

MALI

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ARVA C. FLOYD
Officer in Charge of Senegal, Mali and Mauritania
Washington, DC (1960-1961)

Arva Floyd was born and raised in Georgia and educated at Emory University and the University of Edinburgh. After serving with the US Army in World War II and in the Occupying Forces in Austria after the war, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Djakarta, Indonesia in 1952. His foreign postings include Indonesia, South Africa, Martinique and Brussels, where he dealt with matters concerning NATO, European Security and Disarmament. In his Washington assignments Mr. Floyd also dealt with these issues. From 1978 to 1980 Mr. Floyd was Foreign Policy Advisor to United States Coast Guard. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

FLOYD: I was in charge of Senegal and Mali.

Q: And you did that from '60 until when?

FLOYD: Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania, until about '62, late '61. A couple of years roughly.

Q: Senegal was the major country there, wasn't it?

FLOYD: Yes, Senegal was certainly more advanced, in the usual sense of that word. However, we paid a good deal of attention to Mali because it had been left-leaning. Modibo Keita, the president of Mali, Sekou Toure, the president of Guinea, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana formed this loose kind of alliance. They were the more anti-Western bunch, and they got themselves involved in a non-aligned movement.

Q: Who was the president of Senegal?

FLOYD: Leopold Senghor.

Q: Was he a senator in France, and a poet...

FLOYD: Yes; he was a former senator and a member of parliament from Senegal, a man of letters of some distinction, and a French poet. Senegal, of course, had had a much longer and

deeper exposure to French influence than any of the other liberated French colonies, and was, as a result, much more sophisticated intellectually. They were one of the few newly-independent African countries to effect a peaceful transfer of power when Senghor left. And, to the best of my knowledge, while there have been occasional coups and things like that, I don't think there's been a military uprising or military takeover since independence. They've done relatively well that way. They're still poor; they're not going very far economically; but, there was a certain depth into their political culture that the other African countries didn't have.

Q: Were we fairly comfortable with how Senegal was doing?

FLOYD: At the time that I stopped following it, yes. On the other hand, Mali didn't do at all well, in spite of our interest in it. Keita was kicked out and confined; and the military took over; and, it hasn't been a good story at all. Much the same in Guinea. People thought that Sekou Toure was one of the great dominant leaders, who was going to come out of Africa. There was a much darker side to all of that. He produced nothing of any real lasting consequence.

Q: He had a rather brutal regime.

FLOYD: Quite brutal, yes.

Q: The Kennedy Administration came in while you were there. Soapy Williams was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs; he came in with quite a splash.

FLOYD: He did, yes.

Q: Was there an effort among those of you that were looking at this to try to calm him down, to keep him from getting over-enthusiastic? What was happening in your area?

FLOYD: No, no. We were caught up in the excitement. It started, actually, during the Eisenhower years. Sekou Toure the Guinean president, was the first sub-Saharan, black African leader to be invited to the United States on a state visit, I think, apart from perhaps Liberia. This was during the time of John Foster Dulles. I got myself trained as a French interpreter while I was working at INR as I was sort of bored with INR. I thought that if I got myself trained as a French interpreter, I might get some trips out of it. The first trip I got was to interpret for Sekou Toure, which was not quite what I expected.

Q: How did you find him as a person?

FLOYD: Well, you never felt there was a great distance between oneself and him. He was a man of enormous eloquence. He could speak impromptu; he had a powerful speaking voice, and he had these rhythmic cadences that would come out. I would not be doing simultaneous, but sequential interpreting, as he went around the States and addressed these different groups. They were just entranced by him. Since I had to do the interpretation, I realized that there was more rhythm and force to what he said, than there was actual meaning. He wasn't saying very much, but he was making a very powerful impression. He was an extraordinarily talented man in that respect. I don't think he had much formal education; I don't know how much he had had, but he

was able to handle French grammatically perfectly, and with great fluency and eloquence. There was the sense about the Guineans – him and his entourage – a deep suspicion about everything that had happened or might happen. They were in foreign territory, and they knew it; and Africans, perhaps more than other people, tend to be very suspicious of outsiders. So it was a pins and needles kind of experience; you felt the slightest thing could touch off a firestorm. It was not a relaxing experience at all, but it was fascinating.

Q: Obviously, one of the things we want these leaders and their entourages to do is to come and see the United States and appreciate it. But if somebody is coming and highly suspicious, they can also find things to support those suspicions. Do you think this was a positive experience for him?

FLOYD: The fact that we invited him was a positive experience for him. If I made Toure sound like an ingénue or something like that, I didn't mean to. He was a very savvy political operator, and he knew that in having refused to join the French communauté, he was isolated. He needed an opening in our direction, and we were quite happy to make that kind of gesture at the time, because the Republicans wanted to show that they were not in the business of losing Africa as they had supposedly lost China. It led on to some aid programs, I suppose; but, what impression he formed of the United States I don't know, other than he was undoubtedly struck by how friendly people were. I think he went away with the sense that Americans were not inherently racist in any manner of speaking. But, then, everything turned sour for him, and what kind of impression he had, didn't really matter.

Q: Was Mauritania this sort of a sand pile that we had little interest in?

FLOYD: Pretty much a sand pile that we had little interest in. This was still in the Republican days. These people would come to address the United Nations and then would always try to migrate down to Washington. One of the first to do that was the Mauritanian, William Tubman, he came down to see Eisenhower right in the middle of a snowstorm, a blizzard.

Q: Were you at the meeting?

FLOYD: I didn't interpret for the meeting; I was there to greet him at the railway station. He came down by train.

I was involved in the Modibo Keita, the president of Mali, came over, along with Sukarno of Indonesia, I guess it was just the two of them, to report to President Kennedy about the doings of the non-aligned meeting in Belgrade. That was the meeting that took place right after Nikita Khrushchev had broken the test ban moratorium, which had infuriated Kennedy and the entire administration.

Modibo Keita, the president of Mali, and Sukarno of Indonesia, were deputized by the non-aligned meeting in Belgrade to come over and report on the proceedings to Kennedy, and in particular, to explain why they had not criticized the Soviets. Well, Kennedy wanted an explanation as to why they had not criticized the Soviets' breach of the test ban moratorium. I sat in on the meeting in which this conversation took place. I would say that while Keita was a man

of great dignity, he was obviously not possessed of a brilliant intellect. He was certainly not on the same level as Senghor and nothing like as eloquent as Toure. So, Keita was largely silent during the proceedings.

Sukarno had obviously met Kennedy before. He had an almost scrofulous look about him at this stage. He had also deteriorated a great deal physically. He was, in my opinion, a little ridiculous with his marshall's baton and his military uniform, when his only military act, to my knowledge, had been to walk 30 miles to surrender to the Dutch. This all struck me as very ridiculous.

I rather expected that Jack Kennedy would simply blow them over. But he didn't do that. He was nervous; it was not the kind of commanding Kennedy that one normally imagines. His voice had a kind of catch to it. He made his point, but he didn't make it in any overwhelming sort of way. It was not a terribly impressive performance on the part of any of these three gentlemen. I don't remember precisely, at this late date, what exactly was said, but that was my general impression of it.

Kennedy, however, was at that time still caught up in his own electoral thesis that Africa was the continent that we couldn't risk losing in the future as we had "lost Asia", before. So, the following day, he invited Keita to come over to the White House informally, and to talk with him. This was the Malian we were talking about. He took him up into the personal living quarters, and he made quite an effort to be friendly, inquiring about Malian attitudes and Malian prospects. For Kennedy to do this with the chief of state of a second or third-rate African country was quite striking, and showed that, at that point in his administration, he still thought Africa was very important.

Q: I must say that it was after the Belgrade conference of the non-aligned nations that Nehru made the comment that was interpreted as, "well, while a Soviet test bomb isn't bad, an American test bomb is bad."

FLOYD: Very much in character.

Q: It soured our relationship with that whole non-aligned group, really. We figured these were a bunch of either soft liberals or communist dupes.

FLOYD: I would say that while all of them had acquired a good deal of facility with the language of the left. They were basically people trying to follow their own interests as they saw it and that while people like Keita or Sukarno weren't great statesmen, I don't think they were anybody's dupes.

Q: But I think this was the perception.

FLOYD: Oh, the perception was definitely that.

ROBERT V. KEELEY

**Political Officer
Bamako (1961-1963)**

Ambassador Robert V. Keeley was born in Lebanon of American parents in 1929. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in Jordan, Mali, Uganda, Cambodia, and ambassadorships to Greece, Mauritius, and Zimbabwe. Ambassador Keeley was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1991.

Q: What was the situation in Bamako in 1961 when you arrived at post?

KEELEY: It was a brand new embassy, still quartered in the Grand Hotel. The hotel was grand by interior Africa colonial standards. Our offices were a suite of rooms that had belonged to the manager. I lived alone in a hotel room for approximately the first three months; the family did not accompany me at first because there was no housing when I left for Bamako. It was a very primitive operation; we finally found a bank building that we bought and renovated into a chancery—more or less adequately. We eventually acquired some housing; it wasn't too bad, but it has vastly improved since then. From the point of view of sheer living, it was the most difficult post I was ever assigned to. The Malians went off in their own direction; they nationalized their currency abruptly, without understanding the consequences. They took one economic decision that literally ended all imports. We couldn't get enough food and we had very difficult diplomatic relations. The Ambassador (a later one, Bill Handley) and I once ordered substantial amounts of food, liquor and other supplies from Peter Justesen in Denmark; this was a shipment of six months' worth of supplies for the staff and the families. By the time the shipment had arrived, the Malians had decided that diplomats did not deserve duty free imports. They insisted that we pay duty; we refused as a matter of principle. An impasse resulted. So the goods sat in a warehouse for a long time; by the time they were released, all was rotten and spoiled. After a while, we decided to send a truck down to Abidjan to load up with supplies. It was difficult living. Mali was a very poor country. It had poor relationships with most of the rest of the world, including the U.S. They were worst with the French, so we played an important role because the Mali-France relationship was so bad. The regime was socialist, headed by people who had been trained to be teachers by the French. It was almost the opposite of Senegal, which had and still has a good relationship with France, as did the Ivory Coast. Mali has gone through many vicissitudes, similar to Guinea. Sekou Toure in Guinea opted out of de Gaulle's "union" and led the way to independence for those West African countries.

Shortly after I arrived and while still living in the hotel, a union of Guinea, Mali and Ghana was created. The three leaders met; I watched the dancing in the streets from the balcony of my room. I predicted a very short life for that union because among other matters, they didn't have a common language. Toure and Modibo Keita would speak to each other in French and there was no one there to translate for Kwame Nkrumah, who didn't understand a word of what they were saying. We played a major role in Mali because the French were in such bad odor. The French quietly encouraged us to play that role. During this period in much of formerly French Africa, there developed a competition and even a hostility between the French and American missions. The French guarded their ex-colonial status jealously, trying to translate that into a position of privilege in the post-independence relationship with their former domains. They were very concerned that the United States might replace them; we came in with anti-colonial credentials

and with President Kennedy's popular image because he was seen as having favored the Algerian rebels. You could see pictures of Kennedy even in the remotest parts of the African continent—in huts; he was a real hero. You could understand why the French saw us as a potential threat to their continued dominance. For some reason or other, the situation in Mali was different. We were very close to the French; they encouraged us to do all we could because they felt shut out; they believed that some mission had to uphold the Western position in Mali. The government was very close to the Soviets and the Eastern Europeans—the Poles, the Czechs, the East Germans—who were heavily represented in Bamako. The West was outnumbered diplomatically.

We did one interesting thing: the Malians wanted to break their military ties to the French; their troops had been trained by the French during the colonial period; they wore French uniforms; their equipment was French; etc. They did turn to the Soviets to some extent, but they didn't want to be beholden to any single nation. The Malians are very independent-minded people and quite admirable: they are austere, tall, upright, and good looking. They are in distinct contrast to the people of the coastal countries, who tended to be the exact opposite: short, round, happy-go-lucky, loving singing and dancing, drinking lots of beer, enjoying life and not worrying about the future too much; if you mentioned "austerity" they would ask "why?" It is an entirely different outlook on life and consequently produces a different life-style.

The Malians turned to us and asked whether we would train their paratroopers. Some of their military officers were apparently impressed by our capabilities in that area. We had an awful hard time selling that request to Washington. I was heavily involved in the process since there was not any one else—no 7ite7hé, no military personnel whatsoever, in the Embassy—and it was not in the purview of the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), as the assistance agency was then known, which had a substantial mission in Mali. That is when my French became most useful because I had to draw up a military assistance agreement after we agreed to provide the military training. We established a military mission known as MALMISH—a typical military acronym, unfortunate in some ways, but that is what it was called. Colonel Frank Mahin, a wonderful character who became a close friend, headed up the mission. We brought in three DC-3 (C-47) aircraft and a training team which trained a company, perhaps even a battalion, of Malian paratroopers.

Our principal objective in providing military assistance was to prevent the Soviets and the Eastern Europeans from being the sole providers of military assistance to Mali. The French encouraged us to do so because they couldn't; normally, they would have been the providers of the assistance. They were doing so in every other former French African colony except perhaps Guinea; in some countries, like Chad, they had even left their own officers in place to command the local troops. In Mali, they were foreclosed from this pattern for political reasons; we jumped into the breach just to get a foothold and prevent a Communist monopoly.

It was a successful program. The Malians took to it marvelously. They were well trained; we supplied the boots and the parachutes; they learned to pack their own gear and they all made their jumps and qualified. They got their special parachute wings, etc. Colonel Mahin, who was not a paratrooper, took the training along with the Malians—he also got his badge. He even talked me into taking the course and gave me a free pair of boots. When the Ambassador heard about it,

he called me in and absolutely forbade me to proceed, because if anything had happened to me, he was concerned that it would take the State Department at least a year to find someone to send to Bamako, and even then the officer would refuse to come to “this God- forsaken” place. Also, if I broke a leg, I would be out of action for a long time. He therefore denied me the opportunity to take the training. So I kept the boots, but never took the training. To return the boots would have created more red tape to explain whence they had come than was worth it. So I just missed becoming a paratrooper.

The wonderful day came when this Malian paratroop group graduated. They all made a final ceremonial jump with the Malian President in attendance and won their wings. The three C-47s filed their flight plans to leave via Dakar and return to their bases in Germany, taking the American training team with them. The President, Modibo Keita, heard of that and sent word that he wanted to see the Ambassador. I normally acted as the Ambassador’s interpreter, because his French was not really all that good, for all the meetings that he had held and all of the conversations that he had had since my arrival at post. I accompanied him to every meeting he had, whether it was with the President, a Cabinet member, the Soviet or the French Ambassador; I did the translating and wrote the memoranda of conversation after the meeting. My French was by no means perfect, but the Malians’ English was non-existent. So I went with Ambassador Wright. The President said he had been told that our planes were leaving. He then asked what his paratroopers were going to use for their jumps. The Ambassador said that we had agreed to train the troops; we had not agreed to supply an air force. The President noted that we had supplied the boots and the parachutes; they would now be useless if the Malians had no planes. He wanted a battalion of paratroops who could be used to control the often dissident tribes—the Tuareg and the Peul and the Fulani and related Saharan tribes in the north and east. He had all sorts of tribal problems in the desert regions of the country; he viewed the paratroopers as his means to get those tribes back into line should they become unruly; they would jump out of the sky and frighten the hell out of them, which indeed would have happened. The tribesmen were people who rode around on camels, and certainly would not be expecting people coming out of the sky. President Keita said he could not send the troops by truck; it would not make the same impression. It had never dawned on the President that the American planes and trainers would come in, do their job, and then leave.

It became a very embarrassing moment for us; the Malians had gone to the Soviets for their air force support and had received a version of the Ilyushin transport, a turbo-prop plane. These planes flew too fast for paratrooper jumps; much slower planes, like C-47s or C-130s, were required—something that could slow down enough so that when the trooper jumps out of the door, he doesn’t get knocked unconscious by the force of the wind. The Russian planes were just too fast. So the President had no planes for his troops to jump out of; we never did supply any. The Malians tried to acquire them elsewhere, but by the time I left, the problem had not been solved. When I returned to Washington, I had a very difficult time explaining why we had agreed to train Malian paratroops. Our officials wanted to know who the enemy was. I told them it was for internal stability; the paratroopers were to control the tribes. That didn’t entirely satisfy my colleagues, but I added that if we hadn’t done it, they would have turned to the Soviets. It was a typical East-West confrontation situation; to keep the Communists out, we ended up with the task and the military assistance. Of course, Washington had approved the program, on the usual basis of competing with the Soviets for influence in the Third World.

The issue of the planes had never arisen before. There was never any thought in our minds that we were doing anything else but lending the planes for training purposes; we had no idea of donating them. We hadn't considered it. I don't remember giving that possibility a moment's thought. Our job, as spelled out very specifically in the Memorandum of Agreement, was to train a certain number of Malian troops to a level of proficiency so that they could jump out of planes, without being killed and with all their equipment, landing safely on the ground, and so forth. That was as far as the agreement went and certainly as far as we had intended to go. We had in Mali an economic aid and technical assistance program which was just beginning; the French were still welcomed in that field, but less than others. We worked on the Niger project, which was a vast irrigation scheme along the Niger River which had been in the works for years under French supervision. The Soviets gave economic assistance. I had a tooth problem one day and went to the hospital where I was treated by a Bulgarian lady dentist. Different countries were staffing different Ministries and activities. The French had not literally pulled out wholesale; it was not quite as bad as Guinea; they hadn't ripped out the telephones, but the French had pretty much deserted Mali, mainly because the Malians wanted to reduce their ties to France.

I should also mention the schooling problem. My son was too young for school, although he eventually went to a play group, which had no teacher or equipment, and this didn't provide him a good start in school. No Head Start program in Mali. But my daughter was a second grader. There was no American school in Mali, of course; she knew no French—she had only studied in a very good English school in Jordan, taught by a Britisher—a Miss Webster, who was very famous. There my daughter received an excellent grounding as a student. In Bamako, there were something like 27 nationalities represented in the diplomatic corps—many with children—but the schools were all in French. Some ambassadors went to the Ministry of Education and pointed out that the kids could not follow the French curriculum. The Malians very generously set up a special class for diplomatic children with their very best French teacher—Madame Chalmeau, who became a life long friend, and who was a superb teacher. She was a professional teacher and her husband was an inspector of education, seconded by the French to Mali under their technical assistance program. She just taught French to these kids, about thirty of them, of some ten nationalities, who came from all the far corners of the world and of all ages from grades one to six. At the end of the year, she had all those kids studying all subjects in French.

Unfortunately for me, at that stage something happened to spoil our educational situation. We got a new Ambassador, the late Bill Handley, who then and later became a very close friend. He was a career USIA officer—he was the first USIA officer to be appointed as an Ambassador. This was the result of President Kennedy's intervention; he thought it a shame that there were no USIA career officials who had been appointed as ambassadors. He called Ed Murrow, who was then the head of USIA, and asked for a nomination for an ambassadorship. The name Murrow gave was Bill Handley and that is how he ended up in Mali. He had excellent French; he didn't need an interpreter. Therefore my role changed; one of the things he did was to assign me to start an American school because he had a son who knew no French. The Mali government's effort was terminated after one year. It was then up to the foreign community to sink or swim. Handley's son therefore did not have the opportunity to learn French with Madame Chalmeau; so he decided that his son and all the other children that had come after that one year's effort had to have some English language educational opportunities. Our aid mission was growing and

American Foreign Service personnel were reluctant to come to Mali because of the schooling situation. AID had money and would be available to help. AID had an executive officer, Charlie Myers, who also became a close friend; he had no children but he loved kids. He saved my neck by giving me some space in one of his warehouses; he put air-conditioners in because Mali had a terrible climate—the worst I have ever lived in: very hot part of the year, very dry part of the year, then very wet, and around Christmas and New Year there are about six very pleasant weeks, but then the cycle begins all over again. We had enough money from AID to hire one teacher; I recruited a lady from Washington. She taught grades one through six—all subjects. Madame Chalmeau taught our kids French a few hours a week. We started with two kids—the Ambassador’s son and my daughter. By the time I left, it had built up to twelve students and I understand it is still a going concern. It is called the International School or something like that; so it was a success. Although I put a lot of effort into it, I don’t mention the school for that reason; rather I just wanted to provide an illustration of the kind of activity that the Department of State is not able to conduct; without AID money, support, interest and commitment we could never have started that school. State’s attitude has been mostly that the Foreign Service is on its own and has to do the best it can without State support. If the children have to go to foreign schools, so be it. Of course, I did that as a child and never felt that I had suffered, but then I didn’t live in remote places like Bamako and other similar posts in which I have served. As a child, it was Montreal and Thessaloniki and Antwerp and Athens. It is also an illustration of activities a Foreign Service officer becomes involved in, although certainly not part of the official job description.

Q: Mali was the first country you had served in which had contact with the Soviet Bloc. Did you see much of the Soviet and Eastern European missions?

KEELEY: We did, but only officially, not socially. They were not personally hostile, but contact was not extensive. I remember one event clearly and that was when our Ambassador called on his Soviet counter-part, which he liked to do periodically just to trade notes. We worked very closely with the British and French Embassies. We were sort of the Western triumvirate. But our Ambassador liked to call on the others as well and I went along as the interpreter. The Soviets also had an interpreter. It was interesting to note that the Soviets were having all the same problems that we were except worse. They had trouble staffing their Embassy; couldn’t get new recruits, personnel didn’t stay, education problems. For them it was even worse because they are racists—much more than we might be. The Soviet Ambassador was very frank about it; most of his staff felt uncomfortable being in a black country having to deal so closely with all the black people. What concerned him most of all—which tells you something about the Soviet attitude—was the terrible paranoia that he and his staff had about disease: fear of contracting terrible African diseases to which the Soviets thought they were very susceptible—according to the Ambassador—because they didn’t have a natural immunity. He had all sorts of “scientific” explanations, but in any case, he kept losing staff who would just pack up one day and leave for home on “medical” evacuation. They were frightened that they would get some kind of infection for which there was no cure. (This was long before AIDS.) There was a leper colony near Bamako. Sensible people know that it takes a person half a lifetime to acquire leprosy, but the Soviets, much more than our people, were really fearful of “germs;” it was particularly a problem for them because many of them were working in the medical field; they also staffed many Ministries as technical advisors and had to work closely with the Malians. We didn’t

socialize very much with the Soviets. We didn't avoid them particularly, but they lived a closed existence in those days; they didn't travel about freely. They were always under KGB surveillance; they traveled in groups. If we found someone who was particularly outgoing, as we did later in Uganda where we met a very engaging young couple, you assumed that they were KGB people because they were allowed freedoms that others weren't, such as having dinner at our house alone without anyone else present who could report on them. In those days the surveillance was pretty severe. But for example, when our military group came, we formed a volleyball team and challenged other embassies, including the Soviets, to matches. Eventually we created a league. The Soviets were extremely good in volleyball; all the Eastern Europeans seemed to excel at volleyball. We didn't beat the Soviets but we put up a good fight. That kind of socializing did go on, but there were no close relations.

