis were doing a tour of the country. This is in the pre-independence days of course when the SWAPO (South West African People's Organization) Forces and others were contending for the power and independence for what ultimately became Namibia, from Southwest Africa. They stopped at a gasoline station to fill up and a limpet mine blew them to bits. We were of course all devastated by loss of both of those fine gentlemen.

Q: Why don't you talk a little bit more about what the Defense Attaché in Lilongwe would do and was he accredited to other countries in the region or just Malawi? Was he primarily reporting on the Malawi military?

KOTT: Yes, he was working with the Malawi military. Seems like he spent most of his time... Ken more so than his successor was a very hands-on kind of guy. He jumped out of planes with the Malawians, he was a very well accepted and integrated into the Malawian military structure. The Malawians had a first rate, small, but well disciplined army. Very starched-shirt, British-khaki kind of army. Great parade formations, snappy salutes, tough Gurkha kind of mentality, wore kind of Gurkha outfit, khaki shorts, starched shirts and Gurkha hats, with the feathers and all that sort of thing. Not terribly well-equipped but well-led. Sandhurst trained officers. Needless to say, they didn't have much of a navy, Malawi being land-locked. They did have a

lake, Lake Malawi, which ran in essence the length of the country, so they had a few patrol boats. No air force. So it was really a land army that was not politicized. Truly not politicized, so therefore it did not do police functions. There was a very effective police force in Malawi, which was part of the armed services as I recall, but separate from the Army. The Army was very professionally led and well trained and was basically a land defense force to fight potential invaders if you will. Happily they didn't see a lot of action. I know when the Falklands war broke out, during our stay in Malawi, word was that Hastings Banda was petitioning the Queen to let him send off his Gurkha troops to help his friends the British against the Argentines. You know, no Third World solidarity there at all, I don't want if you can call Argentina a Third World country, but you know what I mean. The Malawians were certainly the minority, a typical Malawian fashion in Africa. Rooting for the British to win this conflict.

The Defense Attaché, he was mostly concerned with the land forces there. I can't recall if he was accredited elsewhere. I know he took a trip over to Mozambique once or twice, but that may have been on a discrete order from Washington. I am not sure he was accredited there. Clearly he was tracking from afar, as we all were, developments in the Mozambican civil war, but we didn't really go into Mozambique as a matter of course.

Q: Was the Malawi Army at that time used at all abroad in UN peace-keeping functions, or anything like that that you remember?

KOTT: I don't think so. And that was probably reflective of the sort of outcast status that Banda "enjoyed" as an African statesman. He really was not... he was iconoclastic, he was not accepted if you will, he was barely tolerated. Because if his conservative, very pro-Western views.

Q: You mentioned that he would send a delegate or a representative to the OAU. Was Malawi a member of, for example, the non-aligned movement, do you remember?

KOTT: Yes I think it was and it probably still is, and is a member of the OAU but only nominally. They really kept to themselves pretty much.

Q: Can we talk just a bit more about relations with neighbors, I don't think we talked much about Zambia?

KOTT: Well, it was a touchy relationship. Probably the most important in many ways because of familial ties, people in at least the western part of Malawi and the eastern part of Zambia are one and the same tribal groupings, so there was a lot of cross-border movements. Malawians of course wanted to defend against smuggling, and the Zambians, I suspect, were in favor of some smuggling because their economy was rather in tatters, even relative to the Malawian economy. Relations were up and down. Kenneth Kaunda of course was front line, very much front line, a moderate leader, one who, I think, the U.S. basically got along with pretty well, but was certainly more contemporary in his thinking in terms of being a more typical African statesman at the time. More vociferously anti-colonial, more vociferously neutralist, if you will, in great Cold War that was playing itself out in Africa. Banda was not that way at all. He was very much in the pocket of the West, if you will. He was an iconoclast, he fought for himself and made his own decisions.

The Zambian Embassy I think was the only black African country to be represented on the ground in Malawi, interestingly. The rest were all from much further afield.

Q: Zimbabwe was not there?

KOTT: No. Zimbabwe had just become independent in 1979 or '80, and I'd gotten there in '81, they had not opened an Embassy yet.

Q: And they are not an immediate neighbor of...?

KOTT: Not contiguous, no. You have to go through Zambia to get there.

Q: Okay. How about Tanzania? What sort of relations where there?

KOTT: Dicey at worst. Cordial but not warm at best. Again, Tanzania having harbored, as did Zambia of course, and this was one of the reasons for the nature of the relationship, Malawian dissidents, so called dissidents, opposition figures, what have you. That was probably the sum of the relationship.

Q: The border between Malawi and Tanzania is partially across the lake?

KOTT: Yes, a little bit across the lake and just a very small border.

Q: And a long way from Dar es Salaam and more populated parts of Tanzania.

KOTT: Indeed. And the north of Malawi more underdeveloped than the center and the south. The south being the traditional area of colonial influence and economic activity than the center. And Malawi was divided up into three provinces if you will, the center being the second most important and the north being the least most important in terms of political influence and economic activity and probably the least developed. I only went up to the north once or twice. Very beautiful, by the way, forested areas.

Q: To what extent was there a community of..., effort or occasional meetings of the embassies of the region? Did you get together with the other embassies in Lusaka and...?

KOTT: You mean American Embassies?

Q: American Embassies.

KOTT: I don't recall that we did. I think we proposed something once to Washington and it sort of got nixed. I think it was an effort to get Malawi more involved in the Contact Group and I think Washington decided they really didn't need Malawi or want Malawi so it was nixed. No, I don't remember Burroughs going off, I certainly didn't to any regional meetings with Ambassadors.

Q: But Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker did come once for a brief visit?

KOTT: Just a few hours, sort of a pro forma, stop. We didn't get paid any attention.

Q: You didn't get any CODELs (Congressional Delegations)?

KOTT: No. I don't think there was.

Q: The Vice-President didn't come?

KOTT: Certainly not. No Cabinet ministers that I can recall. Maybe one CODEL, I don't even think that we had one CODEL. It was just off the map. In some ways very pleasant.

Q: I have to ask you sort of one question for my own limited... never having been to Malawi and not knowing much about Hastings Banda. But it seems to me that in my time in Ghana I learned that at one point, way in the past, Banda had come and worked in Ghana as a medical doctor for a short period of time. I don't know if that would have been when he was living in the UK or on his way back, before independence?

KOTT: I think it was on his way back. I think it was when he left London, he did go to Ghana for a short period of time.

Q: And I think he was in Kumasi, I believe.

KOTT: That maybe right. That's right, I forgot about that. But it was in the biography, this Phillips short biography. It was a very fascinating life story. The guy just died very recently, a few years ago, probably, I'm going to guess, about 99 years old. He was effectively ultimately removed from power in the early '90s I believe. Democratization, the human rights wave, everything else caught up with him. He outlived his usefulness. And Malawians, they really needed a breath of political fresh air. I wasn't around, of course, in Malawi at the time, but he was forced out of power and there were democratic elections held, and a man who, I knew briefly, who had once been the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress Party, the then one and only party, Bakili Muluzi, who my predecessor Bob Maxim used to deal with quite often, again as head of the Malawi Congress Party and I think Muluzi bought Bob Maxim's car when Bob left, he was very proud of it, it was a big American long Oldsmobile or Pontiac or something, looked like a real boat. I went over and paid an introductory courtesy call on Muluzi, who was a lovely gentleman. But shortly thereafter, he was one of those ministers, and he did have that title, who was removed from power because he ran afoul of the old man.

Q: Did he leave the country?

KOTT: He didn't leave the country but he was exiled to his village and so he became a non-person. When minister was out of favor, left office, I told you the sequence of events before he became a political non-person. But he was elected ultimately president, the first democratically president of Malawi in the '90s and is still the president of Malawi.

Q: In the period that you were there from '81-'84 did you feel that there was sort of an atmosphere of intimidation, of fear?

KOTT: Much less so than what history tells us prevailed in the '60s and '70s when the young pioneers held sway. These were the group of brown-shirted youth that used to go around doing the bidding of Hastings Banda and the Malawi Congress Party. And they were thugs. I've read some of the history books and some of the novels even about the bad old days. Certainly it was much better when we were there. For whatever reasons, I don't know what caused this relaxation, whether it was a combination of economics or political or diplomatic pressures brought on from the outside, or maybe just Hastings Banda aging, mellowing in his old age, whatever. No I didn't feel as though there was really pressure. As I said, if you were politically active, and if you were perceived in any manner to be running afoul of the president's dictate, you were in danger. And in fact, as I alluded to earlier, two senior ministers of government, who were both done away with, who were on our watch in Malawi. I remember one night they were both sitting at my dining table. At either side of me. We had a USIS visiting guest speaker and I was the host for an evening at my house with the speaker and both Minister Matenje, who I believe was the Education Minister, but a very senior political figure in Malawi and the Minister, each of these three regions of the country had a minister, the Minister for the central region's name was Aaron Gadama. I invited them both and they both came to this "stag event" and sat on either side of me. Both rather hefty fellows. I sort of squeezed in between them as they were enjoying their dinner, shall I say, over this talk being given by our professor. A few months later they were both gone. They met with the tragic "road accident." This was the cause célèbre of the diplomatic community and of course of the country. Even Washington paid a little bit of attention to it, as to what happened to these guys. They were allegedly shot. Why? I still to this day don't know. I can surmise that they were either plotting against or either discussing changes at the very least and Banda's secret police found out about it, reported to the President and/or others around the president, and they were done away with.

Q: Was it your impression from the dinner or any other sort of occasion that they were particularly outspoken?

KOTT: No, absolutely not. They were very deferential. We were all taken by surprise. And I will say, I lost a few nights sleep over that, because we felt fairly close to them. We knew them fairly well. We were certainly not in league with whatever they may have been doing, but that showed the sort of ruthlessness of the leadership of the day.

Q: You mentioned toward the end of your time when you were Chargé and intervened on behalf of Chirwa, to spare his life, the dissident who had come back into the country, did you have instructions or did you raise this issue, more in the sense of trying to understand what happened?

KOTT: Yes. We were getting a lot of pressure from Washington to get to the bottom of it, but not a demarche. Because there was no evidence. We couldn't prove that it was a human rights issue. It was a police report, journalistic report, of course in controlled press, controlled police, that there was a tragic road accident. Two ministers and another parliamentarian were all traveling in this car together and they just ran off the road late at night. People who allegedly saw

the bodies said they were riddled with bullets. And tortured. But that's hearsay. There was nothing we could really do.

Q: Anything else we ought to say about your three years in Malawi?

KOTT: It was a great experience for a fairly young officer. Good managerial experience, again seven agencies at post, reasonable number of people to supervise, an Ambassador that delegated a lot of authority to me, did the political work. From a personal point of view, a lovely country to live in at the time, with young family. I could spend reasonable amounts of time with them since there was not a lot of attention paid to Malawi, it wasn't a very important country, so the weekends were pretty free.

Q: The economy was, I think you talked about it before a little bit, but it was stable at the time? There was no inflation?

KOTT: Yes, that was not an issue. And it was relatively self sufficient but it was a minor economy, tobacco and maize.

Q: Pretty poor country.

KOTT: Pretty poor country. But, largely self-sufficient unless a drought came. I think they had a little petroleum crises when we were there because of the Mozambique situation. Their lifeline to the sea went through Mozambique, so of course when the war heated up and affected the Nacala railway, Malawi couldn't get the shipments out or in.

Q: What would they do then?

KOTT: South Africans again, who were very good friends of theirs, would fly in supplies. Truckers would go the long route, instead of going to the ports in Mozambique they would go all the way down to South Africa, to the Cape. So that added a lot of expense. The truckers I think in some cases went to Mozambique ports and they took their lives in their hands that they wouldn't get attacked by the rebels or by the government side I suppose.

Q: But there was one railroad to closest border?

KOTT: I think there were two lines, one was a relatively new line that went from the central part of Malawi to the port of Nacala, in northern Mozambique. And then the other line in southern Malawi that went to Beira ultimately. Then of course there was the rail line over to Zambia. I'm sure the rail line from Zambia went down through Harare and into South Africa. So there were a couple of ways. I may have misspoken about southern Malawian rail line to Beira, maybe that didn't exist, maybe it was just the Nacala line to Mozambique or the alternative was the line through Lusaka and all the way down to South Africa, which added tremendously in terms of both time and cost. And then, of course, trucks, lorries. So, being isolated and landlocked like that was unfortunate for Malawians.

Q: But you were isolated and a long way from Washington, which has advantages certainly on occasion. You presumably took R&R (Rest and Recreation) and home leave and were able to get out occasionally. Did you...?

KOTT: It was not a country that you really felt you had to get away from. Unlike many of the countries in West Africa that had this oppressive heat for example, or disease, Malawi is a relatively pleasant, healthy country. Lilongwe was about 3,500 feet up in altitude, so you didn't have the heavy humidity and oppressive heat. In fact it had more often than not a rather pleasant, sunny, crisp kind of, relatively speaking, kind of climate in their winter season being below the Equator in the southern hemisphere which was June, July, August. In mornings you would wake up it would be 40 degrees. Never got below 40 degrees.

Q: Snow ever?

KOTT: No, not in Lilongwe. Forty degrees was the coldest, that was the very bottom that the mercury went to. And it would warm up to 60 or 70 during the day, so it was really pleasant.

Q: And in the hot season, in the warmer season?

KOTT: At most 90 degrees, more humid, a little rainy but it didn't last all that long. And the road network was reasonably good, at least the axis roads, north-south. We had lots of avenues of good, clean outdoor entertainment. Lake Malawi was about 90 minutes away, the closest point from Lilongwe. The Embassy Recreation Association maintained a cottage on Lake Malawi when I was there it was not where it is today, if in fact it is still there, but it was about a three hour drive away. A lovely isolated place on the lake, probably at that time the only body of water on the continent of Africa that you could actually go in and come out of without having caught bilharzia. You could virtually drink water from the lake. There was wonderful fish, both of the eating variety, a tilapia-type fish, which was delicious. Malawi is the source of much of the world's tropical fish in aquariums. Yes, they export them from Malawi. So it was an isolated, pristine almost paradise. The other thing they had was, the Embassy had a physical property on a mountain area near Zomba, a Plateau, that had been developed by the British, back at the turn of the century and that is to say it was forested with the pine, evergreen forest. So there was this vast area, up on the Plateau, right outside of Zomba. We bought, or maybe we built it, but we owned it in any case virtually or had a 99-year lease or something a log cabin, a two-bedroom log cabin that was considered the Ambassador's residence away from Lilongwe when he would have to go to watch Parliament. Needless to say, we all spent at least one weekend a month down there, with these great roaring fires, trout stream not far from the residence, the ability to go horseback riding, hiking, it was lovely. It was just charming. Great place for kids.