Our people never had the same reaction to the medical problems in Mali; we of course had people get sick. Our children suffered from many strange bites, lizard burns, unexplained fevers. My wife had a fever that lingered on for months. The leprosarium was the only place she could go for blood tests. She often took new wives to visit the leprosarium, which she had learned about from the French doctors. It was a struggle in Mali for our wives and mothers to keep healthy food on the table and the children free of disease. In our house we had only one air conditioner—that's all the Embassy allowed as our ration—so for all our tour all four of us slept in one room in the hot season, which was a good part of the year. We had no hot water in our kitchen, until Charlie Myers of the AID mission took pity on us and got us a heater for water. There were no fresh milk products, or eggs—I could go on and on, or even better, my wife could.

I had a medical problem—a fatty tumor on my back—and had to be evacuated about six months before my tour was to end. We had become very close friends with a French doctor—Dr. Rivoalen—and his wife. He was a fine doctor, military trained like many French doctors, but was in private practice and would come to see us day or night for any problem that we might have. He looked after all of the Embassy's medical problems; without him we would have been in dire straits indeed. I showed him my tumor; he felt around it and said that he could take it out. He asked me how much longer I would be in Bamako. When I told him that I would be there another six months, he said that he could send the tissues to Paris to be examined by a pathologist (there was none in Mali) but what if the tissues or the report got lost in the mails? Then I would have to worry for at least six months or more about whether the tumor was benign. He thought it would be better for me to go to the Army hospital in Frankfurt for the operation. So I was evacuated and had the surgery done there; fortunately, the tumor was benign and I returned to finish my tour. They were great bridge players, the Rivoalens. He later died of a strange kind of cancer, perhaps from a poison he picked up in Mali.

Medical care was at a level where you really didn't want to get sick. Tom McKiernan, our DCM, an extremely able officer, was Chargé for a period and he got shingles on his optic nerve. It was extremely painful; very difficult to treat. He was and has always been a very conscientious officer. I was the next ranking person. The poor guy couldn't stand light and had to stay in bed, in a darkened room. This went on for about a week while he was Chargé. He refused to be evacuated until the Ambassador returned. I couldn't talk him into it. I would call on him every two or three hours or so to get his instructions and to bring him up to date on what was going on at the Embassy. Finally, the Ambassador returned and we evacuated Tom to Germany. When he

got there, he was asked what treatment he had received. Dr. Rivoalen had given him Vitamin B-1 injections. The Frankfurt medics said that that was exactly the right treatment, but they tripled the dose. Eventually he recovered, although he had severe scarring on his forehead as a result.

There were other similar cases. We had a young USIA officer, Phil Pillsbury of the flour-milling family, who while opening a beer can, nearly severed his thumb. The cut was so severe that we had to evacuate him; there was not a surgeon in Bamako who could deal with a severed tendon to save the thumb. Those are the situations that make a post like Bamako difficult to serve in. You are always a little bit on edge; not that you are afraid of black people or diseases, like the Russians, but there is a premium on staying healthy because if you get sick it is either evacuation or worse.

Q: Did the attitude of the Mali Government change while you were there?

KEELEY: During the period I was in Mali the relationship mostly degenerated. As I mentioned earlier, the worst action they took was to issue their own currency. They left the CFA franc area, which was supported by France; by the time they re-entered it years later, they had to devalue by some factor of five or ten. It was a very dramatic event. Modibo Keita walked into Parliament one evening and announced that Mali would have its own currency; it had already been printed, with his own picture on it. Completely oblivious of what was about to happen, we were playing poker in the Central Bank Governor's apartment; he, the host, was a Frenchman because that was one position that the French held onto. Soldiers came to the apartment with guns; broke up our game; demanded that he give them the keys to the vault. They went to the vault, apparently expecting to find bars of gold and other valuables to support the new currency; they found nothing but some paper—communications with Paris. It was a shameful performance. The economy went into a severe decline. Eventually, there was a military coup and Modibo Keita was thrown out. He was a very honorable and admirable man in many ways, but he had certain *idées fixes* about economics and politics that were heavily ideological in nature and impracticable, but which he insisted on implementing. When the military took control, the new President was the commander of the paratroop battalion which we had trained. At this point, I no longer had to justify the training program; it was then considered a stroke of genius. It was believed by some that CIA had engineered the coup, which as far as I know was not true. Moussa Traore took over, but he has also been overthrown. It was one of the few instances in my experience where a little foresight paid off handsomely. Traore turned things around and our relationship with Mali became much friendlier; he was much more pragmatic. Mali was still neutral, but no longer “pro-communist.” Now, like most of Africa, Mali is privatizing and trying to establish a market economy and all the wonderful things that we have been preaching for these many years.

I should not finish this chapter without some further reminiscences. We had a visit by “Soapy” Williams, then the Assistant Secretary for Africa. He liked to go out and meet the folks, like any American politician. We took him to Timbuktu, which he had always wanted to visit. He must have had his own chartered or U.S. Air Force plane. We all flew up there; I have it on film. It was an extraordinary scene; the former governor of Michigan working the crowd in the main square as if it were Cobo Square in Detroit during one of his political campaigns for governor. He shook every hand of every person there; these were tribesmen coming out of the desert in full

regalia with their swords and shields and spears. It was a sight to behold! Those are some of the moments you live for and never forget, unlike the much more sober and serious work of an embassy.

By the time our tour in Mali ended, my family was not in good shape healthwise. I myself was not well. I had lost a lot of weight—40 or 45 pounds—mainly because of the climate. I was down to about 125 pounds; much too thin.

ROSCOE S. SUDDARTH
General Services Officer/Political Officer
Bamako (1961-1963)

Ambassador Suddarth was born in Kentucky and raised primarily in Tennessee. He was educated at Yale and Oxford Universities and Massachusetts Institute of Technology and served in the US Air Force before joining the Foreign Service in 1961. Primarily a Middle East specialist the Ambassador served as Political Officer and Counselor in Yemen, Libya, Jordan and in Saudi Arabia, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served with the Department of State in Washington in senior level positions concerning primarily Middle East and Political Military matters. In 1987 he was appointed Ambassador to Jordan, where he served until 1990. Ambassador Suddarth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: You were in Mali from when to when?

SUDDARTH: I was there from late 1961 through 1963.

Q: What was Mali like? Could you describe the situation there?

SUDDARTH: Well, it was in a state of decolonizing. I had a personal experience because my lovely wife, Michele, of now 36 years, I met in Mali. Her father ran a company that built most of the roads in Mali, a French company that was just demobilizing and leaving. They happened to live across the street. So, I had a wonderful year and a half there, met her, wooed her. We got married in Mali. So, I picked the fruits of colonialism. My wife is very liberal in her views and always has been on those issues. But the French were pulling out.

One of the important early memories was, there was a dam on the Niger River that was very important to harness energy and keep floods from occurring. The U.S. made a kind of pass at financing this dam. It really offended the French, who immediately came up and provided the funding that they otherwise would not have provided in order to keep the U.S. from gaining a foothold in Mali. It was also a crossroads and a competition for both the Russians, the communist regimes, and China, as well as the United States. They weren't competing themselves directly, but uppermost in our minds was how to win the hearts and minds of the Malians from these communists. Of course, the French communists had cultivated the colonials in Paris. Many

of them had studied in Paris. Modibo Keita, who was the president, had a politburo. So, they had the trappings of a socialist, if not a communist, regime. The U.S. was trying to use our influence to steer them toward a more neutral course.

Q: I was interviewing somebody not too long ago who was during this period going to the Sorbonne and saying how the French communist student thing would sort of go after colonial students and pair them up, make sure they got good quarters and were taken care of and all, and it seemed to be a very effective way of recruiting people or at least bringing them all to sympathy for their side.

SUDDARTH: Well, that was my experience. A lot of the top leaders in Mali had been schooled in France. There were a lot of French communists who were working in the Malian administration and were obvious influences on them. So, my memories were trying to convert the Malians to some mild form of capitalism in a country that had relatively few resources. It was mainly desert. Timbuktu was there. The French and the Office du Niger had tried a cotton irrigation scheme at the turn of the century, which hadn't worked out. So, Mali was really dependent on peanuts, cattle and very little else. They didn't have the riches of Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, and places like that.

Q: Was the problem in Algeria at all reflected down there or was it too much desert in between?

SUDDARTH: No, I remember the Algiers Accords. I mean, everybody read about it. It was an important agreement for the Common Market while I was in Mali. But it didn't have a direct effect. Mali was the head of the Casablanca Charter, which was a grouping of Ghana, Mali, and Egypt, among others. Of course, they were very supportive of the Algerian revolution and independence movement. But they weren't directly involved. I don't recall that they were supplying guerrillas or anything like that.

Q: Who was your ambassador while you were there?

SUDDARTH: Bill Handley, who later was ambassador to Turkey. He had been in USIA and was a deputy assistant secretary for the Near East as well. He was a very nice man and a fine ambassador. I liked him a lot. I was moved after a year as general services officer to the Political Section. I'm glad that I had that early year. It was very good for my French. I was working with French contractors and we were leasing houses. I had one of the better developed home repairs vocabularies in French. I've forgotten most of that stuff.

But then Bob Keeley was a great influence. He was the head of the Political Section. Bob was my predecessor here at the Middle East Institute. Bob was a brilliant officer who went on to be ambassador to Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Greece. So, he and Louise gave me away in marriage. They are very close friends.

We had a good AID mission, Dr. Samuel Adams, a distinguished black academic was the AID director. I thought we really tried to do our best to send very good people to Africa in those days.

Q: It was considered glamorous, the way to go... It was later that there was a lot of disillusion about it. What about as a political officer, was there much of a political life to report on?

SUDDARTH: I remember going to endless party conventions. They were trying to aid the Communist Party. They were trying also to conceal the fact basically that the Bambara tribe under Modibo Keita (There were seven tribes in Mali.), were really the dominant tribe and were giving out most of their political favors and so forth. Being immersed in the French community (and also in the Lebanese community), I got a sense that there was rampant corruption and the French didn't mince any words in terms of finding ways to get contracts. It usually meant paying a bribe to some official who was important. So, it was a little disillusioning for a wet behind the ears idealist to realize that it was a society that seemed to work on bribes.

Q: What about Soviet influence? What were they doing there?

SUDDARTH: Well, they were giving Ilyushins for Air Mali. They had a barter trade agreement where they would buy peanuts. But it was pretty obvious that it was a feeble effort on both the Russians and the Chinese, although the Malians always held it up to us as a way of getting more American assistance. We were not particularly generous. We didn't really feel that we wanted to be that much of a supporter of this regime. I noticed in the paper this morning that there is a big story about Malian municipal elections, which were not occurring in my day. So, I think they've made several leaps toward a more democratic process.

Q: Thirty-five years later.

SUDDARTH: Yes. I remember being married. We had to have a civil wedding as well as a church wedding. The civil wedding was the day before. It was performed by the mayor, Mayor Coulybali, of Bamako. I had to swear that I hadn't paid more than two cows for my wife as a bride price. I told them, "In our system, you pay after rather than before the wedding." As he was going through this civil ceremony, he heard the sirens of Modibo Keita's passing entourage and realized that there was a Politburo meeting about to start. He was a member of it. So, we went through the fastest wedding ceremony on record. He was out of there in a minute's time and we had signed out.

There was another funny incident. When we first got started - it was actually just before I arrived - we moved out of the Grand Hotel. But at one point, the Russian, the Chinese, and the American missions were all in the Grand Hotel. A robber got into one of the offices and was very proud that he had looted the American safe. He had all of these dollars. It turned out it wasn't the Americans; it was the Chinese embassy that he had gotten his dollars from. But my abiding sense in Mali was competition for the hearts and minds with the French being involved. They were on our side but they didn't want us to get paramount influence.

Q: This is a theme that continues to run throughout the French part of Africa. Were you as a young officer told, "Hold back a little. Let's not upset the French. We really don't want to supplant them?"

SUDDARTH: No, I was never given any guidance like that. I wasn't really doing anything that significant in that. But I don't recall that... I recall a respectful dealing... There was always a certain amount of tension when our ambassador went over to see the French ambassador. There was friendly rivalry. This was in De Gaulle's time and De Gaulle was unhappy with the NATO arrangements and the nuclear monopoly. So, there was a certain Gaullist disdain for U.S. foreign policy and then a colonial one. The French ambassador had been a colonial officer who felt somewhat possessive about that. I don't think that we had a division of labor, but I think they welcomed our aid program. But as I said, this dam project suggested that the French didn't want us to supplant them. I'm not sure that it was true, but the French used to allude to the naiveté of the United States. They said that we had sponsored a road project that ended up paving the road to the president's dacha out in the countryside, things of that sort. I don't know whether that was actually true or not.

Q: How about Mali's relations with its neighbors?

SUDDARTH: Well, they had just broken off from Senegal. They had the Mali Federation. That seemed to be pretty well established and there wasn't any feeling... I didn't have a sense that Mali had major ideological affinities with Guinea and with Ghana, who were other socialist countries. The Ivory Coast and Senegal with Houphouet-Boigny and Senghor, who was French educated, were considered the kind of models for the United States. They were free enterprise and not socialist governments. But governments that have resources can get capitalism. I have some sympathy for Mali because it was so poor they may have needed a little bit of socialism to get going. They needed some state enterprises.

ROBERT C. HANEY
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Bamako (1962-1964)

Robert Haney was born in Iowa in 1921. After attending from the University of Iowa in 1943, he fought in World War II in the U.S. Army. After the end of the War, he worked in France with the Paris Herald. He later graduated from the University of Iowa with a Bachelor's in French. Since joining the foreign service in 1951, his career has included positions in Paris, Washington, Belgrade, Mali, Saigon and Warsaw. Mr. Haney was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on September 21, 2001.

Q: Today is October 31, 2001. Bob, we're off to Mali in 1962. You were in Bamako for how long?

HANEY: From 1962 to 1964.

Q: What were you doing there?

HANEY: I was the public affairs officer. It was a small embassy.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HANEY: Bill Handley.

Q: Did they get your names mixed up?

HANEY: Sometimes he would get my mail, but I noticed I never got invited to the President's palace. As you are aware, Mr. Kennedy, both names are Irish. The head of the political section was Bob Keeley. To spread things around a little, the family name of the head of the consular section was Kim.

Q: How were things going in Mali in those days?

HANEY: President Modibo Keita was trying to "build socialism." He was an experienced politician, having served in the *Assemblée Nationale* in France. Back in Mali, a former French colony that had become independent in 1960, Modibo – as he was almost universally known in his home territory – was elected president of the newly established republic. He was particularly adept at stumping the boondocks and pressing the flesh like a Chicago ward heeler. He was well educated, a socialist by persuasion and an admirer of "socialist" countries like the Soviet Union and its satellites, which were well represented in Bamako. The Chinese were helping Mali to expand rice culture. The Soviets had deployed an extensive team giving technical assistance to Air Mali, which was flying Ilyushin passenger aircraft.

We had a library in Bamako, but it had been closed to the public by the Malian Government, apparently because it was considered an advocate of capitalism and *ipso facto* inimical to socialism. When I arrived in Bamako as PAO, my USIS staff consisted of my American secretary; a young Malian woman, Marianne Sissoko, who had received a college education in France – a rarity, especially among Malian women – and who worked out of the closed library; and a Malian driver for the office jeep.

The constraints imposed on our operation meant that personal contacts, the occasional exchange visitor (e.g., Ralph Lapointe, a former big league shortstop who became a basketball coach at the University of Vermont and was sent to Mali by the State Department to train local teams), and unorthodox means of circulating printed material were the offbeat *modus operandi* we developed.

An example: The Government of Mali had its own information officers stationed in major regions of the country. In the town of Kayes, the government information officer was Moktar Dia, whom I had met in Bamako. Kayes is a provincial center in western Mali, close to the border with Senegal. Dia, like President Keita, spent a lot of time roaming his territory and asserting a government presence. He liked to have something to hand out on his rounds. I showed him some USIS material about the United States in French. He was impressed. As I had hoped, he asked if I could give him multiple copies that he could pass out to people he met on his visits through the Kayes region. It was a request I couldn't refuse.

Q: It sounds like the country was not just leaning but was practically in the Soviet camp. If they were closing down information activities, this is something that didn't happen in many countries, including in a lot of Bloc countries.

HANEY: That's true, although in Modibo's mind he was doing something positive. Socialism was his ideal. That the Soviet Union and a number of the Soviet satellites became firmly rooted in Mali was more a reflection of their enterprise and initiative than of Modibo's invitation.

Q: Did they have information centers that were open to the public?

HANEY: The Soviet embassy and their satellites usually had some kind of activity aimed at the public. But I must say that an information center in a country like Mali is not like operating one in Paris. The literacy rate was very low. The local language, Bambara, was not a written language, and efforts were being made to transcribe the sounds of Bambara in a Latin alphabet. But literacy was measured in Arabic or French, and the percentage of Malians who could read and write was in single digits.

Q: How did you go about your business?

HANEY: For the first few months I was the only officer at the post carrying out any kind of an information program. I developed contacts with Malian information officials and at the Foreign Secretariat, and I talked with as many Malians as I could. My favors to my Malian friend in Kayes are an example of how one had to work in a country where information was tightly controlled.

In its first couple of years of independence, Mali had succeeded in isolating itself, not only politically, but fiscally and physically as well. Its initial federation with Senegal, also newly independent, broke up, and Mali opted out of the French franc zone. Its currency was no longer convertible. The rail line to Dakar was cut at the Senegalese border. Mali's only access to the sea then became Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast, 600 miles south of Bamako as the crow flies, much farther on the meandering roads. Everything imported had to be hauled in by truck. My prized Citroën, which I had shipped from the States at my own expense because it was a foreign car, arrived from Abidjan a few weeks after we did. When I opened the large box in which it had been transported, I found the car covered about an inch thick with red laterite dust. Fortunately, among the few French who remained (many had left when they could no longer repatriate the francs they earned) was the owner of the Citroën garage. So I got the car cleaned up and put back into running order.

Speaking of the French *garagiste* reminds me how restricted were the means of recreation in Bamako. A favorite pastime on a Sunday afternoon was to play *pétanque* on the garage owner's well-kept lawn. Another diversion was to visit the rapids in the Niger River a couple of miles downstream. In the rainy season, the Niger was a mile wide at that point. But in the dry season, if you were agile enough, you could cross the river by leaping from one rock to another. A picnic out in the bush was another means of relaxing. A few hours rambling about left everybody in the party indistinguishably covered with laterite dust. On Sundays, *le tout Bamako* strolled out of town a few blocks to visit the zoo. If you missed the sign, "*Jardin Zoologique*," you would think

it was just another piece of the *savane*, north of the jungle, south of the desert. The zoo was home to one mangy lion, an ostrich family, an elephant and a babble of baboons in an enclosure covered with wire netting. As you strolled up the open alleys of the zoo you would sometimes encounter wild baboons that had come in from the bush to visit their relatives doing hard time.

If you're stationed in Bamako, there's really no place close where you can get a break from the climate, the monotonous terrain and the isolation. So the R&R (Rest and Rehabilitation) break everybody got once during a two-year tour was welcome. Our family went on R&R in November 1963 to Spain, where we had physical exams at the U.S. Air Force base at Torrejón de Ardoz. Then we took a brief vacation in the Canary Islands.

I had checked in with the honorary American consul when we arrived in Las Palmas so we would have a point of contact if anybody was looking for us. At the end of the first week, we took our two younger children to an evening performance by a visiting Soviet circus. When we had returned to our hotel rooms shortly before 10:00 p.m., we got a telephone call from the honorary consul. "President Kennedy has been shot," he told me. I couldn't believe it. I thought the man was drunk, or hallucinating. But then the radio confirmed the terrible news, which left us dazed as it sank in.

I could not abide the thought of remaining on vacation; I wanted to get back to our post as soon as possible. But we were not all fit to travel. Our elder son, then eight years old, had shown symptoms of appendicitis earlier, during our first year in Bamako. His mother had taken him up to Germany to the military hospital in Frankfurt, but by then the symptoms had disappeared. In Las Palmas, however, they returned. A Spanish surgeon at the Queen Victoria's Hospital for Seamen told us, "If he were my son, I'd have the operation done here, before you return to Bamako."

So Mary stayed on in Las Palmas with Christopher, recovering from his operation, and his younger brother, Michael, aged three. Our daughter, Karen, aged seven, and I then flew to Conakry, Guinea, to wait for the next Air Mali flight inland to Bamako.

When we got to Bamako, I learned that the ambassador was away from the post; the DCM was chargé d'affaires. Modibo Keita had been out of Bamako, politicking in the countryside, when news came of Kennedy's assassination. Now back in Bamako, he had notified our embassy that he would come by to sign the book of condolences.

The chargé asked me to join him in receiving Modibo. The chargé's French was perfectly good, but it's sometimes useful to have an interpreter present at important meetings – it gives you time to think while the interpreter translates into English what you've already understood in French.

Modibo arrived, signed the book, and was invited by the chargé to take a seat in the ambassador's office. Modibo folded himself and his flowing white *boubou de cérémonie* into a chair and began to talk about President Kennedy. Modibo Keita and Indonesian President Sukarno had been dispatched by the first Nonaligned Conference held in Belgrade in 1961 to bring word of the conference to President Kennedy. (Other nonaligned delegates who had attended the Belgrade conference made similar visits to important world leaders.)

It was clear from Modibo's spontaneous eulogy that he had been much impressed by JFK. He spoke in particular about the efforts by the administration to reduce the inequalities of racism in the United States. In all, it was a moving testimony to the legacy of our 35th president.

Q: Was this a country where public opinion mattered, or was it pretty much that the top man or top men ran things?

HANEY: Modibo and his government ran things, but he was not at all a dictator. Had he governed with a tighter rein he would not have been so easily overthrown in a coup a few years after we left Bamako.

When I went to Mali, I was a bit concerned because racial problems in the United States were commanding increasing attention in the media. Bobby Kennedy, the attorney general, was an advocate for true equality and was trying to get us accustomed to a new way of looking at race problems. Given the racial turbulence in America at that time, how would my white family and I be received in a country that was by then about 99 percent black? I was apprehensive.

My fear turned out to be ill-founded. When I was out in a village and invited by a new acquaintance to enter his thatched dwelling, I would see a picture of Bobby Kennedy prominently displayed. Malians looked positively upon the few Americans they encountered because of what our president and his attorney general were doing in the United States on behalf of the black population.

It was also great to be in a black country where a white person didn't attract special attention. You were just part of the crowd. Our youngest son, who was three years old at the time, would go with his mother to the market. He had a small carved wooden stool from the Dogon country that he carried around clapped to his behind. When his mother bargained for mangoes, he would plop down on the stool and patiently wait. Nobody paid special attention to him. He was just one more small person in a colorful assembly. In Yugoslavia, he and his stroller used to draw a crowd.