DENNIS C. JETT
Deputy Chief of Mission
Lilongwe (1986-1989)

Ambassador Jett was born in Massachusetts and raised in New Mexico. He received degrees from the University of New Mexico and the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa). After a year at the US Naval Academy, he joined the Foreign Service in 1972 and was posted to Buenos Aires. Several assignments at the State Department in Washington DC and Miami were followed by tours of duty at Tel Aviv, Lilongwe and Monrovia. In 1993 Mr. Jett was named United States Ambassador to Mozambique, where he served until 1996, after which he served as US Ambassador to Peru from 1996 to 1999. Following retirement, the ambassador has pursued an academic career, as professor, at the Universities of Florida and Penn State. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.

Q: '86, so where did you go then?

JETT: At that point I decided if I wanted to move up I needed to be DCM somewhere so I went back to Washington and walked the halls and talked to the people in Latin America and there wasn't really anything that worked. Part of the problem was I wasn't married at this point.

Q: Yeah.

JETT: I would go to ambassadors and I would say I'm single, but I want to be your DCM. They would say to me, some of them quite explicitly, "Well, you know you've got to have a wife who can do the representational stuff because I don't want my wife stuck with all of it so I'm going to hire somebody else." I remember the ambassador to Guyana saying that and so he hired somebody who was married as his DCM. That guy went to post, but the irony was that his wife didn't go with him; she had a career of her own and it was not going to prosper in Guyana so she stayed in D.C. So, being single and aspiring to be a DCM was a problem.

Finally, I found a DCM job in AF working for the political appointee who had been sent to Malawi. One of the features in the Reagan administration was they sent political appointees to some rather obscure places. They had a higher percentage of political appointees than previous administrations and needed places to stick them besides the Caribbean and Western Europe. So they sent political appointee ambassadors to Malawi and to Rwanda. That opportunity came up and I said, "Well I don't know anything about Africa or Malawi or this person, but this is the kind of a job I want so I will go." So off I went. Of course there were no direct flights. You had to fly overnight to London, land in Heathrow and hang out during the day and then fly overnight to Johannesburg and take a connecting flight the next day from Johannesburg to Lilongwe. I was replacing Genta Holmes as DCM and we literally were two ships passing in the night because we got together for breakfast in Heathrow as she was heading back to D.C. and I was heading to Lilongwe. It was then that I learned that the ambassador who had been there only two years had decided that was enough. Another thing that the Reagan administration instituted was a policy that all ambassadors stayed in place for three years, whether they were political or career. It takes about a year of paper work to get an ambassador from being selected to arriving at post so they wanted that predictability, they wanted to know a year in advance which posts they needed to fill so they instituted a three year rule.

Nevertheless Genta informed me at breakfast in Heathrow that the ambassador, Weston Adams was his name, had decided due to family health problems, that he was going to leave after two years and that he would be departing within six weeks of my arrival. She said I'd be chargé for an extended period because it will take a while for the system to generate a replacement on such short notice. I arrived and sure enough Weston Adams left a month and a half later. So all of a sudden, I was not only DCM, but I was chargé. As it turned out they came up with a replacement but he had difficulty, he was a career officer but it was one of these things where somebody raised a rather spurious unfounded, objection to his appointment as ambassador. Often in those situations you just twist in the wind, if you will, waiting for the system to satisfy itself that there is no merit to this objection. To get a decision you are put in the position of trying to prove the negative. In any event, I was chargé for two years because it took the bureaucracy that long to resolve the issue.

Q: Well that was a great boost wasn't it?

JETT: Well it was because after you've been chargé for a few months you get half the difference between your pay and an ambassador's pay. So you are a middle grade officer and all of a sudden you get half way to what ambassadors make; it is a tremendous hike in pay. And it was also great professional development.

Q: Well let's talk about Malawi. Where is Malawi and what was the situation there when you arrived?

JETT: It's a small landlocked country on the lower east side of Africa. If you think of Mozambique as Y shaped, in the crook of the Y is Malawi. So the southern half of Malawi is surrounded by Mozambique on all sides, on the northwest you have Zambia, and on the northeast you have Tanzania. Most of the eastern border is Lake Malawi or what the Tanzanians call Lake Tanganyika. It's the tenth largest lake in the world and the one with the more species of fresh water tropical fish than anywhere else. Malawi then had eight million people. It was one of the poorest countries in the world and still is. Probably 90 percent of the people engage in subsistence agriculture, exports were tobacco and tea and a few other agricultural products such as macadamia nuts, some coffee. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was the president. He had made president for life because he was the guy who led the country to independence.

Q: It was Northern Rhodesia wasn't it?

JETT: Right, It was Northern Rhodesia but became Malawi when it got independence in 1964. Banda was elected president and then after a while in office he liked power so much he had the Congress declare him president for life. It was interesting that nobody was quite sure how old he was. Probably at that point he was somewhere in his 90s but it was unclear what year he was born. He had a medical degree and he studied in the States at a couple universities and then got a medical degree in Scotland. He must have been all of five feet tall and about 98 pounds soaking wet, but he was an absolute dictator. If you criticized the life president and someone reported you to the authorities, the police would often come by and pick you up the next day and that would be the last you would be heard of or seen. In a country where the per capita GDP was probably \$200-300 a year he had presidential palaces all over the country. The commercial center of the

country is Blantyre and he had one there, the traditional colonial seat of government was Zomba, he had a palace there. He decided that he wanted the capital in the center of the country, which is where he is from, so he designated a small trading center, Lilongwe, as the capital; it was kind of like Brasília. In the bush you had these new government buildings surrounded by beautiful landscaping and some nice housing for expats and senior bureaucrats and little else. One of the things that was under construction on a ridge, within the view of my house as DCM, was another presidential mansion. To illustrate the kind of contrast between what average Malawians faced in their daily life and Banda's life style, I sent in a cable in once and the opening line was "There are 37 elevators in the entire country of Malawi, six of them are in the new presidential palace being built by Banda on the outskirts of Lilongwe."

Q: Good God.

JETT: It was a bizarre place in that regard; it was very isolated. There was one newspaper and it was owned by the government, there was no television because that wasn't permitted, there was one government-owned radio station. Banda had these strange cultural and moral hang-ups. If you arrived at the airport and were a man and had hair that reached below your collar you had to get a haircut at the airport or you weren't allowed into the country. If you wore bellbottom trousers you weren't allowed into country. If you were a woman you had to enter the country wearing a skirt that extended below your knees, no short skirts, no shorts or pants. That was the kind of country it was. When I was there, the first satellite dish in the entire country was set up by USIS. The first show that we carried live, and I made a big deal of this and invited a lot of people to come watch, was the inauguration of George H.W. Bush. At the time for such an isolated country it was an innovation to say the least. People really were out of touch or unfamiliar with technology. I remember once we had what looked like a weather balloon float over Lilongwe and it was silvery and bright. Everybody was looking up and wondering what it was and I got a call from the permanent secretary at the foreign ministry who was an educated guy with a college degree from an institution outside of Malawi. He says, "Well we've got this thing up in the sky; can't you aim your satellite dish at it and tell us what it is?" I said, "No, I'm afraid that is not what this satellite dish is capable of doing."

It was a great experience for me as charge because it was a small embassy with a big AID program. Banda was a favorite of the donor community because he was as ruthless with government officials who corrupt as he was with any political dissidents. Mike Armacost, the undersecretary for political affairs, came once. He was one of the few people who visited since it was so far off the beaten path. I was in the car with Armacost and he says, "Well, what are our interests here?" I said, "Development aid, but that is well administered, human rights issues, but there is not a lot of interest, and that's about it." He said, "That's it?" I said, "Yeah, that's it." And since Banda was a staunch anti-communist and far more pro-western than the rest of the countries in the region, I don't think there was all that much concern about human rights. The other big issue while I was there was we had a half million Mozambican's come across the border seeking refugee from the civil war in Mozambique. When I got there there were 50 thousand Mozambicans and three years later when I was leaving it was approaching 600 thousand. People just streamed in because the southern half of Malawi was surrounded by Mozambique so you had all these people coming in seeking to avoid the fighting and then setting up camps and having to rely on the international community, the UN high commissioner for

refugees, to supply them with food, water, shelter, sanitation and medical care. The issue was making sure the response was adequate because these people would flood across and sometimes it would take time for the UN bureaucracy to gear up and provide them with assistance that was needed.

Q: Would the Mozambicans use this, as often happens, as sort of base camps and then go back and fight or were these all refugees pretty much?

JETT: They were refugees. The border was very porous, but the Mozambicans controlled so little of their own territory that there was little need for bases in Malawi and I don't think they would have been tolerated by Banda who would have to fear retaliation from FRELIMO. RENAMO was the rebel movement in Mozambique and the government in Mozambique was run by FRELIMO, which had a Marxist-Leninist orientation. When they were in the bush, they got some support from the Soviets. So when they got their independence and took over that's the philosophy they adopted. Having all the political power gave them control of everything including the economy. FRELIMO abused that power and sent people who disagreed with their politics off to reeducation camps in the far reaches of the country. As a result there was considerable discontent to tap into and an anti-Communist group called RENAMO took up arms against FRELIMO. RENAMO was largely a creation of white-ruled Rhodesia because Mozambique was supporting those trying to end minority rule. When it did end and Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, RENAMO was taken over and supported by apartheid South Africa. The border was pretty porous so people would go back and forth, RENAMO people as well as refugees to buy things. The control of the Mozambican military was so poor that there were large areas of Mozambique where there was no government presence so RENAMO had no problem; it didn't really need sanctuaries in Malawi because it could operate quite freely in Mozambique.

Another aspect of the war, at least in terms of American policy and involvement, was the right-wingers in Washington who saw RENAMO as another anti-Communist freedom fighter movement in the same way that Savimbi and UNITA was in Angola and the Contras were in Central America. They were agitating for a policy of covert or even open support for RENAMO by the United States and an end to diplomatic relations with the FRELIMO government. You had people like Dan Burton, Congressman from Indiana who came to Malawi once when I was there and demanded to meet with RENAMO. I told him that RENAMO doesn't come in here officially; if they come in here they had to come in clandestinely. I explained the Malawian government wouldn't permit a meeting and risk a crisis with Mozambique and they also would not like a congressman crossing illegally into Mozambique. Burton threw a hissy fit when he understood that he wasn't going to be able to meet with RENAMO. But Burton, in my view, ought to be in a mental institution and not representing Indiana in Congress.

Then there were other American groups of right-wingers who would come and enter Mozambique illegally. Sometimes we had to have contact with these American groups even though we had no official contact with RENAMO. Because we had relations with the FRELIMO government in Maputo; there was no official contact with RENAMO. I would talk to these Americans and sometimes find out what they were doing and get their impressions, but I had to be careful about making sure that I didn't really get involved in a way that would somehow imply any kind of relationship with RENAMO.

Q: How stood Banda vis-a-vis the South African government at the time?

JETT: Well he was the only African leader willing to have diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa. There was actually a South African embassy there because he was willing to have formal diplomatic relations. The South Africans liked him because he gave the apartheid regime legitimacy; he was unique in that way. But none of his fellow African leaders liked the fact that he was willing to have diplomatic relations with Pretoria.

Q: Did you have much to do with the South African embassy?

JETT: It was a very small diplomatic corps. There were about eleven embassies in total. There was an Israeli embassy because they wanted to have embassies wherever they would be received. There was a Taiwanese embassy and actually he was the dean of the diplomatic corps. The Taiwanese liked having that kind of status and thought it gave them some legitimacy as an independent country so they would not let this poor guy leave Malawi because the dean of the corps would then have passed to the next person with the most seniority. He may still be there for all I know. China and Taiwan compete to see who can bribe the local government more to have diplomatic relations. Since Banda was such an iconoclast and lacking any significant trade with mainland China; he was happy to have Taiwan there and he was anti-Communist as well. Who else was there? There was a British High Commission, a German embassy, a French embassy and some neighboring countries. It was a very small corps and we all basically got along. Occasionally there were things that caused problems. I remember one time the South Africans had their national day and I thought well I'll send my economic officer I don't think I will bother going to the national day of the apartheid state; of course they boycotted the next Fourth of July. Other than that they were a pretty professional bunch, but wary of us as they were probably up to things that we wouldn't appreciate.

Q: What about UN votes? When we don't have much with a country UN votes become rather important don't they?

JETT: That was not a problem with Banda because he was not taking the typical Third World Marxist-Leninist line. He tended to vote with us on UN issues more than most any other country in Africa. Human rights issues at the UN were not a problem at that point because they hadn't gotten the focus that they do today in obscure corners of the world. I guess there are still obscure corners of the world in human rights. In Equatorial Guinea for instance it doesn't get the attention it deserves. I think he had a pretty good voting record as far as we were concerned. Because he had the Israeli embassy there and relations with Israel he wasn't one of those who automatically voted against Israel.

Q: On human rights I take it that anything that was to be done from our point of view had to see Banda himself?

JETT: Well you didn't really call on Banda. It was a very formal relationship and he would have rejected any suggestion from us on how to improve human rights; I'll give you two examples. The head of the Peace Corps a woman named Lore Miller Ruppe came on a visit since we had a

Peace Corps program in Malawi; it had been thrown out though in the past. Paul Theroux, the writer, at one point was a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi and in his era there were accusations that Peace Corps was getting involved in internal politics which basically meant that Peace Corps volunteers were saying, "Why are you allowing this little tyrant to oppress you," I suppose; so Banda threw out the Peace Corps. It had been reinstated and it was a fairly pleasant place to live and so it was a pretty big and popular program even though you had malaria and obviously a lot of poverty.

So Loret Miller Ruppe came to visit and thanked Banda for hosting this program. Following the normally very stiff protocol for such a meeting, she and I on one side of this table, Banda is at the head of the table and on the other side of the table was the minister of state for administrative affairs. The conversation started off with Loret Ruppe saying, "Thank you very much for hosting the Peace Corps. I know we've had problems in the past but I'm happy to see the program is such a success." Then Banda launches into a historical review about how the Peace Corps had meddled in internal politics and Ruppe said something like, "Yes, we have learned that lesson and we won't meddle in internal politics." Banda said, "Yes, I am a strong believer in discipline and respect and I will give you an example. Then he points to this minister who was sitting there taking notes. He says, "You see this guy. He's the minister of state for administrative affairs and he is sitting here at the table, but if it were just he and I, he would never sit at the table. He would sit on the floor and he would hand things up to me. I would read them and sign them and hand them back." Then he turns and he looks at the minister and this guy's eyes got wide and he jumps to his feet and stands there rigidly at attention and says in a loud voice, "Yes, his Excellency the life president is absolutely correct. If I were in a meeting with him alone I would never think of sitting at the table. I would always sit on the floor and hand things up to him." Then he sat down. Ruppe and I were both stunned, but the conversation went on after that. That was the kind of guy Banda was. Any perception that you were disloyal meant you might wind up crocodile bait.