Q: My son, who was quite blond at the time and was about four, used to get so mad in Belgrade with people coming up and squeezing his cheek and saying, "Srce moje," "my little heart." We had to stop him when he started saying, "Ti si magarac," "You're a jackass."

HANEY: I can imagine. When Mary took our youngest child out for a walk in Belgrade, people would not only check out his clothing, but ask where the stroller came from. When I did a little research to find out what were the most popular books at the USIS library on Ika Ljubina, I was told they were "Spring and Summer," and "Fall and Winter" – Sears Roebuck catalogs. We were in at the beginning of a new consumer society.

Q: In Mali, was there anything we were particularly pushing, trying to make people aware of? What were we trying to do?

HANEY: First of all, we were trying to get a feel for the best way to deal with the African countries. Our government had not paid much attention to that earlier. We sought to get on a sound footing with this country, which many Americans even today could not identify. Malians could certainly identify the United States, but they saw it as a stereotype. A major challenge was to replace misconceptions with understandable and persuasive images that would in time provide a more realistic and, we would hope, positive view of who we are and what we're up to.

Mali had not yet allowed our Peace Corps to serve in the country. But the U.S. Agency for International Development was well represented. Their personnel had close contact with an element of Malian society that a political officer would not be familiar with. The U.S. Army sent out a team headed by an American colonel to train potential Malian airborne troops in combat parachute jumps. Mary and I went out into the bush to witness a final training drop as the Malians neared "graduation." It turned out to be a rather exciting experience. I had parked my doughty Citroën away from the drop zone. But when a stick bailed out of one of the C-47 troop carriers, we had to run for it because the pilot had misjudged either the wind or the location. Fortunately, both Malian paratroopers and the Citroën survived the jump without injury.

Bamako, in my view, is not an ideal site for a capital. The reason it grew from a West African village into a town and eventually became capital of a country has more to do with military than civilian considerations. Progressive French conquests in West Africa toward the end of the 19th century brought a military party to the location of present-day Bamako. I can imagine that the French officer in charge was impressed by the high ridge shaped like a fishhook looming above the village and commanding the Niger River for kilometers in both directions. In my scenario, he queries a native: "What do you call that?" pointing to the ridge. "*Koulouba*," responds the terrified local. (It means "a big hill" in Bambara.) "A great spot for an outpost," thinks the Frenchman. And so it was,

All government buildings and the palace where the first family lives are today located up on Koulouba, the name that the French gave to the site of the *21ite administrative* that grew up to replace the original military outpost. The hospital at Bamako is up there, retaining a quasi-military designation, *l'Hôpital du Point G*. The town below is not a good site because it is so low and so flat and lies in the floodplain of the Niger River. To avoid flash-flooding during the rainy season, huge masonry ditches, about four to five feet deep and nearly 10 feet across the top line the main streets to carry the runoff.

Q: What passed for media in the country?

HANEY: There was one newspaper, published by the Information Secretariat. There was one radio station, Radio Mali. You could get the Voice of America if you had a shortwave receiver. I used to come home for lunch and try to catch a noon broadcast of the Voice of America or the BBC to find out what was going on in the world. Just preceding that broadcast, there was a program on Radio Mali aimed at teaching French to its listeners. A Malian "professor," who spoke good French but with the local accent, attempted to teach French to "Samba," his unlettered pupil. The professor would say something in French and then ask his pupil, Samba, to repeat it. The phrase I remember was, "*Il y a quatre pharmacies à Bamako*"; "There are four pharmacies in Bamako." Samba would try, slowly and hesitantly squeezing out the first two or

three words. The professor would repeat the sentence. Finally, Samba would spew it out in a rush. The professor, pleased at this progress, would say, “*Hanh!*” which is the Bambara way of saying, “Great!” or “You got it!” or “Right on!” or just “Oh.”

The Voice of America broadcast a program in French that was aimed at that part of Africa. But not many people could listen because they didn’t have shortwave.

Q: It sounds like we were essentially keeping the flag flying there.

HANEY: That’s right. We were essentially a presence. And we had good contacts up on Koulouba. The ambassador and a few of his staff managed to get around the country a bit. I had visited Kayes, where we had an American basketball coach working with Malians. And I visited Sikasso, in the south of the country.

Mary and I made one great boat trip on the Niger in January 1964. The ambassador called me in to his office one day and said, “Why don’t you and Mary take a trip with Mary Lee and me to Gao?” It was couched as a question, but it was really to be a command performance. It turned out to be the best thing we did in two years in Mali.

Gao is an important river town at the point where the Niger curves down out of the Sahara and begins to flow south toward its great delta in Nigeria. In its heyday, Gao was the point at which camel caravans coming west from Arab lands would connect with river traffic on the Niger. Our excursion was to take place in the heart of the dry season, when water levels upstream in the Niger were too low for large craft. So we had to go downstream by jeep to Mopti to board our boat, which was in reality a barge built like a boat but without its own power. It was towed by a tug pulling a towline a good 60 yards or more long.

Our craft bore the illustrious name, Liberté. We were on the upper deck, where we had our own cabin and where the “first class” passengers ate their meals. The lower deck would have been called “steerage” had Ellis Island been our destination instead of Gao. It was crammed with Malians who prepared their own meals on charcoal braziers. Why the Liberté never caught fire I’ll never know. The Liberté made the roundtrip to Gao every two weeks – about a week in each direction – stopping at two or more small river ports every day. At each stop we were greeted by a throng of local inhabitants – the weekly visits were a big event. Our terminal was Gao, a provincial capital where the local governor had his “palace.” That structure was – is – an impressive piece of architecture built by the French in colonial times. It was apparently designed by an architect whose favorite childhood story was “A Thousand and One Nights.” The thick stone pillars of the palace were twisted like Christmas candy and about as colorful. The visual experience of the palace was psychedelic. The ambassador and his wife were guests of the governor; Mary and I stayed in what appeared to be the lone hotel, the Atlantide. I shall probably never find out how it acquired such a name in the middle of the desert.

Q: The country was Islamic?

HANEY: It was a mixture, principally Muslim, but with some Catholic converts and a very few Protestants converted by American missionaries who had spent much of their lives in Mali with

meager results. The Catholic Church had done a very good job in planting itself in those parts of Africa that had been colonized by the French. They ran the only normal school in Mali, so that the whole educational system was generously sprinkled with its graduates. The Catholic influence was considerable and, so far as I could judge, mostly to the good. As one might expect in a former French colony, the influence of the ex-colonial power was still considerable, perhaps most apparent in education. French was the official language of Mali and the language taught in the schools. The Malian system of education emulated the French. If students in a particular grade of the *lycée* opened their textbooks to a certain page on a given day, you knew that students throughout France in the same grade were looking at the same page.

Your last question was whether Mali was Islamic. My answer was, “Yes,” predominantly. Marianne Sissoko, the young woman who was my Malian assistant, had been educated in France; she was Catholic. Her father, at odds with the post-colonial government and living in France, had been the French-trained engineer in charge of operating the few railroads when Mali was a colony. Marianne had a boyfriend who was a lieutenant in the Malian army, living in barracks outside of Bamako. Occasionally, I’d give the two of them a lift in the jeep.

In due course, Lieutenant Traoré, the boyfriend, proposed to Marianne. She wanted to say, “Yes,” but first she consulted me. The prospective groom had suggested a Muslim ceremony. That would allow for multiple wives. “Don’t do it, Marianne,” was my advice. “Insist on a civil ceremony.”

She must have been persuasive, for they ended up getting married in her Catholic church. I had been transferred to Saigon by the time of the wedding, but I had a full account of it from the number-two man USIA had by then sent me, Phil Pillsbury.

Four years after we had left Bamako, first for Viet Nam, then to Poland. I was in our embassy in Warsaw taking copy off the AP wire. A short item from Bamako caught my eye. A coup led by a certain Lieutenant Traoré had deposed Modibo Keita. President Traoré had moved into the palace up on Koulouba, along with the new first lady, my Marianne.

Several years later, Phil went back on a sentimental visit to Bamako. He took with him a letter from me for Marianne. Phil dined at the presidential palace with the new president and his wife and brought back the latest news from Mali. The two sons Marianne had borne Traoré subsequently came to Washington to attend Georgetown University, and Phil and I had dinner with them. Then, a few years later, Phil got a telephone call from the Malian Embassy in Washington, saying that a large package had arrived for him. Phil went down to pick it up. It contained two beautiful white wool throw rugs woven in Mali, one for Phil, one for Mary and me, from Marianne. They are elegantly simple. The very center of the white rugs is marked by an elongated black diamond enclosing a deep-red smaller diamond.

You asked me earlier how you communicate in a country like Mali. I can give you another example. I have mentioned the local zoo as a popular gathering place on Sundays. I had found at the office a Polaroid camera and some unused film of unknown age. Our children were particularly fond of the gazelles at the zoo. So on one hot Sunday we headed a few blocks out of

town to the zoo. I loaded the camera and took it along to see if it worked. We stayed outside, near the entrance to the zoo, where you could get the best shot of the gazelles.

I aimed through the coarse wire mesh of the enclosure and snapped the shutter when a gazelle came within range. Then I did the hocus-pocus required to develop the film and get a print on the spot. After a wait of about 30 seconds, as I recall, I peeled off the print. It worked! The kids posed, a couple of gazelles posed, and I took more pictures.

By then it was late in the afternoon. The visitors to the zoo had begun to come down the central alley on their way home. Our little photo opportunity caught their attention. Soon we had a small crowd watching me produce practically instant photographs of whatever came within lens-shot. The crowd grew, and a man elbowed his way through to seek a favor.

“I’m the elephant keeper,” he said, “and I’m just leaving for the day. But will you take my picture with the elephant if we go back up the alley?”

“Why, sure,” I replied. After all, I was the public affairs officer at our embassy. My main responsibility was to try to put Uncle Sam’s best foot forward and create a better understanding of what the United States was all about.

The elephant keeper led me and the crowd of some 35 people up the alley toward the gate to the elephant enclosure. The elephant, not very big, expressed mild interest. I looked for a suitable hole in the fence to poke the lens through. But my new friend, the elephant keeper, took me by the elbow. “You’re coming in, too,” he said. “Much better picture.”

In front of that audience I could not show that I was scared stiff and still meet what I considered to be the obligations of my official position. So I acquiesced, and the keeper let us both into the enclosure and closed the gate behind us. He summoned an assistant to hold the elephant while he got up on its back. It was looking bigger and bigger. I backed off to what I hoped was a safe distance, aimed, focused, and released the shutter. There was a high bench inside the fence next to the gate. I took the camera there and removed the film. The crowd watched expectantly. The keeper slid off the elephant, came to the bench, stood close by me on my left and bent over, as I did, to watch the film intently while I counted the seconds. The elephant lumbered in close on my right, nudged me in the ribs with a tusk, and began to explore the top of the bench with its trunk. The crowd still watched expectantly. Pressed up against the fence on the other side my heartless children appeared to think this was all great fun.

The seconds dragged. Finally, as the elephant reached for the camera, the time was up. I prayed and tore the print loose. Thank God! The picture was a good one. I wouldn’t have to take another. I gave it to the elephant keeper, who held it up for the crowd to see.

I got out of the enclosure as fast as I could. The crowd dispersed, and we went home. Reflecting on that adventure later, I wondered what my superiors back in Washington would have thought. Here I was, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, with a receptive crowd of hard-to-reach foreigners (known in the trade as a “target audience”), and I had failed to harangue them. All I did was make sure they knew I was an American.

PHILLIP W. PILLSBURY JR.
Information Officer, USIA
Bamako (1962-1964)

Philip W. Pillsbury, Jr. was born in Chicago in 1935. He received a BA from Yale University in 1957 and joined the Foreign Service in 1959. His overseas posts included Spain, Italy, Mali, Madagascar, Zaire, Iran, and Argentina. He was interviewed by Charles Kennedy on February 28, 1994.

Q: *That was high Africa.*

PILLSBURY: It was high Africa. There were huge amounts of resources being poured into Africa, opening post and taking people out of Europe, kind of like what's happened in the newly independent states today. There was the same kind of rush to a new world. Certainly the other side was establishing its base there too as confrontation points for the cold war in the third world.

Q: *The other side being the Soviet Union and the Chinese.*

PILLSBURY: And the Chinese, especially the Chinese in black Africa.

Q: *What were you told about Mali when you went out there?*

PILLSBURY: I was fortunate. I knew nothing about the country. I think that it's safe to say that that pertained generally, aside from a handful of people who had had access. The French kept access to French West and French Equatorial Africa pretty much to themselves. We had posts in Dakar and Brazzaville, but that was it, and the French didn't allow us to have anything else, so that knowledge of all these new countries after 1960 was limited. I was fortunate in that the Ambassador at the time ... I think he was the second ambassador we had there ...

Q: *Who was that?*

PILLSBURY: Bill Handley assigned me to accompany a group of ten Malians. It was the first delegation of Ivs, International Visitor Program, people to come from Mali in the fall of 1962. So Handley said: "I want Pillsbury to accompany these people around the United States ..."

Q: *This was before you went?*

PILLSBURY: Before I went ... The Ambassador said, "because there can be no better training for him, for his work, than to get to know these people outside of their country." So I did that. I spoke French. I went around, there was an interpreter assigned, and lived with these people for thirty days. That just changed me so... It was again one of these life changing experiences. I found in them, in those ten, what I subsequently found in Bamako, a sense of civilization, of

civilized behavior in treating each other from a totally different culture which has fascinated me ever since.

Q: Could you describe that a bit?

PILLSBURY: One looks at still today and with some degree of justification ... you see the primitive African, you see pictures of villages with few material comforts defined in western terms. That's true, and from that point of view it's primitive but I found that just the way they treated each other on that trip around the United States and then the way I was treated, political attitudes notwithstanding in Bamako, I found that they treated each other many times in a much more civilized manner with a sensitivity towards each other, the golden rule being lived, than I'd seen in my own culture... than I often saw in western society and especially the impact of, the quest for material benefits, for material well-being, sometimes getting in the way of brotherhood and all that. So that they gave me some understanding immediately on that, those attitudes, a way of treating each other. Then there was also the first ever introduction that I had to a culture and to a people that were completely different from anything I had experienced in the Foreign Service or traveling before. And they were black. I was many times traveling around with that group in the United States, the interpreter and I were white and then the ten Malians, and then many, many times afterwards being the only white person in an all black society was a revelation to me.

Q: Well now, here was a group which had been pretty well kept probably relatively isolated. Mali was not on a main stage of the French either. Here was a group of people coming out of that, brand new practically after independence, coming and touring around in the United States which they might not even have heard of before.

PILLSBURY: Well they knew about the United States.

Q: Yes, but I mean, all of a sudden in thirty days, what was their reaction to how we were, including the race problem and all that?

PILLSBURY: One of the ... it's improved now, but at that time, the Department and the IV program, the International Visitor program, was not really set up to have access to and penetrate ... have meaningful discussions and dialogues with black Americans. It wasn't anybody's fault. The ones who were running the program themselves didn't have any contact with it, so it was hard to set up. We did have some. The Malians I was with were, I learned subsequently, were definitely hand-picked by the president himself.

Q: The president was who?

PILLSBURY: Modibo Keita. They all had leadership roles, not just in the youth movement, but they were leaders across the board. They came, many of them, with fixed ideas, based on very leftist precepts. Modibo was certainly a Marxist-Leninist, African socialist, of the early days of African socialism and was very open to and taken by the philosophy of Marx and Lenin, and especially of Mao. Mao had a very big influence in post-independent French Africa. They also had a very strong love-hate relationship with the French. So they came to the United States, some of them, looking at the United States as their enemy in effect, because they had been trained ...

some of them had gone to school in Moscow or about to and subsequently did go later on to Lumumba University in Moscow, etc. So that their attitudes toward the United States were ... what knowledge they had was negative I'd say. It showed to me the extreme effectiveness of the International Visitor Program because they did have a relative amount of access to black America. We did go to a couple of black communities. They had access to whatever they wanted to see. On our visit to an Indian reservation in New Mexico for example, they were astonished to realize that... some of their stereotypes were confirmed ... the Indians were oppressed. It was a minority that was in a bad way. On the other hand they saw the opportunity that was there for advancement ... people were free in the United States to exercise their God given abilities to do what they wanted. So they came back from that with a completely different view of the United States. Also it was at the time of the Cuban missile crisis and we were in a restaurant on October 22nd, 1962 when Kennedy gave on television his speech about the establishment of the blockade. They realized that the fate of the world was in the hands of two people basically. That was a very sobering thing for them. It wiped away the relative importance of De Gaulle, of European leaders, of Mao and they saw Kennedy and Khrushchev at loggerheads, I mean face to face with each other. That was a very sobering experience for them. I think they took that back and recognized that Africa was on a stage of its own, and important in its own right, but still in terms of life and death of a civilization, what they'd seen on that television screen was fundamental.

Q: How did they react to the materialism of the United States would you say?

PILLSBURY: I think that they ... Well, they were astonished first of all. Seeing just the variety of stuff on the shelves and when I'd subsequently went to Bamako and saw what was available on the shelves there, I could see why they were astonished. They were not taken over and they certainly didn't say: "This is the way I want to live." In effect they were quite objective about it and said: "Well, these are the fruits of a free society, we're going to get there in some way or another and we'll have some of these things ourselves." They were very objective. I remember, shortly after arriving there was a reception for Kennedy's Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Mennen Williams. Mennen Williams said to the leader of my delegation: "Now you've been to the United States, and you've seen how we are, you know something more about us. Isn't it true, why don't you just follow our lead and do what we've done, and then you'll avoid all of our mistakes." And the leader of our delegation said: "Mr. Secretary, we've got to dip our own hands into the water." So they recognized that American leadership was important but they had to develop on their own. So I think that within that framework, the material benefits of western civilization ... what was good for them would come, or they'd get it to a certain extent. Other aspects of it, the search for material benefits at the expense of a civilized way of treating each other that I mentioned at the beginning, they didn't want that. I came back from a trip just last month from Bamako, and I still find that's true today, thirty years later. It was pleasant to see that.

Q: So, you went out there in late '62.

PILLSBURY: Yes, October, November, actually, the end of '62.

Q: What was the political-economic situation of Mali in those days?

PILLSBURY: Well, there was a euphoria for the possibility of an independent Africa. Being able to strike out on their own. All the trappings of independence. I mean the most obvious ones, a flag, and a national anthem, and a national airline, and a national currency, all of that had been established. They knew that they were ... I think it was René Dubois who coined “le tiers-monde...” of the third world. They had a very high illiteracy of probably 75 or 80%. All the problems of a third-world society they had. But there seemed to be, there was no pessimism at all in the belief that they would be able to conquer these problems. There was also, when I was there, an almost God-like attitude towards Modibo Kieta as was the case with the other leaders of African independence in francophone Africa, from the French. Houphouet, and Senghor and Touré, among others, which again in subsequent years dissipated itself. But at the time, Modibo was regarded as a real leader. That was exemplified by a conference they had to resolve a dispute between Morocco and Algeria. Modibo served as a mediator for it and it worked. That was one of the first effective applications of the Organization of African States mediation strategy to resolve disputes locally. So that from that point of view, there was this euphoria and it was a pleasure to be there and to see that, a sense of optimism. It was not a pleasure to be there as an American because they were virulently anti-American and could make life unpleasant. We knew their feelings and their sympathies and their directions were with the Chinese and the Russians and all the other eastern European countries.

Q: *Where was this coming from?*

PILLSBURY: I think it came out of one of the things that I'd like to explore now more is the colonial experience and the influence it had on the leaders of post-colonial Africa. I think that a lot of it came from their experiences in France, studying in France in the thirties, forties and fifties. The fact that they were subject to very effective proselytizing by the Comintern and just the ideology of Marxism-Leninism as opposed to capitalism which was regarded as the handmaiden of the colonial experiences. So I think they were these post-colonial era leaders ... You know, their minds had been worked on. They'd studied a great deal about the relationship and they didn't look at what the Russians had done in eastern Europe so much as they looked at what had happened to them as French colonies. Plus the fact that African village life is socialist anyway. It's all for one and one for all, so ... It fit. That fit nicely into the application of economic socialism on the African level.

One thing in Bamako: We talked about Kennedy. So going from the cradle of western civilization in Florence to a place like Bamako, and being there when Kennedy was killed was really an extraordinary experience. Because I remember that I was in the interior, or the bush as they call it there in January of '64, and I spoke Bambara at the time. I'd learned the local language, and I was talking with a man in a village and he started to talk about Kennedy, and I was astonished. He actually started to cry because he had associated himself with Kennedy, not from hearing the news directly on the Voice, but rather from what he heard from the village wise man, the Marabou, who interpreted the news. The Marabou had the radio and then he'd say what had happened. This villager was to me an extraordinary indication of the reach of the appeal of John F. Kennedy.

Q: Well, did you find ...? You had these two things. One the geriatrics of the geritocracy of China and the Soviet Union, and all of a sudden somebody who is really brand new on the scene, Kennedy. How did that play on the anti-colonialism scene?

PILLSBURY: It didn't play very well. I was kicked out of Bamako, out of Mali. I was *persona-non-grata*. It was completely unjustified, but it happened and it was only thirty years later that I found out why. It came full circle, because I got some documents. I was given some information and documents from the man who was Secretary General at the time in the Foreign Ministry. One, I was suspected of spying because I was very close to the youth movement, and it bugged them. The government was not pleased to have a younger officer in the Embassy who spoke Bambara being that close, largely because of the initial access that I had because of these ten people I took around. Those ten people I found out had gone after they got back ... they went to the President Modibo Kieta for a debriefing. They said: "Don't get upset if you see us with an American officer and his wife because we like him and we think that he's fine and OK." So I was the only one ... well there was an AID officer who also had access to Malian families. But everybody else in the Embassy never saw Malian families on a social basis, especially in the *Quartier Africain*, you know, the African sections of the city. And Bamako was a truly African city with a European quarter rather than the other way around. So that I had initial access, and then I ran with it. We did a lot of things with sports exchange programs that were extremely effective in terms of reaching the younger population. I was close to the youth, and at the time, going back to your question, at the time, the rebellion in the Congo was taking place. Tshombe was taking the Katanga out of the Congo. Hammarskjold was killed, or they say he died in the air crash. Lumumba was definitely assassinated and the Malian government at any rate laid the blame squarely on the United States, mixing around in African affairs. L'Essor's editorial on the subject that resulted in a formal complaint from the American Ambassador at the time. And it was just at that time that I was at the height really of my working with young people, in a kind of a I way, I'll admit, because I didn't connect at all that I, as a young officer, would be suspected of turning young people's minds to American thinking. But that was exactly what the attitude was, so I was thrown out.

Q: Did you have the feeling that there was either Chinese or Soviet influence behind this, or was this homegrown?

PILLSBURY: Well, that's a good question. I think it was a homegrown attitude. I don't think that a Soviet element, or a Chinese element in one of their embassies said: "This guy is dangerous. Get him out of here." Or you know, make an example of American involvement in African affairs the way you interpret it by throwing someone out. No, it was definitely a Marxist who worked closely with the President who did it.

Q: Were the Chinese and the Soviets able to get out the same way you were?

PILLSBURY: They had more access. They did. But their control for access was limited more by their people. The Russian Ambassador and the Chinese Ambassador had named certain people in their embassies that were allowed to have full access and could go where they wanted. They did not want their people running freely either, so ... But it was their own control rather than something that came from the Malian government.

Q: How did our Embassy ... William Handlet was the Ambassador? How did he operate? How did the Embassy operate under very difficult ...?

PILLSBURY: It was under very difficult circumstances. Again I had the opportunity of working with one of the best political officers I've ever encountered, known, Bob Keeley. I don't know if you ever met ...

Q: Oh, yes.

PILLSBURY: Keeley was absolutely extraordinary.

Q: I had a major interview with him. I didn't do it, but somebody did it.

PILLSBURY: Keeley, and also the Deputy Chief, Bayard King were very effective in dealing on a human basis with some of the more ideological elements, some of the more ideologically oriented elements in the Malian government. And then we had a very effective AID program. So that we recognized the African socialist orientation of Modibo and others like him. I mean Julius Nyerere was doing the same thing in Tanzania. The AID program and especially the military aid program were two counterweights that kept a framework for American operation there which were extremely effective.

Q: When you say effective, what were we trying to do?

PILLSBURY: It turned out ... One, the AID program was aimed at village development. The idea was great the way they attempted to carry it out. Sometimes they did not recognize traditional village life enough so that some of the ways that houses were built according to urban designers in the west that did not take into account African traditions or culture at all. Some of those constructions were torn down two or three years later.

Q: What were the problems? Doors facing the wrong way?

PILLSBURY: Square houses and square streets. That was the biggest one. And outhouses, toilets fixed at a certain point. It just didn't take into account the fact of the randomness of an African village. The intention was there, and I saw again thirty years later that the idea was correct, that to a certain extent the idea of trying to keep people away from the main cities ... It hasn't worked. Everyone of the third world cities has been crushed by population. But nevertheless, they did establish regional economic centers that are valid today. And then in the military, it was a silly project, but it was what Modibo wanted. Training paratroopers to, in theory, fight the Tuaregs in the north. Our MAAG mission clearly just carried on the project to maintain contact with the government, but it was effective in its time.

One last thing on Bamako that has a connection with at least my thinking and my relationship with Africa. At the time, we had a young woman working as the librarian. She was getting married, and she asked me to go to ...

Q: This would be a ...?

PILLSBURY: A Malian. She asked me to come to her wedding, and I did. I took pictures of the wedding. I went back to Mali in 1968, 10 days after the coup that overthrew Modibo. When I arrived, I asked the Ambassador who had done it. He said: "It's some young Lieutenant by the name of Moussa Traore." Well, that was the guy I'd known. So that I kept in touch with him over the years too. That was a fascinating ongoing thing that's alive today.

Q: How about the Peace Corps? Was the Peace Corps there?

PILLSBURY: The Peace Corps was not established. The Peace Corps ... I think the first contingent went to Tanzania in '62 or '63. But the first Peace Corps ... Modibo did not want to have anything to do with the Peace Corps. There was a fairly large contingent of the French equivalent. *Cooperants*, young development specialists who were effective. So the Peace Corps did not come until later. It is now I think the largest Peace Corps in Africa, in Mali so ...

Q: Before we leave Mali, I'd like to ask you on our next interview, what USIA was doing, how you operated at that time and the thrust any relationship to the news media there, and also how you felt about being persona non grata as far as how your Embassy treated you, how USIA did. Was there a stigma, was there a problem on that. We'll talk about that the next time. So we'll just leave it at that.

PILLSBURY: Right.

Q: Let's see. Today is March 15, the ides of March 1994. This is an interview with Phillip W. Pillsbury Jr. I am continuing. This is tape 2.

Q: Phil, last time when you were in Mali. First I wanted to ask you. What were the main activities of USIA?

PILLSBURY: The activities of USIA, not only in Mali but in several other countries of Marxist-Leninist or African socialist orientation were pretty much proscribed. Especially in the information side of things it was very, very difficult to do any serious work. In our case, in Mali in particular, the Ministry of Information at the time was run by a very strongly anti-American type. At that time the Chinese, the People's Republic, and the Russian Soviets were very active and had unhindered access to the information media such as it was in the country at the time. So that the only unhindered access we had to countries like that was really the Voice of America.

Q: What was the relationship of the Voice of America? Were you saying: "Here is something that was going on here that maybe you'll want to address." In other words were you working to tune the Voice of America to Mali and to penetrate.

PILLSBURY: Well, to a certain extent, we did. We had to be careful because the atmosphere was such that the government could just have shut us down altogether. We had to be careful. We had a lot of taped program, from the Voice of America which we played on the radio, cultural programming, music, and things like that. The main access that we had really was personal

contact largely through sports programs that the State Department sent. People like Wilma Rudolph, people like that.

Q: She was a well-known black track star.

PILLSBURY: And VISA sent a three man delegation from the NBA. Led by John Havlicek and K.C. Jones of the Boston Celtics sent a group out that was enormously successful. They would be the key to further programming, especially entertainment in the home, etc. which was virtually unimpeded. The Malian government and other governments in Africa at the time were also interested in military training. So, our military training team had also a fairly unimpeded access too.

Q: I'm surprised, because I would have thought that in any particularly new country, the army is the key. This is where you are going to have the coup as history has shown throughout many countries. For a Marxist country to let Americans in, why did they do that?

PILLSBURY: It was a very specific program. The President, Modibo Keita wanted to have a trained paratroop group to work with the problem in the north. The French had tried to deal with it and failed. It's still there as a matter of fact. The Tuaregs in the desert. The goal was perhaps misguided, but that was not for us to decide. So the President of the country really wanted it and recognized that the Americans had the best paratroop training in the world, the 101st Airborne. They trained a battalion I think and also pilots. It was a very specific program. AID also had an important mission there in village development. And then the competition for minds and hearts which came out later in Vietnam. That was played out most blatantly you might say in three trade fairs that were held one after another. I think that this has general application for United States diplomatic relations in Sub-Saharan Africa at the time. The Chinese built a pavilion. First they brought in many tools and implements and ways of doing business agriculturally that would fit right in with the traditional forms of agriculture already extant in the country. The Russians followed with a hopelessly unsuccessful exhibit in which they brought in heavy machinery which had no application to the developing world at all. They included a model of an icebreaker that had no relevance whatsoever. It was a cultural mistake of the first order. The United States had by far the most fun pavilion. We had one of Fuller's geodesic domes. It was a combination of small agricultural implements, a little go-go cart track for go-go carts, popcorn, things that were It was the only time while I was there, in the two years, that we had absolutely unimpeded access to distribute information, pamphlets about the United States without anyone asking any questions and wide showing of films that were always sold out. So that it showed us that there was a huge interest in the United States and an appreciation for the United States.

Q: Alright. We already talked about why you were made persona non grata. Could you tell me how the system treated you? This and being made a hostage sometimes when it's not your fault, how did it treat you?

PILLSBURY: Right. There's no doubt that it was a traumatic experience for me because it came so completely unexpectedly and it came at a time when I was very, very closely involved with the Malians. I had associated myself almost in a spiritual way, I might say. So to have that cut off before its time, I left about six months before I was due to leave, that was very difficult for me.

The Embassy was fabulous with me, especially the Deputy Chief of Mission who was a close friend

STEPHEN LOW
Guinea and Mali Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1963-1965)

Ambassador Stephen Low was born in Ohio in 1927. He received his bachelor's degree from Yale, and his master's and doctorate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. In addition to Nigeria, Ambassador Low served in Uganda, Senegal, and Zambia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: You left Senegal in 1963. Whither?

LOW: Yes. We returned to an assignment in Washington as desk officer for Guinea and Mali affairs. I had already been to Bamako, Mali and was somewhat familiar with it. Before leaving Dakar, I went down to Conakry and spent a week or so down there with the ambassador and the team just looking around. Guinea was the only West African country not included in my responsibilities when I was a labor officer because another labor officer was assigned there.

Q: Why?

LOW: Because of Sekou Toure. The idea was that Toure who had been a trade union leader would be particularly interested in having contact with some one who knew the field well, and, it was felt, wouldn't want him to have responsibilities outside the country. So, the poor guy, who was a very bright, interesting man, was the labor officer for Guinea, period. I was the labor officer for all of French-speaking West Africa except for Guinea. To add insult to injury it was I who was going back to Washington to be the Guinea-Mali desk officer.

Q: You say you spent how long there?

LOW: I think I was there for a week.

Q: What was your impression? We're talking about 1963.

LOW: Guinea was the case of a country that had steadily deteriorated since independence. It showed how far a country which is tightly controlled can sink without there being any significant political reaction. I guess it's somewhat stabilized now, but it continued down for a long time from the point in 1950 when it was the jewel in the French West African crown. Sekou Toure blew hot and cold towards the U.S. and continued to beguile new assistant secretaries of State for African Affairs. He's a very earnest and intelligent man. They would come back convinced that they could work with him. There would be a few months honeymoon and then it would go sour. This pattern repeated itself a number of times. Relations were improving at the time I visited.

Relations were not good with Mali and they got much worse during the time I was on the desk. It was an interesting time. Bob Pelletreau, my deputy on the desk, and I had a fascinating two years working together. But in those days, the sixth floor didn't really want to be bothered that much by these small countries, particularly the unfriendly ones, as both Guinea and Mali were. The initiatives often came from desk officers like us on the fourth floor. The question really was, how unfriendly could a country be and still continue to receive U.S. economic assistance? Our basic philosophy was that this was economic assistance and it was in our interest that the economies of these countries grow, whatever kind of government was in power. Our interests would best be served if we could establish a long-term trusting relationship or at least a long-term helpful relationship. But there was obviously a limit to that. To what degree could a government consciously lead opposition to American policies around the world and continue to receive aid? Bob and I reached the point where we decided that we just couldn't recommend continuation of the significant level of aid the U.S. was giving. We went up with recommendations, accepted at our office director's level and then by the assistant secretary, that we should be a little less forthcoming in the level of aid and only approve small projects which were obviously in everybody's interest. We cut back significantly on assistance level. Modibo Keita was president of Mali in that period; it was a difficult time.

Q: You must have had screams and yells from our embassies? Had they reached their limit, too?

LOW: It's interesting that we have always had extraordinarily able representation in Bamako, Mali. I've never quite understood why that should be. Number one, morale was always enormously high. The Malians may have had difficult leadership at that point, but as a people, they are hard-working, straightforward, attractive, and interesting. The embassy people and the diplomatic corps, in the early years, were living in one hotel. The dining room would have people from the Bloc seated on one side and from the western countries on the other side. They would pass in line. It was really quite an extraordinary thing. But our embassy people were able and tough-minded. They were not clientists pleading the cause of their country of assignment. Bill Handley had just become ambassador. They recognized and agreed that there was a limit to what we should be doing in the face of leadership that appeared to go out of its way to oppose U.S. positions all over the world.

Q: You were there from 1963 until 1965. Was Soapy Williams there?

LOW: He was the assistant secretary. Wayne Fredericks, an experienced and committed friend of Africa, was his deputy. Soapy was always a lively person to be dealing with. Bill Trimble was first the West Africa office director and then deputy assistant secretary. Trimble was an extraordinary man if a little old fashioned. I remember my first meeting with him. He warned me about two things – never put classified documents in the drawers of your desk, and never use the word “feel” to mean think or believe. But he knew how to make decisions and take responsibility. He kept the Bureau going when he moved up to be deputy assistant secretary. While the others talked he moved things along. Leon Dorros, one of the ablest people I worked with in the Foreign Service, served as Trimble's deputy office director and then took over when Trimble moved upstairs. So at the working levels there were good people. Leon went to Greece where he was Henry Tasca's DCM.

Q: He was basically a Europeanist.

LOW: Well, he had been an ambassador in Cambodia. He certainly wasn't an Africanist. But he had been around a long time. He was a clean desk man. You went in and laid a case out. He said "Yes" or "No." If you sent him a paper, it was through and up or back within a day. He facilitated movement rather than obstructing it. He would often just say yes to things that would amaze us. We would wonder what Soapy would think but he would say, "Don't worry about Soapy. I'll take care of that." And away we would go. He got more work done than the other two combined.

Q: What about Soapy Williams?

LOW: Ah, fun. The thing I guess most of us remember are the square dances. He would say, "We're going to invite the diplomatic corps for square dancing and all the desk officers are to be present." He would be the caller. Here were all these berobed, dignified ambassadors being directed by the Assistant Secretary to "Allemande left in the corners all; swing your partner right..." Soapy was barking it out and they were doing their best to follow. I had a good time, but I always wondered whether they really enjoyed this kind of thing. It would have been fine if Soapy hadn't been the caller. Soapy featured himself as a French speaker which often horrified us because his French was atrocious and he insisted on speaking it, not just for pleasantries, but during important and sometimes delicate conversations with a foreign diplomats. We knew that all kinds of misunderstandings were being built up, but in the end I suppose no great damage was done. He didn't concern himself much with our part of West Africa. He focused primarily on Rhodesia and a few other questions. We didn't have a great deal of contact with him.

Q: What was the problem with Sekou Toure? How was he unfriendly at this particular time?

LOW: During the time I was involved our relations were comparatively easy. Sekou had just done us a great favor when he denied the Russians the right to resupply Cuba from Guinean air bases. Soapy was one of those assistant secretaries who was convinced that Sekou meant well, so our relations with Guinea were really improving. They had been pretty low. There was some hope that Sekou would turn around. He didn't do it, but at this point, he was much more cooperative. It was the Malians who were being more difficult.

Q: What were the Malians doing?

LOW: At the UN, they would not only vote against us, but they would organize opposition to us on issues like Puerto Rico which the Malians didn't really know much about. It looked very much like deliberate provocation. At the Non-Aligned meetings, they took very aggressive leadership roles condemning and attacking United States positions around the world.

Q: What did we see as American interests in those two places at that time?

LOW: I think it was a generalized interest. Since they were both prominent leaders in the Non-Aligned movement, they were countries of some influence around the world. It's a derivative interest in the sense that they could help make our relations better or worse with countries that

did matter. Some years later, Chet Crocker, then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, put it well by saying that the policies we follow towards Rhodesia and South Africa are not only important in themselves, but they affect our relations with everybody else. Guinea and Mali were leaders in Africa. Other African heads of state were more friendly, but less aggressive, less outspoken, less influential, and followed their lead. They set a tone not just in Africa, but worldwide that was hostile to American policies. That's something you try to avoid. So, it was the leadership role they played in Third World councils that was the most important so far as the United States was concerned.

Q: What about Sekou Toure dealing internally in his country?

LOW: It was an authoritarian country in which the standard for human rights and treatment of the individual was not very high. A good example was what happened to the Guinean ambassador to the United States, Bangoura, an extraordinarily competent diplomat who served his country loyally and well. He didn't speak much English, but he was a large, forceful, hard-working man who communicated well and got all over the city. He knew people on the Hill, in the Pentagon, and throughout the bureaucracy, and was constantly moving to advance Guinea's interests, particularly in the field of bauxite. Guinea was considered to have the free world's largest reserves of bauxite which were being mined by the giant producer Aluminium Limited of Canada which was probably beneficially owned by U.S. citizens. The Guineans seized the operation and turned it over to a very small American producer, Harvey Aluminum. Everyone in Washington seemed involved on one side or the other. I would get calls from all kinds of people asking me what was going on and threatening dire action if the Department didn't do something one way or the other. Members of Congress were being pressed from both sides. We were in the delicate position of needing to insure that the nationalization of Aluminium Limited in Guinea was done with adequate compensation but it was an American firm that was taking it over. And our AID program was very much involved. Bangoura would come into the Department and talk to the associate director of AID for Africa, Robertson, a wonderful, able man. We would spend hours with him. I would go back to my office and within an hour, I would get a call from the office of one member of Congress or another saying, "I understand you told Bangoura said you said such and such this morning. Please explain how you can take that position." Though he gave us fits, you had to admire and enjoy him. He represented his country skillfully, way above the level one would expect from a small recently independent nation. My wife and I had gotten to know him and his wife and many children somewhat. He was recalled by Toure and, I believe, played a role in Guinean politics briefly and then disappeared. I later learned that he had been killed.

Q: Was this Sekou Toure's way of operating?

LOW: I don't know the details of what happened to him, but whatever happened, it was a great tragedy for Guinea. We managed to find our way through the aluminum problem. We spent many, many hours on it.

Q: As you were dealing, in a way, it sounds like as a dual desk or country officer, you were given quite a bit of leeway.

LOW: Absolutely. As long as I kept Leon Dorros apprised of where we were and what we were doing, he essentially let me deal with the problem. That's what made it fun. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

Q: Did you find International Organizations (IO) intruding on your bailiwick to get these people to shape up as far as the UN votes were concerned?

LOW: No, I don't know why they didn't press us much. I spent more of my time with AID than anyone else. Our relations with AID were very close and quite good. The AID desk was ably led. We would be in contact three or four times a day. It was a good team.

Q: With AID, you were there during a period when you were trying to bring down our involvement there in Mali. Was there general agreement with AID to be able to do this?

LOW: I don't have a clear recollection, but I certainly don't recall significant foot dragging on their part. I think they were willing to accept it. There were no dramatic statements; it was just a quiet, general reduction. I think they were willing to go along with it, and I believe the Malians got the point.

Q: Just to get a feel for how diplomacy works, you're having Mali, you want to cut down because you're unhappy with their cooperation. Does somebody from Mali come in and say "What the hell are you doing" and you tell them why?

LOW: No. You're working on a case by case basis with AID programs. It's like so many other things. If you keep people apprised of what you're doing and you check with them constantly and you get a team working like this, it goes very smoothly. I knew that both the leadership in State was sympathetic and we kept the leadership of AID apprised. They agreed and so everything went along. It's a matter of getting cooperation over a broad area. When you do that, you get a lot done inside the United States government. We never had a problem on this, that I recall. Later on in my career, I did the same thing with regard to Brazil. Again, there was not a problem.

Q: Did you see in 1963-1965, still early on in African years, an impression of a core of Africanists developing there in the State Department?

LOW: Yes. I think I mentioned the training program. By that time, many of us knew each other. Some years earlier, while we were in Uganda (57 to 59) the State Department had organized two African training programs for people new to the area. Both spent time at Makerere College in Kampala where I got to know most of them. The academic community was very active and we knew many of them fairly well. It was an interesting period. There were some romantic ideas about Africa. In incoming FSO classes a majority would request African assignments. It was a time when that was the place to which people wanted to go. Even President Kennedy was interested. There was less interest in the Johnson period, but still we got a fair amount of attention. Where we ran into problems was with NATO affairs and the European Bureau. When we came up against EUR or East Asia, which was then Far East (FE), we generally lost those battles. The entrenched State Department bureaucracy was prepared to let us have our own way

in areas that didn't conflict with their interest, but once that was being impinged on, they challenged us and were almost always supported by the 7th floor (the secretaries of State, his deputies and the White House (National Security Council) staff. If you were dealing with Portuguese Guinea or one of the others and you wanted to complain about the use of NATO equipment against Africans, you didn't get very far. I remember going into Marshall Green's office in Far Eastern affairs on one occasion. I can't remember what the issue was, but I do remember coming out with my tail between my legs because I lost that battle. We didn't have any problems with NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs] until later on, but the established bureaus generally got their way if there was a conflict.

Q: This was 1963-1965, a time of heightened civil rights action in the United States, the African-Americans looking for more social justice. Did this have any reflection from your point of view dealing with Africa in those days?

LOW: Not a great deal. We were pleased at the attention African-Americans were beginning to give to African affairs, but in general they were much more concerned with events in English-speaking Africa than the francophone areas. When it came to putting real pressure in support of our diplomacy or assistance in Africa the community showed it was primarily interested in domestic issues. Congressman Diggs, the forceful Chairman of the Africa subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee, was perhaps an exception. An African-American congresswoman who was next in line preferred chairmanship of a subcommittee dealing with domestic affairs. You couldn't blame her. She was reflecting the interests of her constituents. It wasn't until Randal Robinson showed how to organize the community to press for South African sanctions during the Reagan years that effective influence was brought to bear.

Q: Was there any cooperation or problems with the French in the areas you were dealing with?

LOW: It was always a prickly relationship. The French in Senegal when I was there didn't really know how to take us and were very suspicious. They pressed the Senegalese to limit our activities. Cooperation between the French and the Senegalese was very close. There were French all through the Senegalese administration. They knew exactly where we were going, what we were doing. Phil Kaiser, our ambassador, had a good relationship with the French ambassador, who was a top-notch man in Senegal. He was a university professor, but I am not sure he represented the real power in France which came from the presidency. Though it was not a period of intense difficulty, most French believed we were trying to replace them in Africa rather than simply have access to African leadership and economies. We believed the French position would be strengthened by loosening their domination. There was certainly no intention to assume responsibility in those countries from the French, but they couldn't believe that, and I think still don't.

Q: What about in Washington? Did France have any effect on our relationship with Guinea and Mali?

LOW: These weren't the countries they were concerned with. They had been kicked out of Guinea completely and the worse our relations were with Guinea, the happier they were, but they really weren't involved. Similarly in Mali, they weren't as concerned as they would have been

with Senegal, Ivory Coast, or Gabon, where their interest was greater. As far as I was concerned, we didn't have difficult relations with the French.

Q: Algeria was still going through its time of difficulty. It has a border with Mali.

LOW: Yes, but there is absolutely no convergence on policy matters. The issues were entirely separate. The Africans themselves weren't concerned with the Mediterranean littoral. They were separated by the Sahara and there really was no overlap other than the fact that they would support the Algerian independence movement and so forth.

JOHN M. ANSPACHER
Public Affairs Office
Bamako (1964-1966)

John M. Anspacher was born in New York in 1918. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from Columbia University. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Mr. Anspacher joined USIS in 1953. His career included positions in Germany, Cambodia, Vietnam, Mali, Ethiopia, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1988 by G. Lewis Schmidt.

ANSPACHER: It was from there, after about a year or so, that I was offered, if that's what you can call it, the post of PAO in Mali, a country of which I had heard almost nothing. I looked it up on the map. And there it was, tucked away between Senegal and the Ivory Coast in West Africa. So off I went as PAO to Mali, much to the surprise of my friends because some of them thought I was over-graded for that job. But it didn't make much difference to me. I didn't care too much. It was, as we like to say, "a challenge."

So, it was from counter-insurgency that I was selected to go to Mali. It was the smallest post I had ever had. The Ambassador at the time was an ex-USIS Officer named William Handley who was at the end of his tour there. I really didn't have a chance to set up a program with him at all. He was perfectly willing to let me just move in and take over and work it out with a chargé d'affaires until we had a new Ambassador, which I did.