Q: Yeah.

JETT: The government's favorite slogan was "peace and calm, law and order." I remember talking to a Malawian official once and he was saying, "Yes, his Excellency the life president has brought us peace and order." He stopped and he got this horrified look on his face and said, "Uh, peace and calm, law and order;" as if had he failed to repeat the words right he would be arrested. The Malawi Congress Party government officials had a little button that they always wore on their lapel; it was sort of their flag lapel pin like American politicians think they have to wear. Only this had Banda's face on it and if you were an official you would never be seen in public without your Banda button.

I have one other example. Each year on Banda's birthday they would invite the diplomatic corps to a nice reception at the Zomba presidential mansion. They'd line up the diplomatic corps in order of precedence. They would have each ambassador or chargé sit down with Banda for something like sixty seconds, express greetings and then move on to the next one. Banda had a woman named Mama Kadzamira, who wasn't his wife, because Banda wasn't married, but she acted as if she were first lady. All we knew was that she was next to Banda and therefore potentially very powerful. We didn't know what she was thinking or how much power she had or

anything else. So it was the two of them and the ambassador or chargé. So when I got my turn I thought I'm not just going to exchange pleasantries. I'll use the opportunity, even though I have no instructions from Washington. Shortly prior to the reception the only well-known Malawian writer named Jack Mapanje, who had published books in London of poetry and other writings, had been abroad for awhile and had come back and was living there. All of a sudden he gets arrested and disappears. The rumor was that some official had read one of the books that had been published years before or one of his poems and decided it was critical of Banda. So he was then arrested and put into prison for that. When I sat down for my minute with Banda and Mama Kadzamira, I said, "Well it is a great honor to be here today thank you very much. You are the founding father of your country, etc., etc., but there is one question I would like to raise and that's Jack Mapanje. Not everybody likes his poetry, but I don't think I would call it subversive and shouldn't there be a judicial proceeding to determine whether he should remain in jail?" At that point Banda half way rose out of his chair. His two characteristics were he always wore black suits and a homburg hat and carried a flywhisk. So he starts shaking the flywhisk in my face and saying, "That's an internal affair and it's none of your business." I just said, "Your Excellency, thank you very much but internal affairs have international implications. Thank you for the day." By this time the protocol people were going nuts because they saw this confrontation and so they rushed over and said, "What did you say?" Anyhow, Banda was not happy; he didn't take to criticism or intervention from abroad in his internal affairs. He hung on to power until 1994 when somehow the donors finally leaned on him and his government sufficiently to have a referendum as to whether he should continue to be life president. He lost and he actually stepped down in a very peaceful transition. Of course the elected presidents that followed generally turned out to be corrupt and incompetent, but at least they were democratically elected.

Q: Well did you find yourself having to observe the Peace Corps because these are young kids who are full of idealistic ideas and all. I would think it would be difficult to handle them in that sort of country.

JETT: They were all well briefed about what to expect and they were all told look, we were thrown out of this country once and if you start messing around you are going to get the program thrown out again. I think they understood that and so they avoided saying things that would be interpreted as meddling in internal affairs or if they said anything they were very discreet about it. They were scattered all over the country so there was no way to observe what they were doing and it would not have been the embassy's job to do it unless there was a serious problem. Malawi is a densely populated country and it was about 8 million people at the time, but Lilongwe was 100 thousand people and Blantyre was 300 thousand people so most of the people were in rural areas. You could drive along in Malawi and almost never be out of the sight of somebody walking along the road or people in fields. The Peace Corps volunteers were scattered all over the country and generally behave themselves.

Q: You were there before AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) became such a factor in Africa?

JETT: AIDS was already a factor. When I was there, five percent of the Foreign Service national local employees had died that year in the embassy next door in Lusaka. I remember having a

discussion with the regional medical officer, “Obviously we don’t want Malawians dying but particularly we don’t want our key employees dying. What can we do to educate them to demonstrate to them the seriousness of the problem?” So we hit on the idea of when they got their envelope with their paycheck every two weeks we put condoms with their paycheck as a way of encouraging them to practice safe sex. I remember having a discussion with a group of local employees as to what was the right number of condoms. It was a very uptight society because of the British colonial and missionary influence and because of the rigid morality and political oppression under Banda. In three years there I set foot in the home of a Malawian on one maybe two occasions, but was never invited by Malawians into their home for a meal because they were very careful of who they associated with and there was no reward in associating with diplomats.

Q: How big was the embassy?

JETT: I think there were about forty Americans; the biggest group was the AID (Agency for International Development), John Hicks was the AID director.

Q: What were we doing AID wise?

JETT: They were doing some agricultural work, some rural development basically, and health projects. I went to a village once where they had built a pipe that ran up the side of a mountain and took water out of a stream and delivered it to a well in the village. That way they had a source of clean water in the village instead of having to walk down to the river. We also had feeding programs.

Q: Was it a cattle culture?

JETT: No, there were some cattle, but it was mostly just growing maize. Cattle were beyond what most people could afford. The land was all pretty intensively cultivated, it was pretty fertile land, but very dependent on the annual rainfall. You really got an appreciation of the fact that 90 percent of the people were making a living from subsistence agriculture. If the rains were late everybody became intensely concerned about when they would start because foods stocks started to run out. The seasons were rainy or dry, not summer, fall, winter and spring. And the months before the maize was ready to harvest was the hungry season.

Q: How about tribalism in the area was that much of a factor?

JETT: Not too much. There were about eight main tribes. Chichewa was the second official language after English, but there were others. There was regionalism; there was a north-south-central sense of identity. There was never a situation where there was inter-ethnic violence in Malawi; it was all pretty well contained though there was this regional identity and particularly in the north they felt that they were under represented. They thought they were better educated because there had been more missionaries in the north and they may, in fact, actually have had a little bit more education. There was that tension, but the government was aware of it and made some efforts to see there was some representation from all the areas in government and in the military as well.

Q: Did you finally get an ambassador there?

JETT: Yes, after two years George Trail came and took up the reins as ambassador so I continued on as DCM for another year.

Q: Were there any sort of major developments or any problems with terrorism or was this pretty much a static situation?

JETT: No there was nothing like that. It was a thoroughly repressive society. The only issue was the war going on in Mozambique and its spillover effects that went beyond a huge increase in the number of refugees. For instance, Air Malawi had an Irish-built plane, a boxy little propeller plane that carried maybe twenty passengers. They had a flight from Blantyre to Lilongwe and it cut across a corner of Mozambique. It was daytime and a scheduled airline flight. But the Mozambicans always suspected Malawi of supporting RENAMO. So this Mozambican army officer decides to shoot this plane down with a surface to air missile. He shoots down this civilian airliner and it crashes in Mozambique and everyone died; the Mozambicans refused to let the Malawians go to the wreckage site and assess whatever they could assess. So that was a point of some tension.

The other issue was the rightwing Americans who wanted to see RENAMO as freedom fighters instead of a bunch of thugs. While I was there a USAID contractor named Robert Gersony who came to tour the region. He went to Mozambique and all the neighboring countries. He did an analysis of the situation and his report concluded that RENAMO was responsible for massive human rights abuses and while the government was indeed responsible for some as well the vast majority were committed by RENAMO. He also said the RENAMO was using child soldiers. When that report was presented to Congress. Jesse Helms, of course, went nuts because he was not interested in the truth if it weakened his argument that these were anti-Communist freedom fighters. So that was absolutely the last thing he wanted to hear. Roy Stacy, who was retiring from AID, got the job of giving this report in a Congressional hearing to Helms. I think Roy was selected because everybody knew whoever gave this report to Helms was never going to be an ambassador or get a position that required Senate confirmation because Helms would always retaliate against anyone who crossed him. He had a long memory and if you made his enemies list you could forget getting confirmed for any position.

One other issue that came up had to do with a group of missionaries who had an operation in Zimbabwe. An American nurse named Kendra Bryant was working with them. RENAMO took the group hostage and then marched them across a good part of Mozambique. The fact that they had kidnapped an American became a big issue and Helms and company were saying, "If she is released to the Mozambican government, they will kill her and blame RENAMO." In the end what happened was they walked to the border with Malawi and then were turned them over to me mainly because I had some contact again with these rightwing Americans who helped make the transfer happen. It was agreed that we would meet at this spot on the border on a given day and time and they would hand these people over to me.

Since communication was very difficult there were one or two false starts. At one point I went with this guy who was supposed to arrange the handover and we came to this river, which marked the border between Malawi and Mozambique. He goes across and he comes back and says, "The RENAMO commander wants to meet you." I said, "I can't. I have to stay on the Malawi side and can't enter Mozambique that way. They have to bring the hostages to me." The guy says, "No, he insists that you come and talk to him. Otherwise these people are not going to be freed." I said, "Well, okay." So I got in this little rickety boat and row across this rain-swollen river with this guy. He wasn't an American. He was a White South African or Zimbabwean who was a little strange in his own right. So I illegally entered Mozambique and we walked up the trail twenty paces and out of nowhere three guys materialize wearing flip-flops and shorts and tee shirts and carrying AK-47s. So we had a little chat and it turned out that the hostages were still several days walk away. But the leader of the group said now that we have met he was willing to turn them over to me. Then my escort and I got back in our little boat and we rowed back across the river. Several days later at a different place, the handover actually worked out. I waited on the Malawi side and they brought over the hostages including this American woman. Then I took them back to Lilongwe; there were three Zimbabweans and this woman. The ambassador's residence was still unoccupied at the time because the new ambassador hadn't arrived so I put them in the ambassador's residence so they could rest and adjust to being free and being able to eat a normal diet. I also had to convince the Malawians to not object to how they entered the country and to let them leave without any problems. They had been held for many months in captivity so they had some health issues. I had the nurse practitioner look at them and help them.

After a couple of days they decided they wanted to go back to Zimbabwe where they had started their ordeal so I told them they were free to do whatever they wanted. The American woman says, "I want to go back with them too." I said, "Well I'd gotten a call from this guy who says he's your preacher back in Houston and he's on his way here to escort you back to Houston." She said, "Look, I don't even know that guy. I shook his hand once or twice, I went to his church once or twice, but he is not my preacher. I don't even know him; I don't want anything to do with him. I want to go with my friends back to Zimbabwe." So I said, "Well, you are free to do whatever you want." So she gets on a plane and flies out.

Then a couple hours later this preacher shows up and in tow he has a journalist from the Houston Chronicle who I suppose is there to chronicle his daring adventure. This guy was a self-promoting blowhard who wanted to be the hero who led this poor girl out of captivity and back to the United States or some such nonsense. This clueless journalist shows up and gets told at the airport that they don't allow journalists into Malawi. That's another thing Banda didn't allow. So I had to talk to the officials at the airport and get them to allow the journalist to come in, spend the night and leave the next day. This minister was furious with me because I had not locked this young woman in a closet I suppose, until he could get there and be the hero. The journalist was also angry because she had no story and a lot of travel expenses to justify so she wrote this article about how quaint all the people walking around with no shoes were and how I had not helped her in any way and was responsible for the fact that she had nothing intelligent to report.

The minister must have gotten on the phone and complained to anyone he could because a few hours after that Dan Burton, the deranged congressman, calls me up and started screaming at me

over the phone saying, “You let her go and she is going to go back to Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean government is going to arrest her at the airport and torture her and kill her.” I told him Embassy Harare was going to meet her, but he was sure she doomed. I finally screamed back at him and said, “You are entitled to your opinion, but I have no right to detain an American citizen against her will and tell her what to do. If you don’t like it then write your Congressman.”

The Zimbabwean officials questioned them for about twenty minutes and then released them and she was fine and eventually went back to Houston. She even wrote a book about her ordeal. But that was the kind of ridiculous stuff that happened because you had these rightwing people in Washington who were basically self-appointed lobbyists for RENAMO who were trying to always look for opportunities to promote their cause.

There was a funny story I heard that sort of put the nail in the coffin of the people who wanted to promote RENAMO. Somehow Chet Crocker, the assistant secretary for African affairs, was able to get Samora Machel, the president of Mozambique, into a meeting with Ronald Reagan when Machel visited Washington; it was supposed to be a 15- minute courtesy call. Machel went into the meeting and immediately told a joke about how stupid the Russians were and Reagan came back with his favorite joke about stupid Communists and so they sat there for about 45-minutes exchanging jokes and stories. Machel completely charmed Reagan and they really connected even though their politics could not have been further apart. At that point any thought of attempting to overthrow Machel by giving covert assistance to RENAMO became impossible. All the time I was there were rightwing Americans trying to make RENAMO the contras of Africa, but during the Cold War the rabid anti-Communists wanted to jump in bed with anyone who said they were against Communism too regardless of how reprehensible they were.

Q: I understand that one of our officers in Moscow during the Reagan administration was assigned to pick up jokes to pass on to the president.

JETT: I think Machel knew of Reagan’s love of such jokes and so he took advantage of that and gave him a few of his own. They immediately hit it off.

Q: Did you have any particular contact with African affairs when Chester Crocker was there? He was very much involved in Namibia and all that, but I was wondering whether you had any feel for this?

JETT: No, we were pretty isolated both geographically and politically in the sense that Malawi was kind of a pariah among African states because of its diplomatic relations with South Africa and because of its diplomatic relations with Israel. We were mainly ignored by Washington, which had plenty of problems to deal with and was happy to have one country off its radar screen. One of these groups of Americans came and I thought they were there just to learn about Malawi. They land and immediately tell me that they are going to cross illegally into Mozambique and go visit RENAMO. I remember being really angry that Washington never bothered to give me any indication that this was what these people wanted to do.

I would say basically we were ignored because we weren't important and because Banda was not going to take our advice about how to run his foreign policy. If the issue had to do with assistance to refugees I would call up the right bureau and ask them to send out somebody TDY (temporary duty) and help us assess whether there was sufficient aid for them and that it was being done properly. Washington would respond, but in terms of AF, Chet had plenty of other irons in the fire and there wasn't any particular need to pay any attention to Malawi, particularly when a lowly chargé running things. So we were ignored basically.

Q: Okay, well this is probably a good place to stop.

JETT: Okay.

MICHAEL PISTOR
Ambassador
Malawi (1991-1994)

Mr. Pistor was born in Oregon and raised in Arizona. After graduating from the University of Arizona and serving with the US Army, in 1959 he joined the United States Information Agency. He served as Public Affairs Officer in Teheran, Kampala, Douala, London and New Delhi. He also held senior positions at USIA headquarters in Washington before being appointed Ambassador to Malawi in 1991. Ambassador Pistor was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You left the counselor job in '91 and you went as ambassador to Malawi. Could you explain how that appointment came about?

PISTOR: Yes. The Director General of the day talked to me about it. When the position of Counselor of the Agency was instituted, it was thought that at the conclusion of his term, the Counselor should retire or leave USIA. A suitable ambassadorship seemed appropriate. Directors Wick and Gelb endorsed the idea; my predecessor had been given an embassy. In my case, I was told that I was in the running and that Ed Perkins, the Director General, thought the idea was a good one and would support it. I think the Department decided that it would be one of the African posts. My own experience had been in several parts of the world and Africa had been where I had started, so I was perfectly happy with that.

But at one point in the process somebody appeared who felt he was more deserving of the appointment. He had an excellent record and a lot of African experience. He was a fellow career officer, who approached Bruce Gelb and said, "This shouldn't just be automatic, that the Counselor gets this ambassadorship." And what he did was work on Bruce, who then changed his mind a little bit and thought maybe he would submit that man's name.

Q: How did that work out?

PISTOR: It worked out that he didn't submit that guy's name and that Perkins and the African area and everybody else prevailed, and Bruce backed away. It was a very peculiar time.

Q: It does seem like something like this and having somebody at the top there who is susceptible to influence allowed, you might say, discipline to break down. To have one professional officer try to knock another professional officer off does not speak well for how things were operating.

PISTOR: No, but if you knew the officer, he was a very talented, effective officer with a lot of experience. He also felt that there wasn't much better. It wasn't all that surprising. It wasn't that the discipline broke down at the top. This guy was a hard driver who thought maybe he could do this. He certainly thought that he deserved the post. But you're right, if you get somebody susceptible like that as Director, then somebody can try to use him. I think I'll edit that whole thing out.

Q: But it does give a feel. I don't like to see things end up a pablum, because one of the things we're trying to do here is to give people outside the profession and understand the role of people, how things worked within the bureaucracy. It's not different than an academic institution or anything. None of this is surprising. It just shows...

PISTOR: With this thing, with this person who said he ought to have that job and started working on it, Ed Perkins, the Director General, said to me, "What you ought to do now is don't be shy. Start working yourself." So I took his advice and had a conference with the Assistant Secretary for Africa and a couple of other people and got back into the running. I had held back. I didn't know exactly how you campaign. I've always been grateful to him for his pertinent – and pointed– advice at the time.

Q: Did you have any problem with your confirmation?

PISTOR: None whatsoever.

Q: Okay. Could you describe were Malawi is.

PISTOR: Malawi is in southern Africa and was part of the Federation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and what then became Malawi, Nyasaland. It's a landlocked country with the same population as its neighbors Zambia and Mozambique, about 10,000,000. It had a fascinating history because the Federation was a post-World War II white-settler affair, trying to hold these countries together as a unit, and the independence leader for Nyasaland, Dr. Hastings Banda, was one of the pioneers in Africa's independence movement, and he broke the Federation.

Banda caused the Federation to fall apart, and then became, first Prime Minister, and then President of the new country of Malawi. He graduated from President to Life President of his political party to Life President of the country. Then he established a 30-year dictatorship.

Banda was a medical doctor, trained first– his undergraduate work– at the University of Chicago. He did his MD at Meharry Medical School in Nashville. Then he moved to the UK, and began his medical practice in London. During World War II, Banda was a very successful doctor with a

good practice who bankrolled people like Nkrumah, Kenyatta and others when they were struggling in London.

He was called home by the young radicals pushing for independence because he was a solid middle-class leader, a Presbyterian elder and— as it turned out, a ruthless dictator. He was also a friend of the West, so he was odd man out in that part of the world when the independence movement really got going. His country had a relationship with South Africa when no other independent state would, and he said, “I’d rather deal on the table with these people than under the table.” He jeered at people like Nkrumah who thought they had the troops to fight the imperialists, and he said, “You must be joking. They’ve all the strength and you’ve got none, and so you’d better treat with them.”

Banda was a practical man. In his early years, the first year he was actually in office, some of his most fervent supporters, the young radicals who had brought him to power, tried a coup, and he dispatched it (and its instigators), and never had any trouble again. So he was the West’s friend and he was South Africa’s only friend, but, as I say, his human rights record was abysmal and his control of the people was absolute. By the time I got there he was almost 90 years old.

Q: On the economic side, so many of the rulers took the left-wing, socialist, Fabian socialist London School of Economics course or the French equivalent and really destroyed their economies. I think of Tanzania and Ghana and other ones. Where did he fit in?

PISTOR: He ran the whole thing pretty effectively and made a lot of money out of it. It was as if he had a large business, mostly agricultural. It’s a dirt poor country, but it was always a good aid recipient because it did what it said it was going to do, so it always got substantial aid money. He exhorted people to be self sufficient and grow maize in their own gardens so that they wouldn’t depend on having to buy it elsewhere.

It was very difficult to separate what he did as a business person and what the country did as a country. You sometimes couldn’t tell the difference. He did such things as build, as a private entrepreneur and in total control of the country, quite a large business building in Blantyre, the economic capital and then rent it to the government for offices for ministers. It was not the capital, it was the commercial capital, so the cabinet ministers used to travel back and forth from Lilongwe, the capital, down to Blantyre. Their offices were in his building. The government therefore paid rent to Banda the private entrepreneur.

He didn’t have the stain of corruption that many of these other countries did, and he wouldn’t stand for things like customs officers being on the take and things like this. He would really come on hard, throw people in jail and throw away the key, so the petty corruption, while there’s always some, was nowhere near what it was in any of the neighboring countries. But at the very top, the fact that what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine as President for Life, extended to favored people, who stayed in favor by being good to him and doing what he said, who made money and lived very well but not in the ostentatious way that you see elsewhere. President Banda, of course, lived extremely well himself.

I had the luckiest break you could have in a small and somewhat obscure country, because I got there just at the time when we could help the Malawians throw this man out of office in a peaceful way, and that's what happened in the three years I was there. First came a referendum to allow a multi-party system. Then a year later there was a general election in which the President for Life lost,, and he left office voluntarily.

Q: You were there from when to when?

PISTOR: 1991 to 1994.

Q: When you went out, what were American interests there?

PISTOR: American interests in Malawi were few and not terribly important to the United States. It was one of those countries that had some coffee, tobacco-- American tobacco companies did well there--and tea, but Malawi's importance to us was more political than economic, not just to us but to the West generally, because Banda had nothing but contempt for the kind of socialist regimes around Africa. He espoused the virtues of the West and the free market, although his country was not much of a free market. He relied also on a lot on expatriates to run organizations and his big farming enterprise for him. The United States and others used his vote in the UN, his moderating influence where it could be felt in other parts of the world as a friend of the West and a special friend of the United States. But this friendship had begun to cool at the time really of the end of the Soviet empire and the political...

Q: There was no longer a game to be played in Africa.

PISTOR: No. Nobody said that out loud. Also, it was a time when we were beginning to pay real attention to the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. Again, it was not so much that the Cold War had disappeared, but practically speaking you looked at it and saw you just couldn't tolerate that kind of repressive regime if you were going to be giving a lot of aid, and that's what we said to the Malawians: "You can do whatever you please, but there are an awful lot of people looking for the aid that we can offer, and there are standards that have to do with human rights and the rule of law. We preached that, and it was understood.

Q: When you say human rights, what were you talking about in that context?

PISTOR: Well, there was no freedom of assembly. There was certainly no freedom of the press. Banda owned the one daily newspaper, and that was that. There were some pretty well educated and, to a real degree, well intentioned judges and lawyers, but the system obeyed the President, the police were ruthless, and people were afraid to speak out loud. Expatriates, if they said things in their houses against the President or against the country or any criticism of Malawi, would find themselves told that they could no longer remain in the country and were out of there very quickly.

Malawians of whom somebody said they were saying things that they shouldn't have said, were put into jail and not even put on trial; they just stayed till they died or till they at some point were let out years and years later. The prisons were not nice places to be in. It's a poor country, and

they couldn't feed prisoners very well and malaria was rampant and you didn't have a lot of chances there. Political opposition or the thought of political opposition was immediately snuffed out and people disappeared or were thrown into prison.

Q: When you arrived there, did you meet Banda?

PISTOR: Oh, yes, right away.

Q: And what was your impression, and what were you getting from people? You say he was moving along in years.

PISTOR: Well, he was a very old man, and people marveled at how spry he was and how quick he was. One of his specialties— he made all his speeches in English and they would be translated into the local language. He did this deliberately to set himself apart from ordinary men. He always wore a three-piece suit and a Homburg hat and they didn't look ludicrous on him. At the great celebrations of one thing or another, his birthday or the country's independence day, the stadium stands would be packed. Women's civic groups, actually political organizations, would dance for him, singing songs of praise, and he would come down from the stands himself and dance with them, waving a fly whisk and prancing slowly and carefully. People admired his stamina and cheered him enthusiastically. But they were frightened of him, and they had every reason to be.

When I presented my letters of credence to President Banda, I had to wear a morning coat and striped pants and, if I had had a top hat, carry it, but that wasn't usually required. I think there were about three top hats in the country. I presented the credentials and sat and talked with him for a little bit. His favorite American President was John Kennedy because Kennedy had received him, and he had been disappointed by others. But he spoke of his experiences in the United States, a coherent conversation but a very formal one. Then when it was time to get up, he told me it was time to get up and that I should get on his left or his right as we left the audience room, skirting a stuffed lion at the door.

I talked to Banda several times after that. On one of those occasions he told me that he really did not appreciate the United States interfering in his business and in his country, and I said that we were taking advantage of an old and close friendship to speak frankly, and that's what we were hoping to do. That was interesting, that we were able to talk directly with him when it counted.

The major interlocutor for me and for the other ambassadors was the Secretary to the President and Cabinet, the country's senior civil servant. The Cabinet members and the three or four people who were close to him were also quite approachable. You could have them to dinner or lunch or breakfast and push them, which is what we were doing. I developed a good partnership with the British High Commissioner, who was a wonderful man. We didn't plot together, but we did march together in increasing pressure on the Malawians. I had a very good AID Director too; she did a brilliant job in pushing for change, with the threat of curtailment if we didn't see improvement in the human rights area. Had I explained the human rights situation enough?

Q: Yes. Well...

PISTOR: While my wife and I were in Malawi, some of the people who had been in prison for years were sprung, and a political opposition took shape, and the country had two national elections in two years—flawed but clean elections. In some districts there had been some hanky-panky, and there were areas in which there had been some threats, but overall... We donor countries insisted on international supervision and observation. Every day was interesting. Members of the Catholic hierarchy in Malawi were vilified in speeches by officials of Banda's political party, and a bishop in the north who was an Irishman was threatened. So I took the Ambassadorial car with the flags and all that and went to pay a call on him; it was pretty heavy stuff. I had a small embassy but very good people in it, and they too got really involved in reporting and looking at what was going on and making new contacts.

Q: Who was your DCM?

PISTOR: I had two DCMs. The first one was with me just for a year and was in a sense a left-over. He'd been chosen by the previous ambassador, and he was a very pleasant, likeable man, but he didn't have an awful lot of judgment. He left after a year, and then I had a really superb guy who is now, I guess, right here in the Department. Greg Engle.

Q: Were you being a gadfly while you were there, saying, "Why can't you get your human rights thing," bringing up cases?

PISTOR: Yes, absolutely, and at several levels, most particularly and most frequently with the Secretary to the President and the Cabinet. I'd say, "We know of Mr. So-and-so or Mrs. So-and-so. Where are they? What's happened?" Before I went to Malawi, I had meetings with a number of people in human rights organizations. Amnesty International had a big, thick dossier on Malawi. Members of Amnesty International were not allowed in Malawi, so they had to get information second hand. And then we had the human rights reports that the State Department does. I wanted to be sure that everything got wrung out as much as possible so we weren't counting on rumors or unsubstantiated charges, because the human rights organizations, wonderful as they are, are apt to go for the most lurid accounts. Amnesty International will substantiate as much as they can, but not as thoroughly as our government would want. You don't want to get caught talking nonsense, so we squeezed as dry as we could and got as factual as we could. I did that, the British High Commissioner did it, the German ambassador did it, and we eventually put together a donors' club.

We met frequently and compared notes so that the donors were pretty much in sync.

Q: The British High Commissioner was playing the same role.

PISTOR: Yes, he was. He was a little out front of his government, not far but some; he was awfully good. I had the real backing of the Department at that time. This wasn't the most important country by a long shot, but the Assistant Secretary, George Moose, was very supportive and read our cables. So the British High Commissioner and I had more freedom to do something and then report it rather than request something and then do it. We didn't get too far out of line, but we were comfortable with our relationship with Washington or with London so

that there were more embassy initiatives than there would otherwise be. You could tell that this was very different from the French, the Germans, the others who were more constrained by their Ministries. They used that as an excuse as well, when they— especially the French— wanted to stall. But it was actually true that they had to phone home. .

Q: Well, with the French and Germans, then they were somewhat lagging behind?

PISTOR: The Germans were not. The Germans had a little stiffness in their relationship with home, but they were big donors and they were very concerned about human rights and about the rule of law, so they were in sync, but they were not quite as free-wheeling as we were.

Q: The French?

PISTOR: The French ambassador was a charmer. I liked him a lot, but he was so intensely French. The French had a trade relationship that they didn't want to have messed up in any way. They knew Africa well, and they always played just a little different, but they were after the same goals, so our efforts were in harmony.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of what was happening in Zimbabwe?

PISTOR: One thing more about the French: The British High Commissioner and I drafted a memorandum that we were going to present jointly to the Government of Malawi. He and I thought it was a good idea and so did the German Ambassador, but the Frenchman said, "We're a European organization and the Americans are different, and so it's all right if they want to submit this separately, but we can't do it together," which was too bad. We did it separately, but it didn't have the same effect it would have.

Q: This is, of course, that peculiar French thing.

PISTOR: It was wonderful to have them there being so French. It was wonderful. Everybody was pretty much as you would hope he would be as representative of his country. I'm not talking about stereotypes but of attitudes and postures that couldn't be confused between one country and another.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of what was happening in Zimbabwe at the time and Mugabe holding onto power and that sort of thing?