We had a very small staff, I think just an Information Officer, a Cultural Officer, and an American secretary. We had about a dozen Malians. We had had some bad times there before my arrival. My predecessor there was Bill Haney, who had the enviable reputation of speaking, understanding, reading, and writing French about as well as anybody in our Agency. So it was a hard act to follow in that sense. He was not there when I got there. Nobody was there except my Information Officer, Phil Pillsbury (of the Pillsbury Flour family). He did not stay long because he was persona non grata-ed out of there for having talked too much to the wrong people. Phil was a young man, over enthusiastic. There was some dissidence in Mali, and I'm afraid he formed too close a relationship with some of the dissidents.

In any event, I finally wound up with a replacement for him and a very good Cultural Officer named Marilyn Johnson, who eventually became a PAO in her own right, and an Ambassador in her own right, too, also in Africa. She was an Africanist, also very fluent in French. She was an outstanding Officer. She deserved every promotion and every accolade she earned. The Chargé d'affaires was a man named Bayard King. We got along reasonably well, although I suspect he got along better with my new Information Officer than he did with me. But that was a matter of personalities, not programs.

We were constrained somewhat there because the President of Mali and his staff, his information minister and cultural education people especially, had been reasonably successfully wooed by the Soviets. Having just broken free, so to speak, not by dint of any revolution on their own part but simply because the French had given up West Africa (Mali had just recently, two or three years earlier, got its independence from the French). They were ripe for the plucking by the Soviets.

We had had some problems prior to my arrival there with the government, partially because of its communist leanings. Mali wanted to become a leader of the Third World, but Mali is never going to be a leader of anything. It just is not built that way. Its geographic and political and economic situations are such that it will never be a leader. But its president had delusions of grandeur and he had opted for what he called independence, neutrality in the Third World, and so forth.

He gave us a lot of trouble, such as imposing censorship on anything we wanted to publish or even to import, and also closing down our library. Our library had been closed for six months prior to my arrival there. I wasn't quite sure what I could do about it because he wasn't going to let us open it again. However, we managed to find, around the edge of the Embassy courtyard, some outbuildings that hadn't been used. So I arranged for them to be cleaned out, and we opened a Reading Room "in the Embassy" which the local government, because of the Embassy's rights under the treaty of diplomatic privilege, could not touch.

Our new reading room could be entered from the street, and we put up a sign which simply said U.S. Embassy Reading Room. We put in a "librarian" and, sure enough, we got some audience among the people who had been coming to our old library and some other new "customers." We let it be known among the schooled in Mali, particularly in the capital, that the Reading Room was available to them. We didn't lend out books, so it was not a full fledged library. But at least we had a place to show our face and a place to put up some exhibits. Our tough Minister of Information refused to allow our French language publications to come in from Paris, and refused to allow us to distribute material that we published ourselves such as a weekly news-bulletin.

And Topic Magazine was prohibited so we had to fiddle around with that one for a while. What we did eventually with both Topic from the Beirut reproduction center and the French-language publication called Informations et documents, out of Paris, was to circumvent the censorship.

I got a list of names of about 300 Malians I wanted to be sure would read these magazines, and what passed for street addresses in Mali. We sent this whole list of names up to Paris, supplied the magazines from the list into an Addressograph and had Paris mail the French-language

magazines directly. Paris was asked simply to go to the post office, put postage stamps on the publications and mail them to these people in Mali. Sure enough, the information minister had issued the prohibition against distribution, but he had forgotten to tell the post office. The post office just let those publications go through and they were delivered to the addresses we had targeted.

I think we circulated Topic the same way. We also produced a news bulletin, on a weekly basis, by having that come out of Paris. We manufactured it in Mali, sent it to Paris, and they sent it back again, addressed by hand to individuals. Terribly complicated, but it worked. And thus we had some impact.

The Malians were hard to deal with because they had no real sense of responsibility for time or obligation. We would set up English classes, and the first class or two 13 or 14 or 15 or 20 or 30 people would come. The next time three people would come. And that would be the end of it. We would invite people for dinner or to have an English lesson and they would never show up. Very difficult place to work. But I think we were making headway, because at some point we had enough friends to tip us off to some things that were happening in China in which our government was interested. And although I played no particular role in all this, we had made enough friends somehow, either the Embassy or USIS, so that word – the news from China that we wanted to hear we heard through the Malian government. It was surreptitiously passed to us by one of our friends in the Malian government.

Out in the countryside where we could get away from the ministers and from the government we also found friends who were interested in what we had to say. For instance, we would take a boat trip up the Niger River and stop for a day or two in a settlement and borrow or rent a jeep. Or we'd drive out there, go off into the bush, and come across tribes of Malians who had never seen a motion picture, who had never seen a photograph of themselves. And after some discussion – we always had a Malian with us because these people didn't speak any French – we would take a Polaroid picture of the tribal chief, much to his amazement. First we had to convince him that it was not his spirit disappearing into this machine. Then we would leave some posters with him, things about the United States, or a flag. And we would leave a picture of John F. Kennedy. And he would say, "Oh yes. We know about President Kennedy." And I wondered to myself how in the world did they ever find out about him.

Q: *Were there any radios out there?*

ANSPACHER: They may have had a radio somewhere, but not in this particular village. Communication was by jungle drums, including the word about the death of John F. Kennedy. We also showed his film, that famous film.

Q: *"Years of Lightning, Day of Drums."*

ANSPACHER: Yes. We showed that, and usually had a good audience for it. It was subtitled in French, which had to be translated into the Malian language by one of our local employees, usually the operator.

Anyway, back to Mali. What else did we do in Mali? We sent Malians to the United States to learn about how the other half lives; that worked reasonably well. One of my best acquaintances—I can't at this stage call him a friend—we had sent to the United States. He was the Mayor of Timbuktu; [The interviewee misspoke. Timbuktu is the capital of Sudan. Bamako is Mali's capital.] he was also the President of the National Assembly.

People who had any French education, either in Dakar or in cosmopolitan France, rose to the top. They could hold two or three jobs simply because there weren't that many of them. You'd find a minister who was also a deputy or president of this or president of some commission, also minister of that. Here was the Minister of Timbuktu, also President of the National Assembly that we had sent him to the United States to watch our Congress at work. He was an influential person and one whom we had influenced. At least both the Ambassador, who by this time was C. Robert Moore whom you may or may not know, and I were reasonably confident of this.

Q: I don't know him.

ANSPACHER: He had been born, I think, and certainly brought up in Turkey and gone to Roberts College; he had been DCM in Cambodia when I was in Saigon. I had met him briefly when he'd come down to Saigon. His wife was Dutch-born and a Dutch foreign service "brat." They had met in Venezuela and had married some years earlier, obviously. He was a very fine Ambassador. He did all the right things and said all the right things at the right time. And she was also outstanding.

This Mayor of Timbuktu had us out to his place on several occasions for a weekend. Spending a weekend in Timbuktu is an experience in itself. There is no Timbuktu Hilton. There is a place called "the encampment" which is a couple of rooms with a couple of beds and mosquito netting and no running water. If it did have running water, one wouldn't drink it anyway. Lots of mosquitoes and flies and no fresh food. Quite an experience. But that's Timbuktu.

We made more points in Mali by sending people to the United States and by introducing them to films and publications than we did anything else. English teaching didn't really catch on. We had some cultural events, singers and dancers from the United States. Everybody kind of enjoyed them but they didn't go wild about them.

So much for Cambodia. Back to Mali. We must have done something right, wither we and/or the Ambassador and/or CIA. Because sometime later, it must have been two to three years after I left Mali. I was stationed in Ethiopia when the government changed in Mali. My Ambassador from Mali, Ambassador Moore, was by then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. He cabled me and asked me about the new president in Mali. It turned out that the new president's wife had been our local USIS secretary in Bamako. So apparently somewhere along the line we had convinced enough Malians that this leftist trend of theirs, this communist orientation, was not going to get them anywhere.

Malians, as do so many of these newly-independent countries, talk in glowing terms about the wonders of communism as opposed to capitalism. They don't really know; they haven't passed through capitalism. They don't know what capitalism is. They don't know what socialism is.

They go from colonialism to communism without stopping to see what there may be anything in between, such as capitalism or, if you like, even socialism.

And, of course, they do it in ringing tones. This impressed me in Mali particularly. I kept asking people about this. We made an effort to translate as much as we could into Bambara, which is not easy because only the Jesuits have managed to get something down in written form of the Bambara language. We worked principally in French. It was the lingua franca between the English-speaking Americans or British and the Bambara-speaking Malians.

But when the President of Mali spoke about those “terrible” French colonialists and how they have to break away from colonialism and the French “oppressors,” he did it all in French, never in Bambara. I kept asking why he didn’t speak his own language. I could never understand why they could never bring themselves to conduct these diatribes against their French colonial “oppressors,” if that’s what they want to call them, in their own language. Perhaps it is more to impress us—in French—than their own people in their own language. It’s happened elsewhere, too.

C. ROBERTS MOORE
Ambassador
Mali (1965-1968)

Ambassador C. Robert Moore was born in Illinois in 1915. He joined the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Turkey, France, Cambodia, and Syria, and ambassadorships to Mali, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. Ambassador Moore was interviewed by Dayton Mak in 1988.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, you have served in Africa, in the Middle East, in Europe, and in the Far East. Perhaps you could tell us a bit about the difficulties you had in these various parts of the world and how they differed, and what some of your problems were. Would you mind doing that?

MOORE: Yes, there are certain common threads, but there are many, many differences. The common thread, I guess, is that they were all, particularly the newly emerging countries that had just obtained their independence—I’m speaking primarily of Africa—very sensitive to any suggestion that they weren’t equals, at least political equals.

I might speak first of Turkey, because that’s where my experience has been most prolonged. Turkey, of course, has existed as country with a government for over 800 years. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it passed through a period where as the Ottoman Empire, it was known as the “Sick Man of Europe” and had to submit to various infringements of its sovereignty in order to survive, but it did survive. The revolutionary regime that took over in 1923, with the new boundaries of Turkey, as a much more heterogeneous state, became very sensitive about its independence and recognition of its independence, and very proud in the spirit which was fostered by Atatürk, very proud of Turkish nationality. Every Turk was very proud of being a Turk and encouraged to be proud to be a Turk. But with the result that sometimes slights which were not intended became quite serious.

I recall that Webster's Dictionary was ordered out of the Roberts College library by the minister of education because it contained an offensive definition of a Turk. It seems that one of the definitions given, not certainly one of the favorite definitions, but a secondary definition, was "a licentious person." Some student saw this in the dictionary, reported it to the ministry, and the ministry ordered the dictionary to be removed.

Another time, a professor at Roberts College took friends around to see the old walls that surrounded Constantinople, took a picture of his son and a Turkish boy with their arms around a donkey, and underneath it, he entitled it "three friends." A Turkish student at the college saw this picture in the album, reported it to the authorities, by then he was away on leave and was not allowed to return to Roberts College. Finally, it was settled after many, many months of absence. Of course, speaking of a Turk in relation to a donkey is certainly a very offensive suggestion, but, of course, his meaning in showing "three friends" was entirely an innocent one and a friendly one.

But it does show how sensitive countries can be, which was a very good experience for me, because I appreciated at a very young age – I was then 16 or 17, with classmates of 20 different nationalities – that one had to be very careful not to tread on the particular nationalist sentiments of one's colleagues. I found this in very good stead in other parts of the world where I served. I think I came to realize, no matter where I was, that many of these countries are, in a sense, looking for any slight that suggests that you don't consider them your equal, or that you're looking down upon them.

Cambodia, again, was another problem. There, again, we had a monarchy, a very colorful monarchy, with a very colorful head of government, Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk. He had been king, but had abdicated in favor of his father in order to take a more active political life. Our relations with him were always either going up or going down. We knew that they would never be stable. If things were going very well, we would say, "This can't last." If things were going very badly, we would say, "Well, after the Prince has gone off to his annual cure in France, we'll probably get along very much better."

I learned there, I think, the lesson of confidentiality. We would try to talk to the Prince, in an exploratory way, about ways in which relations with Vietnam and Cambodia might be improved. There were constant border incursions that were as a result of the war in Vietnam that were creating problems between Vietnam and Cambodia, and between Cambodia and ourselves. But the next day, the conversation would be completely reported in the local newspaper, which the Prince directed. So the importance of being able to talk to someone on a basis of confidentiality became highlighted, and the difficulty of conducting affairs when you really can't have an informal exchange, just to explore possibilities, when this has been ruled out by one side's inability to exercise some restraint.

Particularly in a country like Mali, which was a socialist regime, the problem there was to get along with a regime where the by-word was "down with the imperialists, the colonialists, the neo-colonialists." We had one newspaper in town and one daily broadcast on national radio, in which some minister or some editorialist was always berating the imperialists, colonialists, and

the neo-colonialists, and it was made perfectly clear that we were being considered as being in that category. Having undergone these experiences in Cambodia, as well as in Syria, I was somewhat inured to this bombardment of slurs, in a sense, and didn't react every time it happened. In fact, I think if I had, my reactions or the ability to do anything about it would have been very much impaired. But if things began to get too bad over a period of time, I would go to the president and complain and cite the examples. Generally, he would order somebody, the minister of information or the local newspaper editor, to tone down the commentary. Then, of course, in due course, the process would repeat itself. But I think one learns to take some of these things. Happily, we discovered, in most every instance, that the population as such seemed to be basically unaffected by these invectives.

We were able to travel around the country and encountered a friendly reception wherever we went, and it was almost as if these daily broadcasts didn't sink in or didn't seem, however, to apply when individuals were concerned. Happily, that was our experience.

In some of the countries we had a very strong bloc presence, particularly in Cambodia and in Mali. In Mali, there were only three Western embassies, the American, the French, and the Germans, but at least 20 of the bloc countries were represented, including such friends of the United States as Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam.

The deanship of the diplomatic corps revolved, of course, among all of the chiefs of mission, depending upon their seniority. Most of the time that I was there, we had either poor or no relations with the country of the acting dean, which meant that he did not communicate with us directly, and the protocol office of the foreign ministry would have to pass on all messages concerning the diplomatic corps to us, rather than through the dean of the diplomatic corps.

I remember one time attending a reception shortly after I arrived, when all of the chiefs of mission were gathered at the presidency, and I shook hands with everybody, including the North Korean ambassador, who smiled at me and shook hands. Then I suddenly looked back and saw a look of horror on his face, as he realized he'd shaken hands with the American ambassador. But this was all part of the game. Receptions were fun to go to, to watch which bloc members sat with which other bloc members, which apparently were trying to keep some distance. We had lots of interesting, sort of fun experiences of that kind.

I recall once when the Russians had invited all of the bloc chiefs of mission to attend some festival at the embassy, including the Yugoslav ambassador and his wife. At the end the Soviet Ambassador proposed a toast to Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean president, whose birthday it was then. Of course, immediately everybody rose with their glasses, except the Yugoslav ambassador and his wife, who were seated at opposite ends of the room and had no communication with each other. Yugoslavia had no relations with Kim Il-Sung and didn't get along with him, and they simply defied everybody else and resolutely remained in their seats. But this is what we were sensitive to in a small community like Bamako, the capital of Mali. Many of these situations were only of symbolic interest but kept the pot boiling.

I think I do have to speak a bit about economic development and the problems that we encountered in the various countries because they did differ. Turkey, happily, was able to find

itself included in the Marshall Plan, after originally being omitted. There, the first program that we had was a program of creating a highway department, with the help of the Public Highway Service in the United States.

I returned to Turkey last September and was absolutely startled at the development of the road system, which was the outgrowth of that first effort on our part to develop a modern highway organization in Turkey that could plan and carry out road improvement and road development. But it is I think, one of the most lasting and useful things that we performed in the economic field for Turkey, opening up a rich country, in which many isolated areas had virtually no access to markets, either abroad or in the urban centers of Turkey.

But Turkey was an easier matter. Our only problem was that the Turkish Government had its own ideas of how it wanted its economic development money spent, and we felt many of these ideas were unsound. So there was a constant negotiation required to work out programs that we could both accept.

When you get to a country such as Mali, one of the poorest of the poor countries of the world, with a per capita income even today of considerably less than \$200, and with no trained manpower, with staggering health problems (debilitating and endemic diseases including malaria, bilharzia and filariasis) and with an uneducated population, with a literacy rate of less than 10%, how can you translate your aid into projects that are going to bring about improvement in the lot of the average Malian? It was very difficult to deal with anybody in the government below the level of the secretary general of a minister, simply because they weren't equipped, either educationally or, let's say, psychologically, to deal with problems that required responsibility and decisions. So the decision making, getting answers, was always a time-consuming process.

I recall again, in Mali, an interesting situation. We had agreed to give Mali a few million dollars to build a normal school. We had a very prominent firm of American architects design this school. It was beautifully designed. We insisted, of course, on asking the Malians to examine the plans, to give us their suggestions as to what ought to be done, and tried to involve them in the whole process. Well, the result was that three years after my arrival the project was still pending. In the meantime, the Chinese had come in, built a textile factory, had it opened and operating, and we still hadn't turned the first shovel on our school. But the Chinese simply provided the entire complex without bothering or troubling the Malians to get their views on whether the construction ideas were sound or not. I think our idea was sound, the idea of involving the local people in a project, except for the fact that there were only two or three people in the entire ministry capable of dealing with projects of this kind. All of the countries, the bloc and other countries, were absolutely overwhelming it with projects that they had to look over and approve, as a result of which, of course, the process was very much slowed up.

There was something to be gained, perhaps, in the delay of that particular project, because later, before it was completed, we began to realize that the maintenance on the buildings that we had in mind would have been so great that the Malians would have never been able to meet it out of their budget. We ended up by building a much smaller and perhaps better planned, architecturally less exciting building. So one had to realize that you couldn't develop a project in

isolation; one had to think also in terms of what the local government was going to be able to support in meeting the local costs, not only the costs of starting the project, because usually we wanted to have some participation on their side, but in keeping up the project once we had left. Very often, some of these countries simply didn't have the means to do this.

This was particularly evident in road building, where we could build roads and did build some fine roads to connect countries together, but the ability of the country to maintain those roads, to exercise sufficient discipline over truck drivers so that overweight in trucks didn't destroy the roads, was more than these countries were really able to take care of, at least in the least developed of the developing countries.

I served mainly in French-speaking posts, countries that had either been colonies or, in effect, protectorates, where French influence was very strong. So one also had to realize that the officials of bureaucracy in those countries, having largely been trained by the French, had a certain approach to governing and approach to dealing with others that we had to adapt to. I think diplomats, people in my position in the English-speaking world, perhaps had a somewhat different problem, because we were more used to the English-influenced mentality. But again, in all of the French-speaking countries, there was a very heavy bureaucracy, a very slow bureaucratic process in getting approvals or working with any of the ministries. I always said to my staff that two qualities were extremely important in the developing world and certainly in the French-speaking world – patience and perseverance. If you kept at something long enough and persevered enough, generally speaking, you could get the result that you were after.

MARK C. LISSFELT
Economic-Commercial Officer
Bamako (1967-1969)

Mark C. Lissfelt was born in Pennsylvania in 1932. He received his BA from Haverford College and his MALD from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1959. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1954 to 1956. His foreign posts included London, Tel Aviv, Bamako, Brussels, Bonn, Berlin and Paris. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and by Richard Jackson.

Q: This is part II of the oral history interview of Mark Lissfelt. It's being conducted in Boston on October 30 by Richard Jackson. Mark, you took the story up last time with Stu Kennedy through your tour in Israel and you were preparing to depart Israel for your next assignment. That was a two-year assignment in Mali, wasn't it?

LISSFELT: Well, Dick, actually I had home-leave-and-return orders from Israel to come back to Israel for two more years to a good job in the embassy, to a house full of belongings, a car in the garage, and a certain amount of Hebrew study under my belt. However, when I arrived the fateful summer of '67, back in Washington, I was told by Personnel only then that my assignment had been broken and that I was being sent to Bamako, Mali. I won't share, because you can easily imagine, the shock that that created for me and for my whole family and even

made my wife ask, “Do you really want to work for an organization that would do such a thing to you?”

Q: This was because of the “daisy chain” of other people, and you were the end of the chain and somebody else had to be accommodated, or why would they do a thing like that?

LISSFELT: Well, it was done by a friend and classmate, I’m told, Hume Horan, who went on to be a distinguished ambassador. At the time he was making assignments in Africa for a fill-in assignment and, at the same time was well aware that the Arabists in the Middle East had been sent flying from embassies that closed one after the other because of the Six Day War. And the Department had the problem of placing a number of Arabists, and I think it was a bad confluence of needs, and my body was served up. I was replaced in Israel by a very nice guy who was an Arabist who profited taking my place in Israel, had a job, and I was sent off to a place that had been vacant for 18 months, a job as the economic-commercial officer in a country then in the early stone age, with \$600 of recorded trade with the United States, in songbirds and carved wood objects. The futility of it all was just overwhelming, but we bit the bullet, and off we went with three young children and a Welsh corgi pup in a carton for the next two years in Bamako.

It turned out to be less than that because early in 1969 the Department in its wisdom and the Near East Bureau specifically urgently needed somebody to come back to serve on the Israeli Desk, where a friend and colleague, John Leonard, had resigned, and I became their leading candidate in their desperation. You can imagine my first reaction when I heard that the Middle East Bureau wanted me back suddenly after the way I’d been, I thought, rather cavalierly and ineptly dealt with by the same bureau. Nevertheless, it took about 18 seconds in dusty downtown Bamako, Mali, to decide that it was time to go, and back we went to the Israeli Desk. But in the intervening months we’d had, really, I must admit, a rather interesting time in a terribly poor, dusty, forlorn, godforsaken place in the hands of a communist-dominated régime, then very unfriendly to the United States, although the Malians as people are an extraordinarily friendly group, as has been demonstrated in the ensuing years. While we were there, there was a coup d’état, which replaced the father of the country, Modibo Keita, an interesting experience, totally bloodless, totally peaceful. The tanks in the streets were used more often to hang the laundry of the soldiers than anything else. There were about eight old Russian T-34 tanks by the way, which barely ran. Totally bloodless, except for the Father of the Country, who was incarcerated in one prison after another and eventually died. But we enjoyed it, in a sense, because of the extraordinary contrast with the life we had led up until then. While in this francophone country, we worked on our French, but we found it isolating, and after a while, I must admit, boring. Life centered around the small diplomatic community and the biggest entertainment were pool parties around people’s swimming pools, the same faces week-in, week-out, never any contact with any Malians, who again had nothing to gain and only could lose by contact with an American official.

Q: That was because it was a military régime? I remember Modibo Keita was quite an imposing military figure, big man. How did he happen to be overthrown? Was it basically tribal?