PISTOR: Yes, we were getting some of that. The African States were trying to use Mugabe to press Banda to liberalize his regime. There's rich irony in that. Something else that was terribly important to the United States and the international community throughout this period and earlier was the terrible Mozambique war. Malawi had a 10,000,000 population and it had 1,000,000 Mozambican refugees. Malawi was in a sense a go-between for the warring factions. The apartheid South African regime also had a lot to do with the Mozambique business, as did many white Rhodesians. You had a lot of mysterious stuff going on. Before my time, I think, much of the international emphasis had been on what the Malawians knew about the situation in Mozambique, and to a lesser extent, Angola.

Our concern for the moment was Mugabe, and what moderating influence he might have— if any— on President Banda. A forlorn hope. Mugabe was enlisted in a sense to get Banda not to be quite so rigid and maybe to give a little bit. At that time Mugabe was playing it safe. Also, South Africa was changing quickly and well.

But we had further help, I have to say, in pressing change on the President for Life. Within two months of the time I got there, we had the first visit ever by a Vice President of the United States to Malawi, because Dan Quayle was making an African trip and Zimbabwe was on the schedule but had to be scratched because of a hotel explosion. So we got Vice President Quayle and his wife and the Secretary of Health, Education and Human Services and his wife, and a supporting cast of hundreds. The President didn't travel from Blantyre, where he had his main palace, and the capitol was in Lilongwe, where all the rest of us were.

Quayle arrived at our house in Lilongwe late in the night, and I had a breakfast in the morning with the senior officials around Banda, the Minister of Finance, the Foreign Minister, the Secretary of the Cabinet, the person who was the kind of shadow leader. Dan Quayle said clearly and unambiguously, "We're looking for change." They said, "Well, we have our own kind of democracy. It's African democracy." Quayle said, "Well, I would consider that a basic tenet of democracy would be to have an opposition, a protected opposition, and we don't see any of that." He really did it well. Malawi is probably the only country in the world where Dan Quayle is thought of as a dangerous revolutionary. Also, Senator Dennis DeConcini came to town not long after, and gave the same message to the same assembled notables.

Q: Banda, you say, was up in his '90s. How did he, while you were there, have an election and change things? How did that come about?

PISTOR: It just was amazing. He made a serious mistake, and that was he thought that when he called a referendum the people would be with him, because he had preached that you had to have a strong single-party government, because if you didn't, the country would descend into tribalism and chaos. He said, "This is the only way we can continue our growth and our prosperity. As Father of the Country, I will always be able to protect and guide you." We were pretty much convinced he thought if he had this kind of snap referendum, the people, his people, would fall in line. The donor group was pressing him to allow a multi-party system and to get political opposition going and loosen up the press, so he suddenly announced, "We're going to have a referendum, and the question is do you want a multi-party system or a single-party system? Do you want me or do you want chaos?" And they voted for chaos.

It surprised him. For almost a day you didn't hear anything from the palace, and it was pretty dicey, you know. After about 18 hours he made a little speech on the radio saying that, "The people have spoken and said they want a multi-party system, so I am requesting the parliament to draft legislation that will enable us to have other political parties, and within 12 months of today we will have an election." I think he then thought the party was strong enough to be able to win the election, but again they lost, and he stepped down without fuss after 30 years in power. My wife and I left within a week of that second election. My time was over, but I couldn't have been more gratified with this conclusion.

Q: Were you able to do much sounding out about how people were feeling because of the situation? Did people talk to you?

PISTOR: It was amazing. The attempt to muscle the Catholic hierarchy backfired, and people did begin to talk more openly. The donors were going to cut off money-- we didn't, but we made it look as if we were very close to it-- and this emboldened the political opposition even before they had the parties, and so people would begin to talk to you who had not talked before, and talk to one another, and several newspapers sprang up. One of the senior leaders of the party who had been thrown in jail 15 years ago was let out of jail. His wife had continued to prosper. He put together a newspaper and was on the hustings again. This happened with several others as people were getting out jail, as people were beginning to organize. One of the things that fueled the opposition was that people who worked in businesses were able to use the faxes, and you got things being circulated that had been faxed from one place to another. It was really quite remarkable because freedom was in the air and people were really serious about it. As I say, the system allowed this because there were some pretty well trained judges and lawyers and business people and others who were able to carry on.

Q: Did you see, or were you concerned about, a return to tribalism?

PISTOR: Well, you're always concerned about a return to chaos of one kind or another when the reins are loosened wherever you go, and so we were concerned, but it hasn't happened. Also, Malawi doesn't have the intense tribalism that some of these other countries have, and the resultant quarrels. There's more intermarriage; there's less north, south, west tribal associations. There's tribalism but it isn't the same as other places.

Q: What about the white settler type people, the managers and all? How did they feel about change?

PISTOR: Mostly they didn't like it much. Things had been fairly cozy. The settlers felt a little oppressed themselves all the time. They were always looking over their shoulders. But the tea people and tobacco people and the coffee people who had managed to make their compromises with Banda and have a pretty good living didn't need change. They knew something was coming, though, because the old man was keeping the whole thing together himself. It was a personal triumph, and some time he was going to die, and they didn't think all that well of those who would succeed him. So I think they weren't in opposition; they were just apprehensive.

Q: Did you have any problem with American tobacco people? I'm thinking almost of moral grounds.

PISTOR: No. There were Americans in and out, but generally American Tobacco and the others who were buying there used their agents in South Africa. The tobacco people would come up when it was time to have the sales and so forth. Tobacco brought some measure of prosperity to that desperately poor country, so for the moral question of tobacco you'd have to put up another moral question which is starving to death.

What our very bright and savvy AID Director, Carol Peasley, did was to break into the market, which had been controlled by big shots, and get peasant farmers into the production and sale of tobacco so the small farmer could make some money off it. This was the kind of thing that would make somebody able to buy a bicycle or a lantern. It was a very good breakthrough, and the AID people were deservedly proud of it.

The UNICEF office in Lilongwe which was run by an American woman, an ambitious person, who took on this tobacco business as a crusade and preached against AID and its approach, and talked about child labor in the tobacco fields and so forth. She had a scheme or two for getting out of the tobacco business into something that was unrealistic. I found myself opposed to her and her point of view. She launched a little campaign at the donors' meeting in Paris, where we went once a year. As I say, we had a terrific AID director who was able to refute point by point the allegations and kind of steady things so it didn't blow up into a danger to AID for using tobacco revenue to get the small farmer a little money. They'll have to abandon tobacco soon enough and grow something else because of its obvious risks. But in this transition period, I think to snatch it away when you didn't have anything else to substitute would have been to push poverty-stricken plow holders into starvation.

Q: What about social life there? How did you find that?

PISTOR: Constricted. It's a small place, but I was so interested in what was going on, the political thing was so interesting, and I thought the diplomatic community wasn't dull at all so my wife and I enjoyed what social life there was. We had Malawian friends and, as I said, people became more and more open as the times changed. It's a beautiful country; we did a lot of traveling and we met a lot of people, so the social life was not stultified in that 'pass the canapés; oh, my God, there's another embassy do'. We didn't do a lot of that. There was a big Peace Corps effort in Malawi, over 125 Peace Corps volunteers, so we saw a lot of them. There was also a large missionary group of Americans scattered around the country. Each year we held regional town meetings to tell them what the embassy was doing and what we expected would in the country over the next several months. These get-togethers, part business, part social, were very successful. We had big parties on the 4th of July when we mixed the missionaries and the Peace Corps, some drinking beer and some having hot dogs.

Q: Did you have any problems with the Peace Corps or the missionaries getting tangled up with the government or that sort of thing?

PISTOR: No. We had a couple of tragedies with the Peace Corps, because the roads were bad and you had a couple of awfully nice kids killed on the roads. The Peace Corps was well run. There was a risky time when the Catholic hierarchy, the bishops, had sent a notice that they thought was polite and respectful about what changes there ought to be in the country, and the government was infuriated. That's when people started threatening the bishop up in the north, the Irishman.. The Peace Corps people, of course, would have been right there getting copies of this letter, and maybe some of them even passing them out. We had a Peace Corps meeting, all of the Volunteers collected by a quite formal, tie-wearing Peace Corps director, who seemed a little of a stuffed shirt, but as it turned out, he was awfully good. The question came up: "Well, what about the dangerous piece of paper?" and the Peace Corps Director reached into his pocket and

said, “You mean this piece of paper?” which helped the Volunteers realize that we were all on the same side.

We weren’t preaching and we weren’t getting involved in the country’s politics, but we understood what was going on. The Peace Corps Volunteers kept to their assigned work, and the government didn’t try to sling them out. They’d been thrown out once before in the ‘60s, when somebody tried to get a dissident out of the country in the trunk of his car. Naturally this infuriated Banda and he threw the Peace Corps out. It was reinstated later, but the Peace Corps itself yanked its Volunteers because of the restrictions imposed by the Malawi Government. Then, third -time lucky, they were back in great numbers, as many as 125.

At the end of my three- year tour in Malawi, I was able to attend the inauguration of the country’s second president, whom I had known from my first week at the post. So I came to the end of a very gratifying assignment. There wasn’t a day that wasn’t interesting.

Q: Well, then you left in ‘94. What had happened? In South Africa Mandela had taken over.

PISTOR: Mandela had taken over. We in Malawi had our elections first, and they had theirs second. And all of southern Africa was changing.

Q: In ‘94 you left?

PISTOR: In ‘94 I was 64 years old and I was to retire in April of ‘95. We left Malawi in midsummer of ‘94. But before we wrap up these interviews I want to talk a little about what Joe Duffy and company did. to do with one of the political leaders in Malawi who had been a darling, and almost a creature, of the AFL-CIO and then got to be known in Malawi as the American candidate. It was very difficult for us to get out from under that. Joe Duffy, who’s nothing if not politically aware, was very close to the AFL-CIO. I’ll talk about it later.

Q: Joe Duffy was the head of USIA.

PISTOR: That’s right.

Q: All right. Well, maybe this is a good place to stop. Essentially we’ve finished with Malawi.

PISTOR: I want to add just this point: the Joe Duffy initiative during this time of transition, which took us by surprise, had much more to do with American politics than with Malawi.

Q: All right. Do you want to pick this up next time? Okay.

This is the 2nd of August 2001. Mike, you wanted to talk about Joe Duffy.

PISTOR: I wanted to talk about how American politics, in a peculiar way, came to Malawi. You’d think it would be quite a stretch. It generally would be. When I was preparing to go to

Malawi and had my appointment set up by a very good desk officer at the Department, one of the places I visited was the AFL-CIO African Institute . For a long time it had been very active in trade union activities and, therefore, political activities in Africa. I arrived at the African Institute office and, lo and behold, there was a trade unionist, maybe *the* trade unionist from Malawi, in an elegant sports coat, a very Western guy, who was the representative of the AFL-CIO African Institute in the region and had just recently moved to Malawi. It was interesting that the Malawi government allowed him to be posted there, since it was very nervous about any kind of union activity.

When I got to Malawi, I discovered that my DCM was very friendly with this union man. He himself had been labor attaché in Kenya earlier and had kept this friendship going; it was quite cozy. I was apprehensive about the closeness of the relationship since the man was already so close to the AFL-CIO, and I said, "Let's keep a little distance." Actually what I said was, "He's already in the lap of the AFL-CIO; he doesn't need another daddy." The DCM took some heed, but not enough. He was a holdover and he left after my first year.

But as the political situation heated up in Malawi and as the pressure on President Banda increased, this man himself became more and more active politically. He left for a conference in Lusaka. He announced he was going to come back to Malawi and make a statement, a kind of manifesto, at the airport, and he had circulated word of his intent so he could get stimulate some notice on his airport arrival. I had word that the Malawi officials would probably arrest him there and I tried to talk to the senior-most people in the government to say, "It would be intelligent of you to just let him get off the airplane, make his statement and go back to his house, and I presume that's what you're going to do." The senior-most official said, "Yes, probably so," but what actually happened was that they did exactly what the union-based politician wanted them to do, they arrested him, and his manifesto got widely distributed. He took a real chance going to jail in a place like Malawi, but it turned out he was martyred but not bruised. But he was one of several politicians who were pushing the envelope. I wanted to make sure that we knew them all and that we didn't play favorites, naturally, so it was a little dicey.

I then discovered that Lane Kirkland, the head of the AFL-CIO, was interested in this case, and that he was a good friend of Joe Duffy, the Director of USIA. He was also a very good friend of Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, Robert Kennedy's daughter, who was the director of the Robert Kennedy Award, which is given to political heroes who are in prison or who have been threatened with prison. She decided, or they decided, that this man would be a good candidate for that award, and it was making him increasingly visible with a very strong American connection. At one point I learned that Kerry Kennedy Cuomo and Lane Kirkland had made a call on Director Duffy to find out what might be done to help this case. What Duffy decided, without consulting us out there in Malawi, was to do a very unusual thing, to suddenly air on the VOA a half hour of broadcasting in the Chichewa language, one of the country's major languages. This, of course, didn't get broadly listened to, but it certainly was listened to by those who were curious about this U.S. initiative and wanted to know what the connections might be. As I say, we heard about it and had no part in it at all.

Q: Kathleen or...

PISTOR: Kerry Kennedy Cuomo came out to Malawi to give the award that year to this politician. By this time he was out of jail and was running for office pretty strongly as one of the factional candidates. Naturally we had her to lunch and dinner and tried to get her together with other politician-candidates as well. Then at the big award ceremony, the politician put me up at the front table, naturally, and then gave me effusive praise and asked me to speak. I was very careful to praise Kerry Kennedy Cuomo and her efforts over the years for people showing political bravery and talked of the changes in Malawi and this and that, but tried to stay well this side of praising individually or separately this politician. But it was a difficult thing and it dogged us throughout the rest of the election season and beyond.. Even though we were also close to the man who eventually became President of Malawi, who won the election, we were tagged by many as the power behind the union man, backing him with special attention and maybe, you know, with money. It was a very difficult time, and it could have been resolved if somebody just listened to us. I guess this happens with some regularity, but it was really kind of a shock.

Q: I'm afraid it does. Somebody gets the ear of somebody, and they have somebody they find very attractive in another country, and so they think that this is going to solve everything, if we get good old Joe in. Good old Joe may be fine or good old Joe may not be fine, but they then push and they have no idea of the range or the policies...

PISTOR: And really don't care much.

Q: ...and really don't care much.

PISTOR: I think this one was a very good illustration. Over the years I'm sure you've seen as I have that kind of activity on the part of the AFL-CIO. They've been very active, and they often don't coordinate and often you find that they're deeply involved in the political matters of a county in which we're represented. They've done some good and they've also caused some embarrassment.

Q: I think it's important for anybody to understand American representation abroad in that we have to worry about other elements, not just within the government but other people. Sometimes you have Congressmen or even the staff of a Congressperson rushing out on their own, basically on their own policy, and all that and tainting whatever they do with American influence, which often plays against the cause, the person, or American interest.

PISTOR: People abroad have plenty enough difficulty just understanding our system, the difference between the Congress and the Executive Branch and who speaks for whom and with what authority and to what extent. So that a Congressman or a staffer, even if he's not being at all mischievous, if he's there and has opinions about domestic politics in the United States, will cause often confusion among his listeners. One of the good things that USIA did over the years, in USIS posts around the world, was to continually use practitioners, Congressmen, Senators, staffers, Executive Branch members, and get them in discussions, get them working alongside people who come from other political systems, and you achieve some understandings that you wouldn't otherwise get.

Q: Well then, you left Malawi when?

PISTOR: Left Malawi in the summer of 1994, and I had 10 months between that and retirement.

A. ELLEN SHIPPY
Ambassador
Malawi (1998-2000)

Ambassador Shippy was born in Colorado and raised in New Mexico. She was educated at the University of New Mexico and the George Washington School of Law. After a tour with the Peace Corps in El Salvador, Ms. Shippy joined the Foreign Service, where she served first in positions dealing with Latin America and later in with those concerning Asian and African affairs. She served as Political Counselor in Bangladesh, Deputy Chief of Mission in Uganda and she served as Ambassador to Malawi from 1998 to 2000. Ambassador Shippy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Today is September 19, 2002. Could you explain a bit about the history of Malawi? It just kind of sits there in the southern part of Africa. How did it come into being?

SHIPPY: Malawi is a long, thin, narrow country with a territory about the size of Pennsylvania, and a lake the size of New Hampshire. Lake Malawi is 20% of its territory. It has few natural resources. It has land and it has people. The people, except for one group that came from South Africa, have generally been either farming or fishing folk, generally peaceful. The first Europeans who came in were Presbyterian Scots, and they had a great influence on the development of the country. The reason Malawi was created as a country is that when boundary lines were being drawn, what is now Mozambique basically wanted to include a large part of Malawi, but Mozambique had been colonized by the Portuguese. The Presbyterian Scots didn't want to be part of something that was Portuguese, and insisted that Malawi be kept separate.

Q: When was this? Are we talking about the 19th century?

SHIPPY: Yes.

Q: During the cutting up of Africa.

SHIPPY: Yes, it was the 19th century. Britain was the colonial power in Malawi. It was a British Protectorate. In the 1950s, the British wanted to create a federation of the states which are now Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. (Then they were, respectively, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.) The people of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia didn't want this because they believed that all of the power would go to the whites in Southern Rhodesia. But the federation was created, called the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

A sidebar: Nyasa means lake. What is now Lake Malawi was known under the British as Lake Nyasa, which makes it one of those repeated word sequences: lake lake. (As the “Sahara desert” is “desert desert.”)

The Federation lasted from 1953 to 1963. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was born in Malawi, studied medicine in the United States and Scotland, and had practiced in England and Ghana. He was in Ghana when the Federation became an issue. Banda was talked into returning to Malawi and taking part in what became the liberation struggle. The Federation broke up; Malawi was granted its independence in 1964. In 1966, Banda became Malawi’s first president.

From playing a positive role in the country’s struggle for independence, Banda moved fairly quickly into a dictator role. He was named “President for life” in 1971, and was President for almost 30 years. He didn’t consider himself a dictator, but regarded himself as an elder of the Scots Presbyterian Church, and as an African Paramount Chief. He “knew” what was best for his people; he knew better than they, and therefore made decisions for them. Banda made the decisions about where money should go. Malawi’s largest export crop is tobacco. It was and it still is. He said that small farmers could not grow tobacco, that only large estates could grow tobacco. That was one of his decisions. Banda was very conservative, and had rules about length of skirts or dresses that women could wear. Women couldn’t wear sleeveless dresses, for example; men couldn’t wear bell bottoms. (The dress codes of Zanzibar and Malawi were very similar.)

Eventually the Malawi people agitated for democracy. In 1993, Banda agreed to have a referendum as to whether there should be multiparty elections. The general consensus seems to be that he believed the people would vote the way he thought they should vote, and defeat this referendum. They didn’t; a majority voted to have multiparty elections.

There was pressure from donor governments; there was pressure from the Catholic Church and other churches. All this, including the results of the referendum, combined to get him to the point where he accepted the results of the referendum, and the country prepared for multiparty elections. Again, the general consensus is that he assumed that he would win.

I was told that you had to belong to Banda’s political party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), to do almost anything. In order to get on a bus, for example, you had to show your membership card. I even heard one story that if you were pregnant you had to buy a membership card for your unborn child in order to get on a bus, to shop, or whatever. Banda took action against Asians in the country, these being people from South Asia, or of South Asian ancestry. Banda said that Asian shops could not be out in the countryside; they could be located only in major urban centers, so many Asians had to move in to the cities. Banda had a paramilitary group called the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) which acted as his enforcement arm. They spied on their neighbors. They enforced his rulings. They did what Banda needed to have done.

Q: Did anything replace the Asians?

SHIPPY: Malawi African shop owners would take over. I heard a story about a group that he expelled from the country. It was a group of Goans (or of Goan ancestry). Goans often have a

club where they are, and there was a Goan club in Blantyre, which is the largest city in Malawi. Apparently Banda was speaking on the radio and one of the members turned the radio off. That was reported to Banda, and he expelled all the Goans in Blantyre.

Back to the paramilitary group, the MYP: the MYP had run-ins with the Army. There was an incident in Mzuzu, the largest city in the north of Malawi, in which a couple of MYP thugs killed two soldiers. Soldiers then came out of the barracks in Mzuzu to take care of the MYP there. Then soldiers all over the country came out; the officers came out soon thereafter and took control of the soldiers, with the goal of disarming the MYP and removing it as a force in Malawi. It took about ten days for the Army to disarm the MYP. There was killing and it was bloody, but the Army disarmed the MYP. (There was, however, continued speculation, even when I was in Malawi, about “unaccounted for” MYP weapons.) After that, the Army returned to the barracks. The Army did not try to take power. The Army sees itself as the upholder of the Constitution, not of any particular government or person, an uncommon attitude for an African army.

Q: It is.

SHIPPY: Thus the MYP was removed as a force which could influence elections, and when multiparty elections were held, Banda didn't have an enforcement arm. But again, the consensus seemed to be that he expected to win the election, and there were no real attempts to rig the election as has happened in other countries. He lost. The United Democratic Front (UDF), a coalition of small parties, won the election; the head of the UDF, Bakili Muluzi won the presidency. To give him credit, Banda conceded the election and stepped down peacefully when the result of the election was clear, but before all the ballots had been counted. He went into retirement in Malawi, which is unusual for an African former president. (Banda passed his years in retirement quietly. He was in his 90s when he died in 1997.)

By 1994 Malawi had a democratically elected president and Parliament, and a functioning multiparty democracy. Banda's party, the Malawi Congress Party, continued to function and had representatives in Parliament. It was an interesting transfer of power. In many countries, getting rid of a 30-year dictator would have been accomplished only with great bloodshed. It didn't happen that way in Malawi. In Malawi, it was a peaceful transfer of power, with the exception of the one brief episode where the Army stepped in. The divisions in Malawi are not particularly religious, as is the case in Uganda, for example. Nor are they tribal. Malawians classify people by region of the country. You are from the north or from the center or from the south. These divisions create problems, but to my mind, they aren't as difficult to deal with as either religious or tribal differences would be.

Q: Well then, you had your hearings and all that. Any problem with the hearings?

SHIPPY: No. I was asked one question about religious freedom. Banda had persecuted Seventh Day Adventists because they wouldn't acknowledge the authority of the state. But with the new government, there were no problems.

Q: You were out there from...

SHIPPY: January of 1998 through August of 2000.

Q: Did we have when you went out there, was there any issue that we were particularly interested in there?

SHIPPY: HIV/AIDS severely affects Malawi. Economic and development assistance in general. Malawi is a very poor country, and doesn't have oil, gas, minerals, whatever to sell. Tobacco forms a huge percentage of their exports, well over 50%, so while there is no immediate emergency, in the long term they do have to find something to replace tobacco.

Q: Did they have the same thing that happened in Zimbabwe where a small group of white farmers sort of dominated the agricultural field?

SHIPPY: Not so much. There were large estates, because, as I said, Banda didn't let small farmers grow tobacco. In fact, he didn't let small farmers grow export crops. Small farmers were allowed to grow corn, vegetables, things that they would eat or sell on the local market. Of the large estates, some were held by white farmers; there were a couple of South Asian families who had estates. And there was a big corporation called Press Corporation that was basically the Government's corporation, Banda's corporation, which ran large estates.

Q: How did you find when you got there, was the government that was in place by the time you got there interested in the United States and contact with them at all?

SHIPPY: Very definitely. We were either the first or second largest aid donor to Malawi, depending on what Japan provides in any particular year. Malawians are a friendly, warm people, and they like the United States, so, yes, relations are very good. Commercial relations are not particularly thriving. Malawi looks to Zimbabwe and South Africa traditionally as its largest trading partners and then to Britain. So getting the U.S. involved is a huge selling job on the U.S. side and on the Malawi side, and they don't have the money to do big projects that bring in U.S. companies.

Q: The AIDS epidemic, how had by the time you got there in '98, how had the AIDS epidemic hit Malawi?

SHIPPY: A lot of people had died, were dying, children left orphans, grandparents having to raise a second family because they were raising their grandchildren. Often it is the educated people who are the ones first hit by AIDS. In a country where the pool of educated people is fairly small, AIDS is a major factor. Teachers are another group that is severely hit, also health workers. In all of these instances, Malawi can't afford to lose these educated professionals. Banda, although he was a trained physician and had practiced as a doctor, denied the existence of HIV/AIDS. It was a taboo subject in Malawi in his time – not mentioned in or by the media, certainly not discussed publicly.

There was no education about it and no discussion of how to prevent it. This policy was a real tragedy for Malawians.

Q: What could we do about it?

SHIPPY: We had a USAID HIV/AIDS program that was very strong and that I supported. I thought it was important to get the President and the Government actively involved. Malawians are a very conservative people. My last overseas post had been Uganda. There people talk about everything, and President Museveni is a strong vocal leader against HIV/AIDS, as is his wife. They have a monthly supplement for children in the newspaper that talks about sex and bodily organs and functions, very graphic. Malawians were not doing any of that. The President was not talking about it. The government ministers were not talking about it. One of my goals was to get the President and the Cabinet vocal about HIV/AIDS and get it discussed frequently and everywhere. By the time I left, the President had spoken publicly about it, and had publicly promised that he would take action to make sure the Malawi HIV/AIDS program was a good one and was effective. He had prominent billboards put up about HIV/AIDS. Shortly after I left, a Minister talked publicly about one of his close relatives dying of AIDS. For a conservative country, these steps were significant.

Q: What was the thrust of our work, I mean to get people to use condoms?

SHIPPY: That was part of it. Practice safe sex, and there are various ways to do that. You can use condoms; you can abstain. You can have only one partner. (The Malawians were beginning to think about using the Ugandan “ABC” campaign – Abstain; if you can’t, Be faithful; if you can’t, use Condoms.) Another part of the problem is traditional practices that contribute to somebody having more than one partner. By the time I left, there were groups that were trying to change traditional practices, substituting something else that wouldn’t endanger lives. There was a traditional practice which involved a needle, not drug use, and not injections, but some part of a traditional practice. One group was trying to get that done differently, again to keep the spirit of the tradition, but to change the practice so that it wouldn’t endanger lives.

Q: Were you able to get out quite a bit and talk to schools?

SHIPPY: I traveled a lot.

Q: AID was working on various projects or was this concentrated on AIDS?

SHIPPY: No, USAID had five areas of concentration: education, health including HIV/AIDS, democracy/governance, private enterprise, and agriculture.

Q: Did events in South Africa have an effect, you know, the fact South Africa was now free of apartheid. Did that have a ripple effect at all or had that never been anything that Malawi was concerned with?

SHIPPY: Banda was the only African leader who maintained contact with the South African apartheid regime. Thus, Malawi was a pariah in the rest of Africa. Getting rid of the apartheid regime helped, and when Banda left, having a new government in Malawi helped. Malawi was an integrated part of Southern Africa and Africa again.

Q: Were there any aspects of international relations playing a role there? I am thinking of by this time the Soviet Union was long gone I guess, but North Korea, Taiwan?

SHIPPY: Malawi had relations with Taiwan, not with Mainland China, and will probably maintain relations with Taiwan as long as they get more money that way.

Q: Was there any problem with terrorism or anything like that there?

SHIPPY: No. The bombings in Nairobi and Dar happened in August of 1998, and affected what we did and our security stance. The government was completely supportive in what we asked them for, and publicly supported us; it was very helpful.

Q: Who was president when you were there?

SHIPPY: Bakili Muluzi.

Q: Was he easy to talk to?

SHIPPY: Very easy. He is a natural politician. He is very affable and easy going and likes to talk and likes to schmooze with people; he was very easy to deal with in that respect.

Q: What sorts of things was the embassy looking at in Malawi? It sounds like human rights wasn't of much concern any more was it?

SHIPPY: That's right. There were still some human rights issues. Police had a long way to go, for example, in treatment of prisoners, but it was as much due to lack of training and lack of resources as anything else. There certainly was not a government policy that we had to deal with. Our principal issues were economic, social development and health issues.

Q: You were there during the Clinton administration, and the Clinton administration is the first administration to really follow through on the idea that smoking is bad for you. We are talking about tobacco.

SHIPPY: The three major tobacco companies were American owned. It was "follow the trail and eventually you find an American company at the top." Sometime during my first year in Malawi, the State Department published a new policy on tobacco that said we could give American companies involved in tobacco the same kind of support we gave any other company. In other words if they were not being treated fairly by the government, we could talk to the government, but we could not do anything that would promote the sale of tobacco. And, when possible, we were to support efforts to stop the use of tobacco. The tobacco companies in Malawi had a problem with getting work permits renewed for their foreign workers, who held senior positions in the Malawi operations. One of the government officials in the approval process didn't want to renew the permits on the basis that the tobacco companies had not brought Malawians in and trained them so that they could do the jobs, when Malawians were quite capable of doing the jobs. He believed that these foreigners were taking jobs that Malawians should have been handling. There was some speculation that part of his attitude was because he had worked for

one of the tobacco companies as a young man. It hadn't gone well, and he had left the company. In any case, we were able to help the companies, and they achieved an agreement with the government that they could live with. They got fewer permits than they wanted, but enough so they could manage. So that worked out. But we were always very much aware of the U.S. policy and what we could and couldn't do.