LISSFELT: No, I think it was, in fact, military, and he was replaced by some young Turks out of the Malian Air Force, many of whom we had trained to fly C-47 planes at various U.S. bases, and in ensuing years a series of military people have run that country, having had rather positive

experiences at the hands of the U.S. military. Modibo's background was as a teacher. He came out of the famous *Lycée* in Senegal, whose name escapes me, that has trained so many of Africa's leaders. And he rose, at the time of the French dominance, through that channel. But it wasn't a military coup in the sense that – well, I guess it was a military coup in the fact that the leaders were military people, but again, I wasn't around long enough. This happened in November '68, and I left February '69, so I wasn't around to experience the “after;” I only knew the before.

Q: And you mentioned you were on the commercial side, which was fairly limited. Given the economy being active and ambitious, you must have gotten into most of the other aspects of the small embassy. Who were the people you were with, and what seemed like the best thing to get your teeth into?

LISSFELT: Well, fortunately, we had leadership that didn't think that they were serving at the center of the world and had their egos largely under control. The first ambassador was C. Robert Moore, a wonderful man-

Q: Wonderful guy.

LISSFELT: --succeeded by Ed Clark, who had been in the African Bureau for many years, also another wonderful guy, both of them with nice wives and very sympathetic to leading a post in extraordinary hardship conditions. It was not that we wanted to eat and to drink, but isolation – you couldn't leave, for example, the capital; you couldn't go more than five miles outside the capital without a foreign office note requesting and acceded to. You requested and they acceded, if they felt like it, to your demand. So we had in Bamako five Sunday drives after going to church, down in that dusty big cathedral, what was left of it, but they were all quite short.

No, as to what I sunk my teeth into, there wasn't anything to sink your teeth into because there was a bunch of state-run enterprises, and they wouldn't see me. They would have, again, nothing to do with the American embassy. The highlight of my career as an economic-commercial officer, I remember, was stumbling across a report that some French people had written up about prospects and plans for the economy of Mali for the next couple of years and where it should go. I found it on a dusty shelf in a government printing office. I was the only white face in the place, an object of a certain unfriendly curiosity. I built that into probably the best report – it didn't take any work on my part – on what the Department had on where Mali thought it might go. There were even a few statistics, rare in anything about Mali. Of course, the coup d'état came along and made that moot. But survival and morale – survival in the sense of maintaining one's family's morale and health – were, looking back, I think, preoccupying. But again, we had, as memory dims, fond memories of Mali and lots of good stories to tell about life there and trips, for example, to the Dogon country, to look at the source of some of the most important African wood carvings in the world and to take a trip, Cindy and I, on a wonderful old steamer, the “General Soumare,” down the Niger River to visit the city of Timbuktu, which was an experience that I won't soon forget – dusty streets, Tuareg warriors leading their camels about as the tail end of a caravan moved through with salt and other trade across the Sahara Desert.

Q: It was then very much a French preserve. Were there still French coöperants all over the place. Mali had a reputation for radicalism and ties in that period with the Chinese, no?

LISSFELT: Yes , but it still was very much a French preserve, the French thought, more so than the Malians, that's for sure, but there were lots of Russians, and a huge Chinese embassy and little aid projects such as a match factory. The Chinese were always helping natives build match factories across Africa, so they had their match factory. But the French – they had a wonderful French ambassador at the time. His name was Pierre Pélin, married to an Irish woman who didn't stay very long once she saw Mali. But the main feature of the French ambassador was his dislike for the French community and his close attachment to the American community, which led to all sorts of interesting conversations, and good times – I must say – and good eating at his residence.

HAROLD E. HORAN
Political Officer
Bamako (1967-1969)

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: I'd like to turn now to how you got into the field of African Affairs, where you spent most of your time.

HORAN: Well, you know, in those days – I don't know whether it's true or not now – but they use to have this wish list when you were a young Foreign Service officer and you put down the three posts that you wanted. Right? This was when I was a junior Foreign Service officer. So I put down Paris; any other West European post, my second choice; my third choice, which I had forgotten by the time I got assigned to Bamako, a French-speaking, West African post. So I guess after four and a half years in Florence, they figured that I was due for a post and an assignment such as Bamako, Mali. I was appalled. I didn't know where Bamako, Mali was. [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter] Join the club of all of us when we go searching for where the hell is this.

HORAN: That's right. Exactly. But it just couldn't have been better for my career.

Q: What were you doing? I mean, in the first place, to put it in a time frame, you went there in 1967.

HORAN: I went there in 1967. That's correct. I was the political officer. We only had an economic officer, a political officer, DCM, an ambassador, and the administrative officer.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HORAN: The ambassador was Bob Moore.

Q: *Now, what was the situation in Bamako in 1967?*

HORAN: Very, very bleak. We had very little contact with the government. They were very anti-American, anti-West. Lots of rhetoric, pro-eastern, pro-communist rhetoric. They were in support of the North Vietnamese in the Vietnamese War. The ambassador had very few contacts. He had been told to just go there and hold the thing together. And so it was a very frustrating time for me because I had been a consular officer in Florence, an administrative officer in Tehran. So this was my first political officer experience. Frustrating for me trying to do my job, get information, and get people to talk to me. I must say that Bob Moore was an understanding person, a wise man. He is a wise man and a gentleman. He sort of nurtured me through this period.

Q: *Who was the leader of Mali and why was there this anti-Western . . .*

HORAN: Modibo Keita and he was one of these leaders who took a Marxist-Leninist road, a heavily organized society. The government, of course, organized everything, and the party – there was a one-party state of course which ran everything, including the agriculture production. They looked toward China and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union built them a stadium, the Chinese built them a leather factory. This was, of course, when we were still in the Cold War. We didn't have relations with China. From the American standpoint the situation in Mali was unhealthy.

In 1968 when both the ambassador and DCM had changed, the ambassador from Bob Moore to Ed Clark, the situation had gotten so bad in Mali, the government and the party had become so domineering, that there was a coup d'état. I woke up one morning – my house was on a little dirt road leading into the one main paved road into town, in which I had to go past the party headquarters to the embassy – I walked out my house about 6:00 in the morning and my gardener was standing there, and he said to me, “Patron, there are lots of soldiers in the streets with guns.”

I went the radio and turned the radio on, and martial music was playing. I said to my wife, who was working at that time at the USIA library, “Let's go to the office early.” I drive down the dusty road and find myself there at the party headquarters, and there are the soldiers and the tanks. Then I go down the road, which was called Minister's Road, because a lot of the ministers had their houses not too far from the party headquarters, and I could see people standing outside arguing with the soldiers, and with tanks standing around. So I made a beeline for the ambassador's residence. He used to love to tell this story. He was on his porch having his breakfast – this must have been 7:00, I guess. I said, “Mr. Ambassador, I think we've had a coup d'état.” [Laughter] He said, “Well, you go report it.”

So I went to the embassy and reported developments. I think we were the first to report it. Then I had a good friend of mine who was the Agina Frana press reporter, who lived down the street from me – nice guy. I haven't seen or heard from him in years. In any case, I went to his house, and I said, “Do you realize there's been a coup d'état?”

He said, “What are you talking about?”

The first thing he did was to go to his telex machine, and turned it on and it was off. That was the first thing, as a reporter, he thought about, was to go look at his telex, because that’s how he communicated with his office in Paris. He was still in his pajamas, and, in any case, he turned on his telex and it was off, and so he recognized that indeed we had a coup d’état. This was a coup d’état by the military, and, of course, the leader of the coup d’état, Moussa Traore, is still president. And, I guess, he’s – I’m out of it of course, but from what I gather – doing quite well. He was head of OAU and called on the President, I think, four years ago. So that, of course, changed things.

The interesting thing for me, of course, was that I was the old boy on the block, because I had a new ambassador and a new DCM. As a matter of fact, I discovered that some of the military leaders had gone to the United States for training.

Q: I’m looking a little at the mechanism. Here you are, the political officer, there’s a coup, which is sort of the mother’s milk of political officers, a great thing. What did you do? I mean, you can see tanks and you saw things happening, but then what did you do?

HORAN: Well, in a case like that, you listen to the radio. The first thing you do is listen to the radio, and then you report it back to Washington. Then you do as you do in every coup, you lie low for a while, and the ambassador talks to everybody he can talk to, you talk to whoever you can talk to. I did a lot of walking around the streets, because, as in most coup d’états of this kind, the crowds were joyous and there was great celebrations, people rode around on their bicycles or walked around the city carrying – for some reason they broke branches off the trees and laced their bicycles with branches off the trees. I visited some of the rallies with President Traore and the other leaders. Then little by little we tried to get to know some of these people.

One interesting sideline on this, what we had in store for us, in the very early days of the coup, the military had a road blockade at one point. An AID official was stopped and explained he wanted to pickup his child, who was at school – this may have been the first day after the coup. There was an officer manning the barricade and he explained to the officer in French what he needed to do. He needed to get through the barricade to get his child at school, and the officer’s response in English was, “No sweat.”

So I had seen from the files that we had some officers who had been in the United States, and this was confirmation with this totally colloquial English, “No sweat.”

Q: Here we had a rather extremely pro-Marxist, anti-Western leader – this is before the coup – allowing some of his military officers to go to the West to be trained.

HORAN: Well, this had been earlier on. These officers had gone earlier on. There was no military program at the time I was there. This had been earlier when relations were better. Relations got bad over the Vietnam War, I think.

Interestingly enough, the coup was not a coup which changed from East to West overnight. They were non-aligned, enthusiastically so.

As a matter of fact, they announced on the radio – of course, you have to listen to the radio in small West African countries, that’s where you get your news, that’s the device the government uses to convey news – that they were going to have an agricultural fair up in the Sahara Desert in a place called Kidal, which was an old French prison in the middle of nowhere. If you were in that prison and escaped, you’d be dead because there’s no where you could go. They announced that the President was going to lead this delegation to the fair. It was a three-country fair, Mali – I want to say Mali, Morocco and Mauritania. So I called a friend of mine in the foreign office and I said, “I wonder if I could get permission to go to this fair.” I had, of course, cleared this with my ambassador. So he said, “Well, I’ll just have to see.”

So, as was my habit, I was sitting on my porch at lunch time one day, listening to the noon news, and the noon news said, “The following delegation headed by President Traore shall appear tomorrow at the airport to go to Kidal for the fair.” They listed off the names, and there was my name.

What’s interesting is that none of my other diplomatic colleagues thought to request this except one, an officer from the East German embassy, and they had allowed both of us to go. Of course, we didn’t have relations with East Germany. In those times things were pretty bad. But because we were both diplomats, they put us together in the same hotel room. [Laughter]

One point of the story is that during the fair, they had the dances and singing in the evening, including a pro-North Vietnamese, anti-American skit. And there I was sitting as a diplomat. So this young fellow – not so young, but – whom I knew was a personal aide to the President, came over to me after the performance and apologized. Of course, he’d done it on instruction from the President. But here is this American, we don’t want him to get the wrong idea, we didn’t know this was going to happen. I mean, the people thought this was what was wanted, because that’s what they would have done if Keita had been there. They apologized to me to make sure that I, and the American government, understood that this was not something they had done on purpose.

Q: Also, it points out that it’s easy to go with a chip on your shoulder and maybe leave in a huff, when often it’s best just to sit there and keep rather stony-faced, and let it go.

HORAN: Plus the fact in Kidal, there wasn’t any place I could go. I guess I could go back to my hotel room and sulk. [Laughter] No. You’re absolutely right. I’d made up my mind that here I was in the middle of nowhere, where very few American diplomats if any had previously visited. In Keita’s days it was restricted because it was used by the Malians just as it has been used by the French, which was for political prisoners. They didn’t want foreigners there. I was able to take pictures of the prison, which, once again, was unheard of under Keita. I decided to just sit it out.

Q: Did you find that you were able to – maybe influence is the wrong term, but at least gain more respectability?

HORAN: Absolutely. Well, one thing I forgot to mention was the fact that we had a young cultural affairs officer there. The President's wife, in a different era, had worked at the USIA library, and he had known her there. So we had that entre. We found that you just worked the thing very slowly, calmly, not push. We didn't have to push, our interests were not that great in Mali. We could be very calm and make our contacts as we could, and slowly our aid program increased, and our dialogue with the Malians increased. But they were never really – they may be now, but at that time they were neutral. They were not pro-West, not pro-East. They had projects from the Soviets and the Chinese they were prepared to retain, and as is rightly so. As a matter of fact, a large part of the diplomatic representation that this new group found in place in Mali was East European and Chinese, and North Vietnamese.

Q: How about the French? Did the French have much of a role there or had they left in a huff?

HORAN: No they had not left in a huff. Keita had become a member of the Francophone state. De Gaulle had invited everybody and everybody stayed on as Francophone states except for Guinea, you know. No, the French remained a presence there, and they had their own projects. That tie was not, obviously, as close as the ties with Ivory Coast, or Senegal, but they stayed there.

ROBERT O. BLAKE
Ambassador
Mali (1970-1973)

Ambassador Robert O. Blake was born in California in 1921. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Managua, Moscow, Tokyo, Tunis, Leopoldville, and Paris, and an ambassador to Mali. Ambassador Blake was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert in 1990.

Q: Paris, and you had picked Bamako. That must have been quite a change, but a fascinating country, I gather from having talked to you.

BLAKE: Probably the most interesting of all the African countries. The valley of the historic Niger River Valley, ancient civilizations, wonderful people.

Q: It really has a history compared to a lot of other places, at least more of it is written.

BLAKE: That's right, and very, very interesting people. A very poor country. They had a strong history of being anti-French because they were the enemy that the French had been fighting when Franco took over West Africa. That had translated itself into modern times into a – during the time of Modibo Kena – very pro-communist in outlook. By the time we got there, Modibo Kena had been thrown out. The army had taken over, and while there was a general leftist metaphor being used, it really didn't amount to that much. U.S. interests were not that enormous

there. Our interests were in seeing that the place prosper, and begin to be able to solve some of its own problems.

Q: Well, that was enough of a challenge for anybody I would think.

BLAKE: I spent most of my time working on and looking at the AID program. It was a sizeable AID program, trying to help the country get itself established in various ways. Also I spent a lot of largely fruitless time trying to talk the Malians into setting up a family planning program. We finally succeeded in getting them to let in a small group from Planned Parenthood Canada to establish a fertility clinic for women, to show how they could have babies. The idea was that, once they had a family, they would then be in the right mood to limit the number of children. So it was really a very big challenge.

The politics of the country were, as far as I was concerned, of very little importance, particularly the internal politics. I made a rule that nobody in our embassy – a small embassy – was to talk about internal politics with Malian officials. I simply didn't want us to get involved in something which was, as in any country, very Machiavellian and of no real importance to us. I did the talking about politics, when I did, with the President of the country directly, with everything above board so he'd know what the story was. There was not very much emphasis on politics. That was a good decision on my part. That left other people to work on other kinds of relations with the Malians.

Q: Mostly economic?

BLAKE: Yes, economic or scientific. For example, I got the Space Administration to establish a small program for using Landsat imagery, to look for water in this vast desert where finding water is very important. We started a very small space program which was quite productive for the Malians.

Q: Did it do anything to make a dent in the drought and starvation situation there?

BLAKE: No.

Q: Was there any significant Marxist, or pseudo-Marxist, feeling there? Or was it purely an indigenous form of socialism?

BLAKE: There was a lot of Marxist sentiment. This was a fairly early time, of course, before it became as apparent that things were going down hill in all the communist countries. One reason was that so many of the bright people had gone to Paris. They had been very well treated by left-wing people in France and they came back with that kind of baggage. I don't know if I said this before, but we found that the Malians who were the easiest to work with were the ones who had been to the Soviet Union.

Q: They know the facts about life in the Soviet Union.

BLAKE: Yes. They come back with a good technical education as a whole, not too high tech, but also come back with a very, very strong feeling against the Russians, and a very low appreciation of the workings of the Soviet system. Russians are simply terrible with people of color. And the Africans were definitely discriminated against. They would get beat up when they would try to take out local girls, and things like that. For most of them it had been quite an unpleasant experience.

Q: It's nice to know that somebody else is even worse than we are, although I think we've learned an awful lot on this sort of thing.

BLAKE: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, the Malians who went to the States liked it very much. The problem was that people didn't want to come home. I was fairly determined that we weren't going to be a source of major brain drain, so when people went to the States, many for advanced degrees, we would insist that they leave their families behind. Otherwise they never came back. That made for a lot of lonely people, there's no question about that, but they did come back. From everybody's point of view it was a better thing to do.

Q: Did you have a Peace Corps operation?

BLAKE: Yes.

Q: What did they do? Teach English, or teach something else?

BLAKE: I don't remember any English teaching. There was a lot of poultry raising, for example. And there was welding, we had a whole series of projects to do mostly with agriculture.

Q: What was your feeling there about the value of the AID program? Of course, it's of value to the participants in it. We all know that. I mean it's of great value. Did you feel it was a constructive part of our program?

BLAKE: We tried very hard. We had some programs that worked pretty well. We tried to keep it simple, and tried to avoid heavy input of equipment that couldn't be maintained. For example, the poultry program was a very successful program all over the country. That was a joint Peace Corps-AID program. We tried some things that didn't work. For example, one of the big problems has always been; how to get Malian cattle from the great plains up in the Niger River Valley all the way down to the coast. The way it had always been done was to march them on foot.

Q: There they lost half their weight on the way.

BLAKE: That's right, just eating what they could find as they went along. So they'd arrive skin and bones and of not very much value. We tried to help them set up something that they wanted which was to build some cattle feeding stations, watering stations, and places where the cattle could be loaded onto trucks. We spent a certain amount of money although we didn't get that far into it, and it failed. The reason it failed is that although the herdsmen, who are all Fulani, had said that they would sell cattle, when push came to shove, they wouldn't sell very many on a

regular basis. For example, they would sell cattle with the evil eye. They'd sell cattle who kicked over fences, cattle that got too old. But so much of their wealth, and their prestige, is represented by how many head of cattle they have, that you simply wouldn't assure a constant enough flow to make possible all the things that had to be done to put a system in. I learned an awful lot out of that failure.

Q: I think until you've actually been out and seen some of these things on the ground, you don't realize what the problem is.

BLAKE: That's right. We'd had a sociologist out there working with the Fulani for a long time. He spent almost a year talking to the Fulani; he was absolutely convinced that they would sell their cattle. But they wouldn't.

Q: The most valuable guy I had on my AID staff was a young anthropologist who really made a serious study of what made them tick psychologically, and socially. He saved us a lot of money.

BLAKE: Absolutely important. We had limited success. The problem was really, that the gains that were made were wiped out by population growth. Mali never got ahead of the curve.

Q: What is the population of Mali roughly? Or what was it in those days?

BLAKE: At that time it was over 20 million.

Q: Oh, really? I had no idea it was that large. So that took a lot of people. How about the Peace Corps in terms of relations with the population, and the US image?

BLAKE: Very good. Our only big problem with the Peace Corps was that they tried something which I recommended against, but they did it anyway. They brought a lot of old people over there. I shouldn't say a lot. I think maybe ten. And, of that, several of them died. They couldn't take the heat, and the kind of primitive living that we had there. The Peace Corps did phase the old folks properly out. I was never against the idea of older people in the Peace Corps. I think that's great, but don't put them in a place where the pressures of living, and the climate, are going to be such that they can't handle it.

Q: Well, I personally felt the Peace Corps was one of my most useful tools, a little earlier on, in the other side of the continent, but some people didn't. That's interesting.

BLAKE: I agree with you. I won't say, the most useful, in a sense because they tended to be people who were out in the country away from the center of where the most activity was.

Q: I didn't find them useful so much in economic terms, or programs terms, as in human relations and that sort of thing, that's what I had in mind.

BLAKE: We lost several people from sickness there. It's a tough country health wise. People drinking contaminated water, then getting malaria, or some kind of flu. The strongest of them

will fall. The Peace Corps tries hard to teach young people that they're not invulnerable in these tropical climates. We didn't have a doctor.

Q: You didn't have a doctor? Oh, we did, I must say.

BLAKE: We had few doctors in the country, except the witch doctors. No Western doctors. We did have a good nurse. She probably could have done anything, even surgery. We had one serious case when the wife of the head of the Peace Corps, who was pregnant, started bleeding profusely and then had a miscarriage – a serious one. I was told by the nurse that if we didn't get someone to help this woman, her life was in danger. I called Frankfurt, the Air Force there on the radio, and they had a plane down there in three hours with an operating theater. They immediately did what they had to stabilize her. They had an air conditioned plane with an operating theater and then hauled her away to Frankfurt and saved her life.

Q: That sounds like it gives you a lot of support through your staff.

BLAKE: It sure does.

Q: You mentioned in your previous conversation that your wife had to teach the children. How old were they at the time?

BLAKE: Just before going into high school.

Q: Did it work all right?

BLAKE: Yes. Like you, Tully, we always took the position that the kids were going to get a lot more out of their life in these places than just school. I'd haul them all over the country with me on trips. Once I took one of my sons to Abidjan when I went down for consultation of some kind. Those are the things that they remember, learning about how Africans live. They did fine with the Calvers course, but that's not what they really learned.

Q: But still, you do have the frightful thing of keeping them up in school, and keeping on with their education – their formal education.

BLAKE: They all did very well, and had no reentry problems when they came back to American schools.

Q: That's great. That proves you paid some attention to them, which by the way you can do in the Foreign Service better than you can if you're stuck in the Department.

BLAKE: I think so too, absolutely.

Q: How about the quality of leadership in Mali? Were the people being intelligent, shrewd?

BLAKE: The whole leadership was very intelligent, very shrewd, very high class people, not highly educated. Most of the people at the top level in the government were Army officers. They

were conscientious, somewhat limited in their grasp of international economics, and so forth, but they as a whole handled the problems of their country very well. Mali is a country which had the potential for a lot of problems among tribes, and groups. Fortunately that was very muted. Not only muted because it was kept down by force, which as a whole I don't think it was, but because people were relatively satisfied with what was happening. It was a country where people didn't have very high expectations, never had. The French never put much money into Mali, or spoiled them in any way.

Q: And they didn't have an over-educated class... people would be discontent.

BLAKE: No. The real problem was that they never, never got on top of their population growth, and they haven't yet. These men considered themselves modern, advanced thinkers, neo-Marxists, which didn't go very deeply as I said. On the other hand they were reactionary, male, chauvinists in the way their society had always been. I'm not criticizing them, but the idea of any kind of women's lib, or population programs, did not go over at all well.

Q: Is Mali largely Muslim?

BLAKE: I suppose it's a total of many cultural elements, but that's just the way it was.

Q: No, what I mean is, is the population largely Muslim?

BLAKE: Yes, yes.

Q: Are there any final thoughts on Mali, or should we get back to...

BLAKE: I don't think so. It was a very, very instructive experience for me. I learned a lot. Dave Newsom, who was Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, asked me if I would like to go on another African post, and I told him "no."