The USAID agricultural project did a lot on trying to develop substitutes for tobacco. The problem is that for the same amount of inputs, time, fertilizer, seeds, so forth and so on, the return from tobacco is more than the return from other crops. We were experimenting with specialty vegetables for the European market. Cargill, an American seed company (among other things), worked on cotton for awhile. But as of the time I left, nothing had really been found that worked. Part of the problem is that when you are developing perishable goods for the European market, be they vegetables or flowers, you need direct flights to go to Europe, and there were no direct flights out of Malawi, so transportation was a problem.

One interesting sidelight: Lake Malawi has a class of fish called cichlids. The varieties in Lake Malawi are unique to that lake; they don't appear anywhere else. There is a very small business that exports these cichlids, mostly to Europe and Japan, although you can find some in the U.S., for fresh water aquariums.

Q: Did you get involved in how Malawi votes in the general assembly of the United Nations?

SHIPPY: Yes, every ambassador does that. We get instructions from Washington and you try to convince the host country to vote with the US. Malawi generally voted with the OAU; it rarely stepped out and did something different. I believe there was one occasion before my time when Malawi voted with the US, and not with the OAU, but it was extremely rare for that to happen.

Q: Do we have much in the way of exchange programs?

SHIPPY: We have Fulbright, both Americans coming to Malawi and Malawians going to the U.S. A former Foreign Service Officer who now teaches at a teacher's college in Wisconsin and had served in Malawi, started a program to improve teaching in Malawi. Four Malawi teachers start as freshmen at this college every year and go through the whole four-year degree program. Then they go back to Malawi to use their new skills. We take people who have already taught for awhile and aren't just out of university. That program was going very well.

Q: Any consular problems or did you get much in the way of people coming there?

SHIPPY: No, Malawi is not particularly a route for other nationalities. It is expensive to go to the United States, and most Malawians don't have money, so we didn't have huge consular issues. One interesting factor about Malawi is that the capital is Lilongwe. The major city and major commercial and financial center is Blantyre, which was about three hours drive south on Malawi roads. But the President was in Blantyre. For the first year I was in Malawi, the Parliament was in another little town, Zomba, which is another hour beyond Blantyre. They finally moved the Parliament up to Lilongwe. With the President mostly in Blantyre, that meant that when you saw

him, you planned on an overnight journey. He would occasionally be in Lilongwe, but generally not when you had instructions from Washington to meet with him.

Q: So how big was your staff?

SHIPPY: I had 27 direct hire Americans, a total of all agencies.

Q: Was there enough to keep a political officer and an economic officer busy?

SHIPPY: We had a Political/Consular Officer who theoretically was supposed to spend half time on political issues and half time on consular issues. He was always overwhelmed; there was too much work for one officer in those two areas. The Econ/Commercial Officer kept busy. Among other things, we have a very active Self Help Program, whereby we give small grants to communities to do projects, often income generating projects. We had a Self Help Coordinator, but the Economic Officer puts a fair amount of time in on that program.

Q: What kind of self help, this is where you give \$1,000 or something like that to an individual or a group to go out and start something?

SHIPPY: Yes, never to an individual, always to a group. And we generally gave smaller amounts, from \$200 to \$700. We had mills to grind corn. We gave money once to a community to help them install a water system. They lived on the side of a very large and high plateau in northern Malawi, and rivers came off the plateau with a lot of energy. The community tapped into the river at a high altitude, and then put in bamboo pipes to bring the water down to the village. They put in – by hand -- about eight kilometers of bamboo pipes. The water pressure was so high that they had to add additional outlets, because the water pressure was bursting the pipes where they joined. It was a very impressive project. We helped a community start a tree nursery of both ornamental and fruit trees. What else did we do? We helped fund a multi-purpose room in a community. We helped fund a knitting project. We did a chicken project with one group; we have done small bridges and grain mills. One of the things I liked best about the Self Help Projects was that they provided a continual reason for me to travel to visit them or to be present at the ceremonies marking their completion. And since they were all over the country, I managed to cover pretty much all of Malawi. Great fun, even though most of the roads were terrible!

Q: Did you have Peace Corps?

SHIPPY: We did.

Q: How did they do?

SHIPPY: Very well. When I was there, there were about 100 Peace Corps volunteers in the country. They did HIV/AIDS and child survival. We had some teachers, mostly at secondary schools. We had natural resources people who worked with the Malawi Parks Association. Those were the major projects.

Q: Were there any big game parks or things like that there?

SHIPPY: Yes, there are a few, and some wonderful ones. Although Malawi doesn't have the variety or quantity of game that Zambia or South Africa does, the Malawi parks are well worth visiting.

Q: I take it you didn't have any presidential visits or things like that.

SHIPPY: No.

We had two delegations of Congressional staffers scheduled, but the first group was called back to the Hill before they reached Malawi, and the other one was canceled before it started out. I understand this year Malawi has had some senior visits, but it didn't happen while I was there. Andy Young transited Lilongwe once. We met him at the airport and took him on a quick tour of the city – at night and in the rain. The Deputy Commander of US forces, European Command came once or twice. And that was about it in terms of high level visitors.

That does, however, remind me of a good story. When Nancy Powell was PDAS in the African Bureau, she visited Malawi. Marcia Bernicat, my female DCM and I accompanied Nancy on a call on the female Malawian Principal Secretary for Defense. It suddenly occurred to us as we were talking about defense issues, that the occasion was a first – four women in senior positions in the US and Malawian governments, talking about defense. We very much enjoyed the moment.

Q: In the sort of pecking order, how many countries were represented there?

SHIPPY: Britain, Germany, Denmark, the EU, Taiwan; UN organizations such UNDP, WHO; and some African countries: South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe; were represented in Malawi. Egypt was there. But there were not a large number of missions.

Q: Was Great Britain sort of a major outside influence there, or had the United States more...

SHIPPY: No, I think the United States had moved into that. We had a larger embassy; we had a larger aid program. Certainly Great Britain, their High Commission, has a significant impact and played a key role. Prior to parliamentary elections, there was a lot of violence, and it was increasing. Neither opposition political party, nor the Government, was doing anything to stop it. We had a donor group that met once a week. The donors made representations to the Government and to the political parties, and the excessive violence was greatly reduced. I think the British and the U.S. were the two key players on that one. The Danes were also influential in democracy and governance issues.

Q: Were there any major incidents or issues that took place while you were there?

SHIPPY: You mean between Malawi and...

Q: That affected your work, earthquakes, war.

SHIPPY: No. The bombings, the east African embassy bombings were the biggest. Zimbabwe had started to go downhill before I left, but the full impact had not yet hit Malawi.

Q: Well, was there any spillover from Mugabe's beginning to get rid of the white settlers and the consequent decline in Zimbabwe's productivity?

SHIPPY: Malawi traditionally imports a lot of foodstuffs from Zimbabwe as well as other items, soaps and such. So the Zimbabwe situation affected things in Malawi. Goods weren't coming over like they would normally. The other Malawi concern was there are about a million people whose families originally came from Malawi who live in Zimbabwe. These people don't have Zimbabwe citizenship and have lost Malawi citizenship. There was a concern then, and there probably still is, about that group of people. If they were ever forced out of Zimbabwe, they would obviously go to Malawi. The Malawi Government had to start thinking about what it would do in that situation

Q: Would you say the people of Malawi were sort of content with what you are describing, didn't have any vast resources, but hadn't been torn by tribalism or war or something. Do people learn to live a good solid life do you think?

SHIPPY: I think so. For one thing most people were very happy that the dictatorship was no longer around, that they were free to express their opinions and vote. But people want better things for their children, so education is a major issue there. Most people are not happy with the education because the public schools are often not very good; they lack materials, equipment and qualified teachers.

Q: Of course AIDS has compounded the problem.

SHIPPY: Right.

Q: What about missionaries? Were American missionaries there?

SHIPPY: There were. That was a large part of the American population in Malawi. There is no problem with their doing missionary work. As I said, missionaries were Malawi's first exposure to Europeans; some people thought there were benefits and others didn't. But missionaries were not really an issue in Malawi. Many of the missions run schools or hospitals or clinics and contribute in that way to Malawi.

Q: Well by the time you left there, were things sort of the feeling Malawi had gone through a shakedown period regarding democracy and it was pretty well in place?

SHIPPY: Reasonably well. Muluzi is now in his second term. That election went well, and it was democratic. But the Malawi Constitution limits him to two terms, and he would like a third term. That issue is active. Malawi has corruption problems, some involving senior officials, including members of the Cabinet, heads of State agencies, etc. Malawi has made some attempts to deal with that issue. There is an Anti-Corruption Commission that looks into corruption charges and makes recommendations about whether the case should be prosecuted or not, so there is some

attempt to deal with that issue. For awhile Malawi was considered to have the most viable multiparty system in Southern Africa, maybe in Africa, because the opposition party was a viable, active party. But now, the opposition party has split and is no longer quite so viable. So Malawi could go either way. It could get itself together and continue to have a couple of really strong parties, or it could go back to basically a one party state.

Q: How was the military? During the time you were there, were they still in the barracks and minding themselves?

SHIPPY: Yes. In fact that is the one area that I haven't really talked about so far. We did a lot of activities with the Malawi Army. Malawi was one of the first countries in Southern Africa to agree to join the African Crisis Response Initiative, so we had a lot of dealings with the Army. The Army was still apolitical, and believed strongly in that. The Commander and the Deputy Commander of the Army were both very sincere in that attitude. We had many different US Special Forces groups come through to do Joint Combined Exercises (JCETs) where they worked with the Malawi Army. We had many visits from US Special Forces groups in connection with ACRI. The purpose of ACRI was to build up a military cadre in each participating country, which, in the event of need, could be sent to another country to assist, so that U.S. troops wouldn't have to go. The Malawians responded positively to the training they received, and it was a very successful operation in Malawi.

STEVEN A. BROWNING
Ambassador
Malawi (2003-2004)

Ambassador Steven Browning was born in Lubbock, Texas in 1949. He graduated from Baylor University and University of Houston. He worked as a teacher in Damascus, Syria and Amman, Jordan before joining the Foreign Service in 1981. His overseas posts include Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Nairobi, Kenya; Alexandria, Egypt; Colombo, Sri Lanka; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Lilongwe, Malawi, Iraq, and Kampala, Uganda. Ambassador Browning was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2016.

BROWNING: I went to Malawi as ambassador. This was August of 2003, and I left in May of 2004. It was a short but interesting assignment.

Q: Today is October 6, 2016 with Steve Browning. So you are off to Malawi. How did you get that assignment?

BROWNING: My name was put forward by the Director General and was seconded by some other assistant secretaries. But it's the D committee which vets all the candidates for Chief of Mission and decides which ones would be appropriate for each post. So the D committee submitted my name to the Secretary as the right candidate for Malawi, and that recommendation was forwarded by the Secretary to the White House.

Q: Did you have any problems with confirmation?

BROWNING: (Laughs) Well, there's a story there. I was still out in California at this time doing recruiting work. The Senate and the State Department like to bunch the hearings together, so they'll have several candidates from Africa appearing before the Africa subcommittee. So the subcommittee had a group hearing for several candidates going to posts in Africa, but I wasn't able to make that hearing. The paperwork wasn't in and I couldn't sit for it. I was left dangling; there were no other candidates for Africa in the wings. So the State Department proposed to Lamar Alexander who was the chair of the Senate's subcommittee on Africa that they have my hearing tacked on to the end of a hearing that the subcommittee held on HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) in Uganda. They were going to have all the subcommittee members there for an hour to discuss how Uganda was addressing HIV/AIDS. Uganda was a leader in the field; they had brought down their HIV incidence rate dramatically. The Senate subcommittee wanted more information on that success. Senator Alexander agreed that after the HIV/AIDS hearing they would change the nameplates at the table and we'd have my hearing to be ambassador to Malawi.

I sat through the hearing on HIV/AIDS in Uganda, which was very informative and interesting. Then my turn came. All the senators left except for the chair, Lamar Alexander, and the ranking member, Russ Feingold. They welcomed me and were very gracious. I gave my opening statement on what I hoped to accomplish in Malawi. Then Senator Alexander's first question was, "You just sat through an hour-long hearing about HIV/AIDS in Uganda. I would like your comments on their program." Well, I hadn't prepared for that at all because I was heading to Malawi, not Uganda. But I was paying attention during the hearing and taking notes because Malawi also had a horrible HIV/AIDS problem.

The keystone of the Uganda program was called the ABC approach – abstinence, be faithful to your partner, and if you can't be faithful, use condoms. ABC. I said "The ABC method of abstinence, being faithful and using condoms seems like a well-balanced approach." Alexander interrupted me and said "Surely you don't advocate the use of condoms? Surely you believe that abstinence is by far the best approach?" I said, "Well you need a well-balanced multi-faceted approach..." Then Russ Feingold interrupts and says, "Surely you're not advocating that abstinence is a viable approach?" Then Alexander chimes in. That went on for minutes and minutes. I felt like a ping-pong ball between these two guys who had different approaches on how to deal with HIV/AIDS. Finally they agreed to disagree and quit using me to pursue their own positions on HIV/AIDS. They asked me a question or two on Malawi, and that was it. They forwarded my name to the full committee who forwarded it onto the Senate, and I got confirmed. My hearing was really not a full, thorough discussion on U.S.-Malawian relations. But it got the job done as far as I was concerned.

Q: What was the situation in Malawi, and American interests when you went out there?

BROWNING: First, let me give you a sense of American interests in Malawi. I had my Senate hearing which gave me an idea of how much the Senate cared. Then I called on the NSC (National Security Council) director for Africa. I had asked the AF desk officer to set up a

courtesy call for me to go to the NSC and introduce myself and talk about any issues they had with Malawi. I said to the desk officer, “We probably only need 15 or 20 minutes.” She called back and said, “No they want a full hour with you.” So I thought an hour on Malawi, this’ll be good. I went over and introduced myself and got ready for an hour-long discussion on Malawi. The director for African affairs launched into this monologue about things that I had never heard of before. I had no idea what she was talking about. I didn’t know the names, the issues. I was totally clueless. I was thinking to myself, “Man I really have not been briefed well. I am not prepared well for this assignment.” It was about five minutes into this before I realized she thought I was going to Mali, not Malawi. So I informed her I was going to Malawi in Southern Africa, not to Mali in West Africa. She thanked me very much, didn’t really have any issues to discuss with me, wished me luck and sent me on my way.

Then I called on the assistant secretary of African affairs, saying “Boss, I’ve been confirmed, the president’s attested my appointment, my bags are packed and I’m heading to Malawi. Any last minute instructions for me?” He said, “The only thing I want from you is to never hear from you. I’ve got so much going on, Africa’s such a busy place, so many places are falling apart around me. I need you to not bother me.” So after these three exposures to the U.S. government’s perception of our relations with Malawi, the Senate, the NSC and my own assistant secretary, it was very clear to me that Malawi was not at the top of anybody’s list. I went to post with a very clear understanding of what Washington cared about. And it sure wasn’t Malawi.

The main issues for those few who really cared about Malawi were development issues. Development was the alpha and omega in Malawi. It had been a democracy for less than 10 years, so it was still finding its way after the colonial period and after the decades-long rule of Hastings Banda. He was the president-for-life who had really run the country with an iron fist.

The UN has indicators of national development. Infant mortality, girls’ education, food security, GDP (gross domestic product) – all of the indicators that give you a sense of where a country falls compared to other countries in the world. Malawi was chronically and consistently in the bottom 10 of all of those indicators of development. Name any indicator, and there’s Malawi at the bottom of the list. What’s fascinating to people was that Malawi was the only country on the list that had never experienced a civil war or been at war with its neighbors. There was no external determinant, no external cause for the country to be so undeveloped. It was the most donor-dependent society I’d ever seen. I had worked and lived in Africa, had traveled extensively through Africa when I was executive director, and this was a country that just could not get any traction. Forty percent of its budget came from donors – the U.S., UN, EU, British and Germans. Not just financial dependence, they were also dependent psychologically. I was just flabbergasted at the lack of ownership of their own future.

When I first got there I went on a tour of the country – to meet people, get my bearings, visit Peace Corps volunteers, etc. I met one volunteer who was working on education issues. He handled several villages, and invited me to walk around with him. So we took a day long hike from village to village, seeing where he worked and meeting people. He introduced me to a farmer. This was during the hungry season in Malawi, when they run out of their food supply, their maize. Every year there is about a month when they’ve run out of the previous year’s harvest and before the new crop is ready to harvest. So there’s no food, and they depend on the

government and donors to provide food. They call this the hungry season. I asked the farmer, “Why don’t you plant earlier? The growing season is year round. Why do you have this hungry season year after year?” He said, “We have to wait for the rains to come before we can plant.” We’re standing within sight of Lake Malawi or Lake Nyasa – whatever name you want to use, it’s one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. I said, “There’s all the water you need right there! You can irrigate it, you can carry it up in buckets and plant your crop sooner and harvest sooner. Your kids don’t have to go hungry.” He said, “We don’t do it that way.”

I was struck wherever I went – here’s a country blessed with good soil, plenty of water, a great climate, and they still couldn’t figure out how to take advantage of those assets. It was really quite an awakening for me. I went to post with this awareness that Washington really didn’t care what we were doing out there. And I learned the Malawians didn’t seem to care all that much either. So that was the environment when I started my tenure there.

Q: What was the government like?

BROWNING: They had just less than 10 years’ experience being a democracy. The current president was a guy called Bakili Muluzi. He was a businessman, a very wealthy guy with a huge ego. He was finishing his second term, and the constitution said two terms was the limit. He wanted to stay in power longer, but parliament wouldn’t change the constitution, so that was a good thing. He hand-picked his successor, and went around the country campaigning on behalf of this guy. I went to one campaign event and watched the president at the podium with his identified successor sitting on the stage next to him, and Muluzi was saying “Vote for him and you’ll really get me. I’ll be the real power behind the throne.” The candidate never said a word at this rally. It was a government that was still in formation. They had a parliament and a civil service bureaucracy, but they were mainly inexperienced and very much in the developmental stage. They were friends of the West. Malawi had maintained relations with South Africa. Unlike all of its neighbors it remained on good terms with them. So there was that dynamic, too, that Malawi was sort of isolated among its neighbors. The army was well-respected; they were one of the most professional and apolitical armies on the continent, and had a good human rights record. They served as peacekeepers in Kosovo and Rwanda and the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo). There were a few strong institutions in Malawi, but not many.

Q: Was there the equivalent of tribal problems in Rwanda and Burundi? You were some distance removed, but not that far away.

BROWNING: There really wasn’t. Tribalism is just part of Africa. I don’t remember there being a big divide or tension between regions of the country or various tribes.

Q: What about the bureaucracy? Ministry of foreign affairs and all, problem dealing with them?

BROWNING: No. One of the things we did in the embassy was try to break this dynamic of dependency on donors. We successfully pitched our case to the U.S. agencies in Washington that provided assistance to Malawi, as well as the IFIs (international financial institutions). We did a lot of interacting with other donors there in Malawi to get them to join us in this effort. Everyone agreed the situation was not sustainable, but no one had been doing anything about it. I would

call on government ministers and say, “We can’t continue this. You guys are going to have to start taking more responsibility for your own development. We’ve seen no progress here.” I got very little pushback. The elected folks, the ministers, and the civil servant class all agreed. One minister said, “The best thing you can do is just leave and take your money with you. All the donors should go. It’s going to hurt for a while but then maybe we can finally get our act together.” These were well-educated folks; many of the top civil servants and members of parliament had been educated in the West and were knowledgeable and experienced. There was plenty of good will there and individually plenty of talent and expertise. But they were having a hard time bringing it together and having it coalesce to get some traction and get some real development going on the ground.

Q: Where did they look? It was a former British colony, right? Were the educated class educated in England?

BROWNING: Most of them, I would say.

Q: Were there any ties to the United States?

BROWNING: Not any strong ones that I remember. The U.S. is pretty far away. There wasn’t a core of Malawi immigrants or students in the U.S. that would draw even more. I’m sure there were some. Often in Africa, particularly in East Africa, American missionaries have an impact and might fund the education of particularly bright students; that was the case in Uganda and Tanzania and Kenya. But I don’t remember that in Malawi. Most of their off-shore education was in the UK.

Q: What was the capital? Blantyre or Lilongwe?

BROWNING: Lilongwe is one of those purpose-built capitals like Islamabad and Brasilia. My understanding is the South Africans designed and built it as well as the airport right outside of Lilongwe. Blantyre, down in the south, was the commercial capital. That’s where the money was, the tea and coffee plantations. We spent a lot of time on the road between the two cities.

Q: What were the principal exports?

BROWNING: Tobacco – that was the primary commercial interest between the U.S. and Malawi. They were big tobacco growers. Not big farms, but individual farmers would grow tobacco and sell it to tobacco buyers from Europe and the U.S. Malawi also welcomed a sizeable number of white Zimbabwean farmers who had been evicted from their farms by Mugabe.

Q: Did you have a problem? By the time you were there, tobacco was not looked at with great favor by the United States.

BROWNING: That’s right. And we had a healthy debate inside the embassy. Some folks struggled with it more than others. I was not particularly keen to be promoting tobacco usage. But it’s a commercial enterprise that could help counter that horrible dependency on donors. It’s

a legal enterprise in the U.S. and it helps promote American business. We were advocates for American business and industry.

Q: How about tourism? You have that beautiful lake.

BROWNING: There was some tourism. Malawi didn't have the attractions that most Europeans and Americans and East Asians are looking for when they think of Africa. They didn't have the wild game and the huge game parks where you could see elephants and giraffes and rhinos. They did have some national parks, one in particular that was lakeside; part of the lake was in the park. It was a specialized type of tourism. There would be those hardy folks who wanted to trek from Cape Town to Cairo, that kind of thing. And you'd get freshwater aquarium enthusiasts. A major export of Malawi was freshwater fish for aquariums. I can't remember all the species they had, but it was a wide variety and very colorful, so there was this little niche market for freshwater fish for aquariums. But tourism wasn't a major economic driver in Malawi.

Q: Coffee?

BROWNING: There was some coffee and tea in the higher parts of the country. Lilongwe was pretty flat; tea needed higher elevations. But yes, they had coffee and tea along with the tobacco.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing?

BROWNING: There were over 100 Peace Corps volunteers around the country. The Peace Corps work with the local government wherever they go. The government would say what they wanted the Peace Corps to focus on, this issue or that sector, and the volunteers would spend their time doing that. Some of it was education, some was agriculture, micro-enterprise. There was also a big emphasis on HIV/AIDS training. We briefed the volunteers so they could also bring HIV/AIDS awareness to whatever they were doing. Fifteen percent of adults in Malawi were HIV-positive. That had a horrible effect on the society. It was becoming a society of children and grandmothers as all the others were getting infected.

In Africa, when someone from your village dies you really have to go back to the village to be there for the funeral ceremonies. I don't know if anyone did a thorough study on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the economy, but just from our own staff at the embassy, we were constantly understaffed in our offices because our employees had to go back to their home villages to attend yet another funeral. The impact on productivity was huge. The life expectancy in Malawi dropped 20 years; it was almost 60 before HIV/AIDS and it was below 40 years because of HIV/AIDS. The impact on the social and political fabric of Malawian society was also huge. So our volunteers, in addition to their sectoral work in education and agriculture and micro-enterprise, also really tried to help educate folks on HIV/AIDS.

Q: Did you have any problems with the volunteers?

BROWNING: No. We had a couple of problems with the Peace Corps staff but not the volunteers. We had a few early departures from post because of the problems.

Q: Maybe without names could you tell me what the problems were?

BROWNING: Just some issues of misuse of government property and abuse of position. That's about all I can say.

Q: What about Malawi and the UN? Obviously it had a vote. How did they stand, UN-wise?

BROWNING: The UN was present in Malawi and was focused on economic development. Like I said, the Malawi military was active in peacekeeping. As far as Malawi's votes in the UN, they were not standouts or leaders in any concern or area. I think they again were trying to coalesce as a society and a government. They were generally pro-West. If I remember correctly, they were one of those African countries that retained relations with Taiwan and did not have relations with Beijing; I think that eventually changed. That's a residue of the president for life, Hastings Banda. He was a real conservative dictator. I don't remember Malawi ever being a major force in the UN.

Q: You were saying it didn't have problems with its neighbors; it has about four or five different neighbors. Any difficulties while you were there with neighbors?

BROWNING: No. During the apartheid era, they were really isolated because Tanzania primarily and other front line states were really anti-apartheid and were giving sanctuary and safe haven to the ANC (African National Congress), Nelson Mandela's group. But after the fall of apartheid, Malawi worked its way back into the good graces of its neighbors. They joined regional organizations in Southern Africa.

The drive from Lilongwe down south to Blantyre the commercial capital was interesting to me. The road would occasionally veer off into Mozambique, its neighbor to the east. You really couldn't distinguish between the two— there were no border posts, no guards, no fences, the road just weaved in and out of Mozambique. The villagers were — you know, the typical colonial map-drawing pattern of drawing straight lines, they would split tribes and villages in half. But the villagers ignored the colonial borders and would move freely back and forth. It was a pretty open society in those regions. There was a bit of a problem with Mozambican villagers going to health clinics in Malawi because it was a mile from their houses as opposed to 20 miles to the nearest clinic in Mozambique. But they seemed to work that out on the ground. I don't remember any conflict with any of its neighbors at all.

Q: How about your staff? How did you find them?

BROWNING: Young! (Laughter) It was a small embassy; 28 direct-hire staff from all agencies — State, AID, CDC (Centers for Disease Control), Peace Corps staff. On the State side there were 13 State Department employees. Eight of them were serving in their positions for the first time. So we had a first time ambassador, first-time DCM, first-time management officer, first-time econ section chief and others. They were very bright, very eager, but the inexperience was evident. That's fine; you deal with it. And, as I said, Washington wasn't paying attention. We really didn't need a wealth of experience in Malawi. I think a third of the State staff were on their first tour. So there was a lot of acculturation and training going on.

I had previously served on a promotion panel for seniors – OC (counselor) to MC (minister-counselor). I remember reading an efficiency report of one senior serving as ambassador in West Africa who had developed what he called “State University.” He had the same situation I had – a very young, inexperienced staff. He set up a regular program of classes on the State Department, its culture, career development techniques, the way we do things, strategies for bidding on next assignments, that sort of thing. So I set up something similar in Malawi – regular sessions for these new employees on who we are, how we get things done, recommendations on career development. That was very helpful; it was appreciated by them to have a senior officer help them navigate through the State bureaucracy. Most of them hadn’t served in Washington yet, so it was still a big unknown to them.

One of the first things I had to do when I got to Malawi was help the embassy staff understand where Washington placed Malawi on its list of priorities. When I arrived at post, I did what every new ambassador does – I sent out a cable to Washington and neighboring posts saying, “I have arrived and seized power and I’m now in charge.” An ambassador in a neighboring post who happened to be an A-100 classmate of mine sent me back an official-informal cable saying, “Welcome to the neighborhood, Steve, glad you’re here. By the way, Malawi sends out more reporting cables than all of the other embassies in the region combined, and nobody reads them.”

I wanted to maintain the enthusiasm and eagerness and productivity of my young staff, but I also wanted their efforts to be productive and appropriately focused. So in my first few months, we spent a lot of time re-orienting the efforts and workload of the staff. I wanted much less reporting and much more interaction with Malawians and their government and our counterparts in other donor embassies, trying to get a handle on how to break this cycle of dependency. At first their egos were bruised and they were unhappy that the secretary wasn’t reading every weekly cable that they had been sending on the tobacco crop in Malawi. But eventually they understood. I said, “This is really a very liberating thing for us. If Washington doesn’t care what we’re doing, we can do anything we want short of declaring war on Malawi. We have a lot of freedom. Let’s take advantage of that.” Eventually they understood. So we were able to shift their focus from a very heavy emphasis on reporting to one of getting to know the country and seeing what we could do to help them develop.

I was very impressed and proud of the staff. They shifted gears, really got with the program. It was a good staff. I was happy to be with them.

Q: What was the human rights and role of women situation in Malawi?

BROWNING: It was pretty good. The military had a very good record on human rights, and that’s often where countries in Africa have human rights abuses. The government was extremely conservative; this is a carry-on effect from Hastings Banda and his almost Victorian attitudes. There was some problem with human trafficking, but compared to other countries in Africa, it wasn’t as big of a problem. I don’t remember human rights being a major focus for us or for any of the other Western governments who were working there.

Q: You were there when to when?

BROWNING: August of '03 to May of '04. I was there nine months.

End of reader