JAY K. KATZEN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Bamako (1971-1973)

Jay K. Katzen was born in New York in 1936. He graduated from Princeton in 1958 and then received an M.A. at Yale the following year and entered the Foreign Service in 1959. He served in Australia, Burundi, Romania, and Mali. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in June 1990.

Q: Did you go directly to Mali?

KATZEN: I went directly to Mali via a few weeks in the States, and went from snow up to my knees to a temperature of about 93 or so.

Q: How did this assignment come about?

KATZEN: Bob Blake, who was our ambassador in Bamako, had been my DCM when we were together in Kinshasa, and asked if I would like to go join him in Bamako. I said I would be pleased to. He asked the department if that could occur, and the department agreed.

Q: Every DCM does different things. How did Bob Blake use you as his DCM?

KATZEN: Bob Blake had been minister to Paris prior to coming down to Mali. He was a very active and forceful ambassador, filled with the two most important human qualities I think we can have: creativity and imagination. To a great extent Bob, as he should have been, was the leading force in implementing our policy in Mali, and I was his executive officer, if you will. He had direct relations with each of the section chiefs, the AID director, the Peace Corps director and so on, and played an active personal role in virtually every facet of embassy life, primarily on the AID side.

Q: Isn't it difficult, in a relatively small embassy, being a DCM to an ambassador who both knows the ropes and has been a DCM? Didn't you get in each other's way?

KATZEN: We didn't. I certainly learned a lot from Bob, and I guess as testimony of that, we remain very good friends. There is a danger of that, and I certainly know of a number of people who have had that difficulty, but it was not characteristic of my relationship with Bob. If anything, my relations with some of the heads of sections might have seemed a little bit overbearing to them, because after Bob had spoken with them directly about getting one or another thing done, I would be following up on it, and they may occasionally have felt that that was overkill. But again that certainly was not significant.

Q: What were our interests in Mali?

KATZEN: Our interests were primarily on the economic development side. This was a country that, at least the years I was there, seemed to have been going through parts of the Old Testament: the first year I was there we had drought; the second year we had floods; the third year we had migratory crickets; and I suspect a fourth year would have brought frogs, but I didn't stay around to watch. But it was to get the Malians to feel that someone way across the sea was interested in helping them solve their problems. They are a very proud people. The University of Timbuktu in Mali was a Fifteenth Century center of higher education. Our interest was getting them to have an improved existence.

One of the things I learned in Mali and was able to use in my subsequent assignment at the U.N. was a respect for a country's own national interests, if you will. And one amusing anecdote that I would cite was going to see the foreign minister one day with urgent instructions from Washington to get the Malians to support our position opposing the fishing of whales. Armed with that instruction, I went to see the foreign minister, who appeared in camouflage uniform with big heavy boots in the middle of April (it is incredibly hot in Mali then). The foreign minister simply didn't know, understandably, what a whale was. I drew a picture and I described as best I could what whales do. And he, acting from his national interests, said, "Jay, here's what

I can do. I can promise you that if a whale ever appears in the Niger River, we will not fish him.” For a man not all that elegant (as he would acknowledge) to come up with what preserved his national interests and satisfied ours was I think an important lesson.

Q: What was your impression of the effectiveness and the staffing of our AID program?

KATZEN: I think with our program in general (and it certainly was an observation which I had in a subsequent assignment to Africa in the Congo), we’re not a very patient people. Unlike the Malians, the Chinese, the Israelis, and others, we want very quick results. This was the backbone of our own history. We went to the frontier, we built buildings, we built bridges, we fought wars, and all we had to know was how much money over how many months of time and with how many people we could attain a given result. And then came Vietnam, and then came the war against poverty, and then came the drug war. And we saw that impatience was not going to serve us all that well.

I found with our AID program, Stu, that we have been very flighty. Beginning in the sixties, we worried a lot about education in Africa. And our initial thought was let’s have the Africans educated at home. Well, they didn’t really want to be educated at home. So we said great, we’ll bring lots of Africans over to the States. They came to the States and they didn’t want to go home again. So we said what we need to do now is to build infrastructure. So we built roads and tried to maintain them, with mixed results. Then we went on to basic human needs as a priority. Then we went to health as a priority. Then we went to agriculture as a priority.

I think that, as in a number of other problems with which you and I have been faced in the State Department over the years, when one tries to come up with only one answer, the “right” answer, you can do yourself a disservice: oftentimes, several answers may be “right”. You remember for years how people worried, “Do we need specialists or generalists?” And people appointed commissions to study that. I think the obvious answer was that you need both.

Similarly, with the AID program. We both have met a lot of AID people in a lot of countries, with somewhat of a mixed bag of results. The people we had in Mali were very hard working, on problems that, basically because of Bob Blake’s presence, were a lot more exotic than a number of other countries were handling. Pricing chickens and eggs was one of those. Trying to curb loss of grazing areas where cattle migrated was another. These were exciting areas. The tragedy of a lot of that research (and I think it’s not egocentric to say so) is that there are a number of countries now working on those problems without making any reference to some of the earlier research that’s been done.

Q: Were there any other sort of outside influences? I’m thinking of the Polisario movement or the Libyan thing. None of these quite touch on Mali, but how does Mali react to things that are happening within its periphery?

KATZEN: Mali was characterized at the U.N. as being, at that juncture, a fairly radical place. Whereas at home, none of the issues about which its representative in New York was radical was particularly important. So that while the Malians in New York would be very upset about

Vietnam and other issues, for the life of the average Malian, the principal thing was just trying to get some water and to get on through the day.

Q: Your next incarnation was at the U.N., but while you were in Mali, did you find that U.N. votes and things were sort of driving us within Mali? If so, to what effect?

KATZEN: It's interesting, because I had seen that from both sides of the fence. While in Mali, seeing as we did how wretched the life was for most Malians, I could not understand the feeling that was generated via cables from New York that their representatives there had voted against us again and that we ought somehow to punish them. When I was in New York, though, having seen how unimportant a lot of these issues are for the people on the ground, and that it was literally a handful of radicals, if you will, representing their country in New York who determined what that policy was going to be in order to remain an acceptable member of whatever group they happened to be participating in, then I did feel some anger and that that anger somehow ought to be translated into some sort of punishment. As in most punishments, though, they very frequently hurt the wrong people.

RICHARD C. HOWLAND
Office of the Inspector General
Washington, DC (1978)

Mr. Howland was born and raised in New York and educated at Adelphi College and George Washington University. After service in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1960, serving several tours at the State Department in Washington, DC and abroad in Phnom Penh, Djakarta, Vientiane and Surabaya. In his Washington assignments, Mr. Howland dealt primarily with personnel and East Asia matters. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

HOWLAND: We flew from Niamey to Mali in a Soviet tri-motor aircraft via a place called Gao, then to Timbuktu, then to Mopti, finally arriving in Bamako. We stopped in Gao, an old Foreign Legion post, where an army commander was going to kick us off the plane because he wanted to send his extended family to Timbuktu for some social event, but we managed to yell and scream and flash our diplomatic passports and stayed on the plane. When we got to Timbuktu, Bill, Harry and admin Sam wanted to spend the weekend there. I myself did not want to spend more than a day in Timbuktu in the heat. It was really hot. The next day econ Sam and I flew on to Bamako, sitting next to a lady who was taking a big Niger River fish to sell at the market in Mopti. She needed to pray so I offered to hold her fish, and I like to think her prayer helped get us safely to Mopti -- a pleasant traditional African town, and on to Bamako.

There I checked into a nice French-run hotel, which I understand went terribly downhill after a few years. When we were there it was very nice. The food was very good, and the hotel had a pool, tennis courts and everything. The Ambassador in Bamako was Pat Byrne, whom I'd heard about from her work in Bill Hamilton's political section in Laos in 1961. Sending Bill out to

inspect an officer who had earlier worked for him apparently was not considered inappropriate -- it had been 16 years after all -- but it would never happen today. Pat was doing a very fine job running the Embassy and, in effect, the country as well. I don't remember anything special from Bamako except AID was doing fine and Pat was holding it all together. She had good relations with the government.

EDWARD BRYNN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Bamako (1978-1982)

Ambassador Edward Brynn was born in Pennsylvania in 1942. He graduated from Georgetown University and received an M.S. and a PhD from Stanford University. He also attended Trinity College in Ireland and served as a captain overseas in the U.S. Air Force from 1968-1972. His postings abroad have included Sri Lanka, Mali and Cameroon, with ambassadorships to Burkina Faso and Ghana. Ambassador Brynn was interviewed in 2000 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: We now have gone to 1978 and you're going to Bamako, Mali. First of all, let's talk about the embassy. What was the embassy like and how did Pat Byrne operate?

BRYNN: The embassy was, to use Pat Byrne's phrase, the ugliest building that we owned overseas. It was an old French bank with walls as thick the width of these windows. You couldn't make any alterations in it because of the size of these walls. It sat right on the street downtown in a very congested part of the Quartier de Fleuve. It was a distinctly unwholesome place, but in a sense that was part of the charm of working in a place that was completely at variance with every safety precaution. Pat was and remains a diplomat who is dedicated to extraordinary detail. She was very, very focused on personal relationships with the communities wherever she served. Cables were the product of tremendous effort. She really believed that a misplaced comma might have a detrimental impact in Washington. That attitude, however, had been very good for me as a junior officer in Sri Lanka because it meant she invested an enormous amount of time in teaching me to learn to write to a Foreign Service audience. In Bamako she betrayed no particular appetite for day-to-day administration and, therefore, it was very important for her to have a strong DCM, which was fine. She tended toward a proactive sympathy for the people of the countries to which she was accredited. She was quicker to understand and empathize. And she was in Mali in 1978 in the middle of what turned out to be a long and brutalizing dictatorship under the direction of Moussa Traoré, who was overthrown in 1991. Traoré had populated Malian prisons with all sorts of people who crossed his path. Many of them died in confinement. In retrospect all of us in the embassy should have been more outspoken in the defense of the American agenda on human rights and perhaps more openly critical of Moussa Traoré and his ilk. We were not in a high-stakes environment, and it would not have been to our serious disadvantage to have Mali fall under the control of the Soviet Union. Pat was also overly impressed with the successes of our AID mission, lead by an extraordinarily powerful and controversial figure, Ronald Levin. I found later on in my own capacity as

ambassador that you really have to fight the tendency to see only the best side of what your AID director is going to show you.

I think I had a special relationship to Pat because she brought sort of a non-African breath of fresh air to the assignment. I embellished my career there in a rather spectacular fashion. Jane and I arrived, I think, on the 30th of July 1978 and within 48 hours Miss Lillian Carter, the President's mother, arrived on the last part of a five- or six-nation tour of Sub-Saharan Africa. By the time she arrived in Bamako she had completed her own Peace Corps stint in India as a very mature adult. I was assigned to the delegation as the country expert even though I had been in Mali only 48 hours and had been in Africa only 50 hours. Richard Moose, who was then the Assistant Secretary for Africa, was on the plane. Dick was suffering sand or asthma attacks by this time and had considerable headaches.

Our trip was bizarre. We boarded on the plane very early in the morning, before dawn, and headed toward Timbuktu, where – and I wish I had appreciated it as much as I would now – we were treated to the last great assemblage of warriors, all in their blue indigo, lined up to honor Miss Lillian. (This was one of a very few times when I traveled without my camera.) As the plane was about to land and dawn was breaking over the terrain, I heard Dick Moose say, “Who in the hell is the country expert on this place?” I said rather meekly, “I am.” He asked, “How many people are there in Timbuktu?” Well, I hadn't more than the vaguest idea. I looked out the window and, of course, all you could see below was brown on brown. But I thought I had read somewhere, maybe in the *Guide Bleu* or something, that there were about 9,500 people in Timbuktu, so I said, “9,500.” If I recall correctly, Dick pushed back by saying that “so famous a place must be more populous.” When we landed on the runway, deboarded the plane, and queried officials gathered to greet us as to Timbuktu's population – 9500! That was the beginning of my life in Africa. I think that Mali became both the best and the worst of tours for us. It was a very hard family life. We had a large family for reasons we talked about. It was a heroic effort to find a house which would accommodate us, which meant we were pretty far outside town. It turned out we were very much outside normal water supplies or electricity supplies, things like that. In addition, the school situation was in our opinion highly unsatisfactory. The school was pretty much in the hands of a missionary group whose agenda was...

Q: Snake handlers?

BRYNN: ...yes, didn't want to see too much distinction between secular education and salvation. We made a decision, in our capacity as the young Turks at the embassy to establish a new school and get accreditation from the State Department. Well, that led to a great deal of brouhaha. Because of the number of American missionaries in Mali there was a split in the American community. We also wondered why we did not have a commissary. On this issue we had to fight the front office but at the end of the day we got the commissary. We wondered why there was no embassy in Bamako. Before we left we found a site for a club-with land to serve as a playing field, on an airy summit outside Bamako. So by the end of the two years I felt that we had really turned living conditions in Bamako in a much more positive direction.

The American community was short staffed on the financial side. My wife had done some work at a bank in Dublin and had worked for a brief time at AT&T, so she was recruited to become the local hire Budget and Fiscal officer, which in fact launched her career in B and F administration.

I learned to love camping and visited a lot of Mali that I think very few Americans have ever seen. I got a sense of the old Africa out there in the countryside before it was touched by French rule. My best memories of Mali are en brousse.

I came away from Mali with some heavy baggage. It was obvious that it was politically incorrect to suggest that countries like Mali were going to find it difficult to make their way in the new world order. There was an awful tendency to blame everything that was wrong in Mali on the colonial past even though we were now 28 to 30 years from independence. It was politically incorrect among the African Americans, when they came through, to suggest that there were elements of dysfunctionality in this African society that meant that had to be sorted out by Malians themselves. Until that day came, Mali was going to continue its pretty steady downward direction. I was probably more candid than some of my colleagues in holding that blame for Africa's predicament must in fair measure be placed on Africans themselves. I had great personal relationships with the African Americans in the mission. And because I traveled a lot in the countryside and really saw the remote and exotic parts, my credibility was pretty high, but my pessimism didn't wash terribly well back in Washington.

Q: Tell me, what were the elements of dysfunctionality that you were seeing there?

BRYNN: My thesis goes something like this: The coming of the colonial era meant that, especially in the former French colonies, there was a concerted effort to strip away the indigenous institutions of social control, which had worked pretty effectively before the coming of the European period. They had stripped away the old order, but colonialism came to end too early even under the best of circumstances for a new social control order to be put in place. So you had a situation where the old order was gone and in the vacuum a small number of French-trained African with a Francophone mentality had appropriated an enormous amount of the national wealth. They thought of themselves as Frenchmen and exported themselves and their wealth to Europe at the earliest opportunity. That in a sense was an overlay of corruption which was very, very pervasive. Secondly, I think there was a tendency to believe that any African who worked hard and succeeded and moved forward should become the target of the larger family's desire to appropriate all of the capital concentrated by that individual and to share it in the widest possible family circle. As a result, capital formation and capital concentration and investment became an almost impossible task even by the very many talented Africans who were willing to make the commitment. This diversion of capital reduced everybody to penury. This was an analysis which we didn't want to accept or to see accepted in Washington because it would undermine our efforts, that is the efforts of the African Bureau, to build up a larger and larger AID empire in all of these countries. But this dysfunctionality was and remains an enormous drag on modernization in Africa.

Q: This idea of families absorbing the wealth of the better ones, it also sometimes works too in the United States, particularly in families coming from some Hispanic groups and others sharing

it around and also meaning that you don't go for higher education because it's more important to get out there and earn money to help the family.

BRYNN: The other side of the coin in the United States, and which has benefited the United States at the expense of the poorest African countries, is that Africans with ambition and talent and focus and goals leave their own societies in order to escape the dragging-down effect. So what we see as a reverse aid flow in which we here benefit from the best of Africa is talent. They do extraordinarily well here because they are disciplined, focused, energetic, and they know what they want to get done and know that it's so much more difficult to do that in Africa.

Q: There was the political section. Was that just you?

BRYNN: That was me.

Q: An economic officer?

BRYNN: There was no economic officer at the very beginning when I got there, but we did have one later on. My portfolio was the political reporting, which I think I grew into a bit slowly, partly because I had had rather little formal French before I got there. I spent a lot of time learning French in Bamako. By traveling a lot, I became sort of surrogate visitor to our Peace Corps volunteers who were scattered across the terrain. I was in charge of our little but growing IMET program, which was and remains for the most archaically organized.

Q: Would you explain what that is.

BRYNN: The International Military Education and Training program, through which we sent promising and talented mid-grade officers to the United States, usually for year-long training at certain military installations. The military services had selected candidates from abroad through a bureaucracy that involved an enormous amount of paperwork on my part. (We did not have a Defense Attaché Officer in Bamako.) Although it was not a high-profile, strategic task, IMET probably took 20 percent of my time. For a fairly considerable period of time I was also the acting PAO.

Q: Public Affairs Officer.

BRYNN: ...Public Affairs Officer, partly because it was assumed that, since I had had so much education at the graduate level, I somehow was more qualified than someone else to serve as custodian of our country's public image. However, it gave me a heightened exposure to Malian culture. Mali is a vibrant center for African art and also a great opportunity to hear and to practice French. That was pretty much what my portfolio was.

Q: What was the government?

BRYNN: The government was as unabashed military dictatorship. Moussa Traoré had been in power for more than a decade. I don't think his regime, animated in part by a grasping spouse, was ever as ugly or as raw as it was under Sekou Toure in Guinea next door, but there was a

climate of fear both pervasive and infectious. This fear didn't seem to carry over so much into the petty bourgeois who ran the small businesses around town, and frankly out in the countryside it probably had no import at all because the Malian government at the time was so focused on itself in a couple places like Bamako, Sikasso and Kayes that you didn't feel the weight of much of any government out in the far country. We were pleased with Moussa Traoré because he was on "our side". He was a careful, dutiful ally of ours in keeping Libya's interventionist tendencies at bay. He was also very close to the French, who regarded him as a reliable surrogate or partner in the Sahel. We were certainly fairly indulgent of Moussa Traoré and were prone to consider in a favorable light pretty much everything he did.

Q: This was, of course, the Carter Administration, and the Human Rights Bureau was quite powerful in this. Was it Africa or was it just Mali that was off the scope of the Human Rights people?

BRYNN: Well, it was, I think. I can remember on one occasion where we did put together a relatively critical draft for Washington on the human rights agenda in Mali. The vibes from Washington were that we were overly critical, not taking into account the extraordinary difficulties involved in a country with very, very minimal resources trying to govern an impoverished, illiterate people. Also, Mali was also a country coming out of the trauma of very severe drought, which was true.

Q: What was the background of the ruler?

BRYNN: Moussa Traoré was a professional soldier. He had early on in his career been trained in France. I think he was an infantry officer. He had not, to my knowledge, served in the military before independence in 1960. I think he became a young officer just after independence. He reminded Americans (not me in fact, it was interesting in my whole time there in Bamako, the two years, I never met him) that his intervention had toppled a regime which was showing very strong leftist tendencies. We should be grateful for that intervention. And like so many of these military regimes, there was a sense of hope and optimism when they first came to power. There was some cleaning up of corruption. There was a pulling up of socks. There were some public projects that really did seem to be focused on the public good. This type of dynamism lasted a couple years before things settled into an all-too-traditional way, and Madame Traoré became deeply involved in the exportation of artisanal gold and going to Switzerland every couple of weeks loaded with jewelry. (It's a historical footnote, but Moussa Traoré and his wife were just a few months ago tried again and convicted.) He was convicted and sentenced to death in '92 for crimes against humanity, that is, the killing of school children but this time he was convicted of embezzlement and his wife was convicted at the same time. They've both been in prison for almost 10 years in separate parts of Mali. So in a sense the Moussa Traoré era is not finished.

Q: What about the role at that time, as you saw it, of the French?

BRYNN: Well, I have somewhat selective and vivid memories of the French. We were in Mali at the very end of the era where the French fell almost romantically attached to the people of the Sahel, an era where people on French administration remembered Antoine de St. Exupéry. The Malians, and particularly the desert people to the north, especially the Tuaregs, were seen as

heroic figures at home in the desert and endowed with incredible strength. We were seeing a new generation of younger French officers in the embassy coming in who did not share this type of romantic vision and looked upon their service in Bamako as a necessary stage on the way to getting something better somewhere else. We were also looking at the end of a period where certain French nationals still enjoyed the exotica of living in an African outpost such as Bamako. They were rapidly being replaced by the Lebanese, who were tougher and more focused and frankly, probably more avaricious than the French commergants. The French were abandoning Mali in steady and increasing numbers, leaving behind what became, I found in all my Francophone posts in Africa, a hard-core residue of French nationals who frankly possessed such antiquated skill or were really economically so dysfunctional that they couldn't go back and be productive members in France. As a result they were becoming almost psychologically inbred in these communities. I probably saw more of the French in Bamako, because it was still a relatively open society, than I would see of the French outside the very top as I went down the years in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Q: What was Bamako like?

BRYNN: Bamako was a congested, dirty town. That ancient quarter downtown was more charming, I think, than any town I have ever seen in Africa, partly because there had been no attempt to build Western-style skyscrapers. There were no tall buildings because there was no assurance of any electricity for elevators. On the best days in January and February when the climate is relatively cool and the trees with the purple flowers were out, it was absolutely elegant and you could see a hint of why Bamako had been called the pearl of West Africa. It was an extraordinarily lovely, sort of spare but lovely, setting. But when the rains set in later in the spring, the downtown became an almost impossible quagmire. The great drains and trenches, brick walls that had been built under French discipline, had all filled as a result the water, instead of flowing through the great drains, flowed right down the center of the street. There were a number of very upscale houses built by the people who had commandeered more and more of the country's scarce resources, but they were all behind walls with a decreasing sense of community life. The parastatals, the companies that bought the peasant's grain at artificially low prices and stored it in warehouses, these governed the economy. This was the great age of socialism-socialism that favored Traoré's cronies. It was tough for business people, except for some of the very clever Lebanese who dealt in gold and dealt in some exotic imports.

Q: I take it there were no elections or parliament on anything.

BRYNN: No, there was a legislative council, and whole forests were cut down to provided paper to proclaim the regime's good work for the people.

Q: The Peace Corps: what was your impression of what the Peace Corps was doing, its effect, and how it worked?

BRYNN: I was a great admirer of the Peace Corps, probably for reasons, that are somewhat innocent. There was always sort of the constant wonderment and astonishment that we could find American who would live under very difficult conditions in Mali, more difficult than almost any other country I have been in, and do their damndest to try to get some small projects, a fruit

garden or a tree project, to work, even though they could see all around them that a few bigshots in the village were scraping off every bit of fat and putting it into their private coffers. I admired the volunteers enormously. They knew that the macroeconomic system in which they were laboring was really working against them, and they were content to try to make their mark in a small village environment or working to improve conditions for village women. To this day I admire them for doing it. The Peace Corps was at the very verge of moving into a somewhat more technocratic organization. In 1978 we were still pretty largely recruiting Americans who went abroad for the humanitarian vision of it rather than as technical experts. These were still hands-on people who went for the sheer love of doing something good. After Bamako I never saw an organization populated quite so much by innocents abroad. They were the last of the unabashed visionaries.

Q: How about AID? Did we have much of an AID...?

BRYNN: Oh, yes, we did. We had an AID empire there. I alluded to this a little bit earlier when we were talking about ambassadorial responsibilities. In the wake of the great drought in the middle '70s, we were salving our own conscience by pouring a lot of money into certain Saharan countries, and we got ourselves involved in some rather exotic projects, like growing rice in the Niger delta near Mopti, getting involved in cotton production in the southern part of Mali, and in building a small credit union in remoter villages, and simply getting involved with an awful lot of people. We had a very swollen AID bureaucracy of direct hires and contractors. Many were very fine people. But we had an AID Director who, I think it's safe to say, was very much impressed by the number of people you would have working in the country, and the AID mission became a monster which was really out of control. And it led to a point where the AID operation in Mali was no longer under the control of the ambassador.

Q: Was that apparent to you in your position?

BRYNN: It was made more apparent to me not because of my position but because, as it turned, my spouse was doing the budget and fiscal work for the embassy. She became perfectly aware that there was simply a resistance on the part of the AID bureaucracy side to acknowledge the overreaching authority of the ambassador.

HAROLD W. GEISEL
Director, Administrative Office
Bamako (1978-1980)

Ambassador Harold W. Geisel was born in Illinois in 1947. He received his BA from Johns Hopkins and his MBA from the University of Virginia. After entering the Foreign service in 1971, he was posted in Brussels, Oslo, Bern, Bamako, Durban, Rome, Bonn and Moscow and served as Ambassador to Mauritius. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 30, 2006

Q: Well today is the 6th of July, 2006. Harry, we're talking about 1978, you're off to Bamako. Let's talk a bit about, in the first place, I take it you hadn't had any Africa experience, you'd been a European hand and they dragged you out of the marble halls and put you into a bamboo hut or something?

GEISEL: Absolutely. Dragged me kicking and screaming but not exactly into a bamboo hut because remember I'm a fairly good admin officer so I came to Africa on the Concorde. Seriously.

Q: A very fast, supersonic transport of very expensive travel.

GEISEL: Yes. I discovered that there really is no cheap way to get to Africa, at least there wasn't in 1978, and the difference between flying economy class one way between Paris and Dakar, where I had to go first, and flying Concorde was only \$800. Well now, \$800 was an awful lot more in 1978 than it is today but it still wasn't a whole lot for a guy who was single and who wanted the adventure and the markup was much less than it was anywhere else. The plane actually didn't go to Dakar, Senegal, per se, it had a refueling stop on the way to Rio but, they did take passengers to Dakar and, instead of flying six or seven hours in the back of the airplane at night totally crowded, because economy class to and from Africa is always full, I flew in less than three hours between Paris and Dakar. We got on after a lovely few snacks in the Concorde lounge at Charles de Gaulle and I think we got off about two hours and 50 minutes later in Dakar; a very civilized way to travel. I never did it again but it was a wonderful experience.

Q: Okay, now tell me, Bamako, the capital, I mean-

GEISEL: The capital of Mali, if you imagine- the first thing that you know about Mali is you don't know the capital Bamako but you know its most famous city from antiquity, that's Timbuktu or Tombuktu as the French call it. It's an entirely landlocked country. If you picture that big bulge on the African west coast, you go some hundreds of miles inland and the big bulge is Mali.

Q: Talk a bit about the, as you saw it in '78, sort of the political-economic situation of Mali at that point in time.

GEISEL: Oh, one of the most impoverished nations in Africa, ruled by a military dictatorship for quite some years. The economy was really a subsistence economy with goats and farmers and a lot of people just sort of sitting around, in the city of course, but subsistence in the country. The country had been quite left oriented but always totally dependent on France. They were moving a bit more towards capitalism but it was essentially a preposterous place in those days. It's a rather impressive place now; it's one of the few real democracies in Africa these days.

Q: Who was the leader then?

GEISEL: The leader in those days was a man named Moussa Traore. Now, when he took over, throwing out Modibo Keita, who was an extreme left winger, he was either a lieutenant or a captain but over the years he kept promoting himself up the ladder to general. What was really a

cute thing and would I like to mention it for the tape is, one day when I met some of the officers, I noticed the uniforms looked good and I kept staring at them because there was something that was familiar and then I saw what it was. The buttons were all the American eagle. Somewhere, somehow they had gotten buttons that they had put on all their officers' uniforms, you know, the nice gold buttons; they were the U.S. Army eagle, if you could imagine that.

Q: Well who was the ambassador?

GEISEL: My first ambassador was a lovely, lovely career lady named Pat Byrne, Patricia Byrne. A wonderful gal who went on to- let's see, Rangoon, as it was called in those days.

Q: Well now-

GEISEL: Now, I should say, you're probably going to ask, the AID mission was totally the tail that wagged the entire dog. And the embassy was relatively tiny but there was a huge what they called joint administrative office, which I was the head as the joint administrative office director, and I discovered what the hidden agenda was of the Department, why they were so determined to have me go to Bamako instead of Beirut, where I was willing to go, which was already plenty dangerous in those days. And it was that the AID mission director was pretty impossible. He was known as El Supremo, Le Roi, the French for The King, or as we called him Leroy, and somehow the Bureau of African Affairs, which had known me in the admin business I suppose, had determined that I was the only guy who could stand up to him. And they were right.

Q: Okay. Well let's, before we get to that, which I think is probably your major battle while you were there-

GEISEL: The only battle.

Q: What was the embassy like?

GEISEL: Well, it was on, I can't remember the street, I believe it was Rue Mohammad Cinq. It was painted sort of pink like just about everything else in town if you can imagine a typical West African town. A cross- could have been, I wonder if it wasn't an apartment building once or what it was, it was quite unimpressive, a rabbit warren on, if I remember right, three or four floors, little offices and somehow we tried to make the ambassador's office look presentable. Across the street was a much larger compound with buildings that were jerry rigged, the way you build them in Africa, with tin roofs and the like, actually aluminum roofs, and that was the joint administrative section, most of it, and you know, with GSO and the motor pool and all these sheds and all sorts of people and mobilettes, which are motorbikes, all over the place and little shops and quite a large health unit, where a very ingenious nurse, who had been there, by the way, 17 years, which is another story we can get into, a Foreign Service nurse on worldwide assignment, Maxine Bradrick was her name; she didn't want to go anywhere else. She had gotten in very closely with the missionaries and since nobody wanted to go to Bamako, she stayed there. I think a year or two after I left they finally moved her over to Ghana, albeit very reluctantly on her part. But anyway, in that health unit, I'll never forget it, she'd done something very ingenious, she'd taken three or, no, I think it was six water heaters and she'd taken off the governors on

them and so she used them to boil water and then she had filters at the taps and you would come with your big bottles to take home and have your boiled and filtered water.

Q: Well now, what was AID doing?

GEISEL: Oh, it was welfare for the privileged American upper middle class. The ambassador once asked me to study how much of Aid's money stayed in America or went to support Americans and it was 85 percent. I'm not sure what they were doing. I know in some countries it was easy to figure out. They probably had a few medical projects and they weren't building roads or growing crops or anything like that.

Q: Was there any problem with the Sahel?

GEISEL: Oh God, yes. People were starving.

Q: Were they involved in that or?

GEISEL: Not as far as I could tell. I mean, I'm sure they were in some way. They probably gave technical assistance, you know, they helped teach farmers how to farm or something like that.

Q: Well now, did the ambassador, Pat Byrne, sort of give you free reign to go take a look and try to do something or how would you describe sort of her relationship to the head of the AID?

GEISEL: Very frustrated. You know her, she's a lovely, kind, gentle person but she got her dander up with some of this more grandiose stuff. But you know, my job was not to needlessly pick fights with AID, and I took it seriously. I was not the ambassador, I was not the DCM and my job was to support everybody there logistically. And I only got in fights with the AID director when I thought he was doing something which was a violation of law or regulation. The fact that he had a program that I personally thought was a waste of money was really not my issue.

Q: Well was there the problem that occurred in many places, at different times, but where sort of the AID personnel were living far too high off the hog as compared to the rest of the-

GEISEL: Actually not per se. There housing- that's one thing I insisted on and I think my predecessors had insisted on too, is we had a joint housing pool. Perhaps the senior AID people gave themselves an awful lot of trips out but we- they certainly had much nicer offices than we had; money again was no object. They rode around in much nicer cars. In fact, I had a huge what I called my ghost fleet, which was their cars which they turned over to us for disposal and we never disposed of them; we just used them for the administrative section. And they of course constantly got newer cars. The old story, which you probably know is that State pretty well had these American cars, which never worked; the department has gotten much more realistic since then, and the AID people had local cars. I mean, we all had local cars personally but officially we had these damn cars that never worked. So I took over the AID castoffs and that's how we kept the motor pool going.

Q: Well then, was it apparent that the AID outfit wasn't doing much?

GEISEL: Oh yes, we all joked about it. Absolutely. I mean, joked about it or Pat Byrne often cried about it but yes.

Q: I would think that, you know, people working for AID would feel frustrated. I mean, after all, I mean-

GEISEL: The young ones did, the young ones did, definitely. You know, AID in those days, it probably hasn't changed much, recruited a lot from the Peace Corps and a lot of the youngsters who'd come in were very idealistic and were really sort of heartbroken that they weren't doing much, that their bosses were much more interested in their comfort than in getting things done.

I should mention also we had a wonderful Peace Corps in Mali, which you know, was just the opposite. They were living out with the people and I think they were certainly trying to do good things and they were wonderful, wonderful people. I'd never experienced Peace Corps before and I was so impressed. I was a little sad, actually, that I hadn't gone into Peace Corps after college.

Q: Well how did the Malian government, you know, the administrative officer usually is the one who has to, to use the old term, interface with them and get along? I mean, how did this work out?

GEISEL: We bribed them, as far as admin was concerned. We didn't call it bribing on the vouchers; I would call it overtime for customs inspectors because we'd have medicine come in, for example, and we couldn't have it wait until they got around to checking it out so we bribed them to check it out and clear it right away. It was a pretty hopeless government. But they were- I should say I liked the Malians very much. Lovely, lovely people, which is why I'm so happy that they have a good government and they're really making progress now. And they were very, very nice but to get most things done we had to do favors, bribe, whatever it took. That was the case on the administrative level.

Q: Did you find that- were the French sort of running things?

GEISEL: Oh sure, of course. It wasn't to the extent that I found later when I was wandering around Africa for two years that they were, for instance, in Gabon, where they were right there in Gabonese uniforms, these big white Frenchmen and running everything. But the French certainly whispered in the ears. And you have to remember that in West Africa and in Central Africa, those parts that had been French, the French had them by the, well, to be polite, the short hairs because the Bank of France guaranteed what was in most places the CFA franc or, I forgot what they called it in Central Africa; in Mali it was the Malian Franc. But the bank notes were all literally printed by the Bank of France so the French had a hammerlock on the economy, which in a way was good because you didn't have the vicious inflation that you had in a place like Ghana, which just when it needed more currency, it just speeded up the printing presses.

Q: Did you feel, I mean at the embassy, that we had any real interest in Mali?

GEISEL: I think that most of the State Department people, except for the ambassador, remember, she's very idealistic and her DCMs (Deputy Chief of Mission) were quite cynical

Q: Who were they?

GEISEL: The first DCM was Ralph Grainer, the second was Keith Wauchope. And the political officer who from my time there was a fellow named Ed Bryne. He was outstanding; I hope he's giving his oral interviews.

Q: I have done him and I've done Wauchope too.

GEISEL: Oh good. I think they knew the score. Certainly Ed knew the score very well but he loved Pat Bryne and he'd worked for her when she was in Colombo I think as political officer and so Ed really, you know, tried. But our interests were, to say the least minimal, especially in those days. Let's see, who would have been the president in those days? It would have been Carter I guess. Yes, yes, sure. That's right, in fact, we even had Miss Lillian come and visit us on a trip.

Q: That was Carter's mother.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: What about were there any developments, any coups or?

GEISEL: No, thank God. No, there were coups around us but none in Mali itself.

Q: Were the Soviets, Chinese messing around there?

GEISEL: A bit. I mean, I think in memory of the good old days. They had the biggest embassies, both the Russians and the Chinese. Someone put a bug under the ambassador's cocktail table once in the office and I think we ended up assuming it was the Russians. We caught one of the Embassy laborers trying to retrieve it when we broke it but he just ran away. To sum up, I would say life there for all the embassies was pretty desultory.

Q: How'd you find social life?

GEISEL: Oh, I had a great time. I had a girlfriend who was the Peace Corps medical officer and again, most of us were young people and life was tough. You know, you'd go without electricity; we had generators but they didn't cover everything. And then cooking gas would disappear and most of us lived across the Niger River from the embassy and the bridge would get stuck and it would get hot and crummy but you know, if you have a good attitude it was almost fun.

Q: Sure, oh yes. Well usually at a small embassy things are more fun.

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: I mean, more and more a sense of adventure.

GEISEL: Camaraderie, you know? And of course there was this gigantic AID mission and then the next biggest thing around was the admin section. There wasn't much else. And we all, thank God, stuck together and liked each other. I take great joy in the fact that I had two housewives who, one after the other, became by budget and fiscal assistants and I trained them so well they became budget and fiscal officers in the Service and they both went on to great glory, both became FS-1s.

Q: Great.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Well how well do you feel you were supported by the African Bureau?

GEISEL: Very well. You know, and I think it's still true to this day, in terms of competence; you could never give the African Bureau much above a C+ or B-. In terms of wanting to take care of their people, as far as I'm concerned, they've always been A+. And it was so wonderful to work with them. Always, always. Whatever I did, I loved working with AF.

Q: Well you were there until 1980?

GEISEL: Yes. The only other thing that I'll talk about because it was so much fun was, well there were two things. First a minor, well which became quite major, and then a very fun thing which was the Muhammad Ali mission to Africa. But let me take the other thing first, which was after about a year there we were- we had a center in Lagos, which was about the world's worst place to have an administrative support center, it was called WACAS, West African Consolidated Administrative Support Center, a bunch of warehouses which were near the airport and it was just, we would get food from them and they had this plane, it was called Pan African Airways. If I remember right, it was a DC-4 or DC-6, which would come out every few months, would make a circuit around Africa and drop off supplies, even household effects and whatnot, and it was a ridiculous operation. If I remember right the pilot, it was a Norwegian or something similar, he'd actually worked for a CIA proprietary before as a pilot. It was a hoot, it was fun. But apparently, eventually it got so expensive that we were told it would have to shut down. And I came up with an idea, and it just shows you how receptive the AF Bureau was, that we should use ELSO, Antwerp. ELSO was the European Logistical Support Office, which had just started in the container business I think in late 1974 when containers were pretty new and the idea was that household effects and official shipments and all sorts of things would be piled into lift vans which would then be loaded into these containers, the containers would then be shipped to Antwerp and then broken down and the stuff would be shipped in various other ways to Europe from there. Very efficient, saved a lot of money, that was quite exciting then. Well I said why can't we use Antwerp for Africa as well, because there are so many more sailings and even cheaper air freight from Europe to Africa than from the United States to Africa. The idea was seized upon by the AF Bureau, the EUR Bureau agreed and the A Bureau was absolutely delighted and I helped set it up with the Bonn admin consular, a chap named Tom Tracy, who

went on to greater glory. And it has to a large extent survived today. And when we get to Durban, I'll tell you about ELSO South.

But anyway, that was one of the more useful things I've done in my career. But if you'll let me, I'll talk a bit about the Muhammad Ali mission to Africa.

Q: Tell who Muhammad Ali was.

GEISEL: Oh, well, good idea. Muhammad Ali, what was his name before? Cassius Clay, a very famous American boxer, a Black man, quick on his feet, very smart before he got a bit punched up, and this would have been, let's see, in early 1980. He'd stopped fighting for a few years by then already but he was absolutely beloved throughout Africa. And Jimmy Carter got the idea that wouldn't it be great to send Ali to Africa to convince the Africans to boycott the Moscow Olympics. Why? Because of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: In 1979.

GEISEL: Yes. Small world, this. Anyway, I was appointed administrative officer to the Ali mission to Africa. An Air Force plane picked him up, I think he was in India or somewhere, and we met the plane in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania and there were problems. There were a lot of AF stars on that trip. Lannon Walker, I think, was overall in charge; I think he may have been a DAS for AF then. Francis Cook was the PR person. Don Bandler was the political advisor. I can't remember who else we had on the trip but it was a hell of a trip.

It started off pretty badly because Ali didn't know what he was supposed to say or do. And I'll never forget, at his press conference in Tanzania, he said the U.S. and Russia is the two baddest white men in the world and I'm just trying to prevent a nuclear war. Well, I think Lannon and a few other people had a talk with Ali after that.

We then went to Nairobi and he got better but we still had to work on him. But it was crossing in the airplane from Nairobi to Lagos that we really had a chance to talk to him and explain to him what was going on and he got pretty good. He understood what was going on and he really was a nice man and he really wanted to be helpful. In Lagos, as you can imagine, he spent time with the parliamentarians and he saw someone from the government, I forgot who, but you know, politics in Lagos could be ridiculous; everyone was yelling and screaming and insulting each other and all the rest. And poor Ali, as we were leaving the next day, they brought in all the newspapers and he expected to see himself on the front page, which he certainly had been in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam. He wasn't because there was a rumor going like wildfire all over Lagos that these sorcerers had come and that they would shake hands with you and a few days later your genitals would shrivel up. Ali was way buried inside because of this; I think there were 12 newspapers and the Genital Story was on the front page of every one of them.

Well from there we went to Monrovia, Liberia, which was a very different experience. The president was a man named William Tolbert and, in those days, Samuel Do, was Master Sergeant Samuel Doe and Tolbert's guard, and I'm convinced that I saw him there. But anyway, we went to Monrovia for a rather short time and he, Tolbert just starts pontificating and Ali can't get a

word in edgewise and Ali finally says to him, you a preacher? And Tolbert says well yes I am, I try to go throughout the length and breadth of the land spreading the glory of the Lord and all of that. Ali looks at him and says, I thought so. And he says have you written anything that I could read? Well, all of a sudden appear 12 volumes of the collected works of William Tolbert and Ali says this is wonderful; I'm going to read it all. Well, I said to a friend, I said you know, if they gave Tolbert a little button and they said, if you push this button it will blow up all of Liberia but Ali would like you to do it, Tolbert would have pushed the button. So we left the first country where they absolutely said whatever you want we're not going near those Olympics. I don't know if they ever were planning to go to the Olympics anyway.

The last country was Senegal. Very different place, of course. The president of Senegal was Leopold Senghor, who'd been there forever. And Senghor was a little defensive, a very nice man, and he said at the outset, I was against the boycott of the Montreal Olympics, which the Africans had wanted four years earlier because the South Africans were there. He said I just don't believe in mixing sport and politics. And Ali looked at him and said Mr. President, you are the greatest living poet of the French language—this was a bit of an exaggeration which I had fed Ali on the plane—and I am at your feet to learn from you. And that broke the ice nicely. But still, when we left, Senegal was going to participate in the Olympics but Ali made a good impression. And off he went and back I went o Bamako to pick up my goodies and leave for my next assignment.

KEITH L. WAUCHOPE
Deputy Chief of Mission
Bamako (1979-1981)

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

Q: '79, where did you go?

WAUCHOPE: '79, okay, I was in AF/E and Ambassador Ann Holloway who was a protégée of Andy Young, she ran in Andy Young's Washington office, told Dick Moose she needed somebody to go out as her DCM in Mali. Ann had actually been proposed for another African mission but insisted that she knew Mali was available and that's where she wanted to go because of its cultural uniqueness. It's known in French as "le berceau de la civilisation de l'Afrique de la Ouest," the cradle of West African civilization. Ann wanted to go to a place that was culturally interesting as well as politically active. They gave my name to her. I talked to her and said I'd be very interested in going. It was an O-1 level job. I was recently minted O-2, but I was married to a Foreign Service officer in my own right. I proposed that as a condition of accepting, we would have to see if there was some opportunity for my wife to work as well. Fortunately, there was a

joint administrative office, JAO, which was staffed primarily by State officers. As such, my wife could work in that operation and we could have the necessary cutouts in terms of rating and reviewing officer. Ann said she thought that a JAO assignment could be worked out, and the deal was done.

I went to Bamako on the regular rotation in 1979. Pat Byrne was the outgoing Ambassador, and I replaced a fellow who I had actually worked for in Hong Kong. He had a very different management style than me. The most striking thing about Bamako was its very large AID mission for a relatively modest and low-profile post. Just to give you an idea, we had an AID program of \$16 million and we had 42 direct-hire AID employees, plus seven regional employees that were based out of Bamako. On top of that, there were another 50 American and TCN contract employees. If you calculate out the cost to support an AID family in Bamako, it worked out to be more than half of the \$16 million that was going just to the support of this bloated staff.

Q: This is a real problem, isn't it? The tale, which is an American tale, absorbs great majority of.

WAUCHOPE: Absolutely. Sure we are providing technical assistance to a certain extent, but in virtually every case these people are simply project administrators. None of the direct-hires lived outside the capital. They only occasionally traveled to the interior; perhaps two or three times a year. Their families all had to have proper accommodations, and that's fine, but when you calculate it out this cost was a very significant part of the whole USAID program. In terms of the material assistance, that was by far the lesser half of our assistance. In this instance the oversized mission was attributable to the AID mission director. He was a very aggressive administrator, a bureaucratic gamesman and a flat-out empire builder. For example, the regional AID office in Abidjan, REDSO, was supposed to support Bamako. Our AID Director demanded his own engineer, lawyer, etc. He had remarkable success in getting his own people on staff. The regional seven man office was related to a West African organization based in Abidjan, and they were supposedly providing technical assistance to the other member nations. Even so, 49 USAID direct-hires, when the State complement was about 19 is an exceptional situation. We had a Peace Corps program with staff and there were two people at the U.S. Information Agency. Otherwise the U.S. Mission was fairly standard for a Sahelian African post. The USAID mission was disproportionate, and it had its own office compound. In part, it was because the host government had shown a willingness to commit itself to economic development. Mali was certainly no great friend of the U. S., and its leaders had a socialist bias talking about sort of the revolutionary origins. They had close ties to the Soviets and other Bloc nations. It was generally moderate in its votes in the United Nations, which has always been a big factor in our presence in these posts. In any event, the USAID mission director was an FE-MC; I arrived as an FS-O2. In fact, there were 17 people at post who outranked me, and yet I was the DCM. Within six weeks of arrival I was the Chargé, and served in that capacity for almost three months before Ann Holloway finally finished her processing and came out. In that interval there was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As Chargé, I was instructed to go to the government, as were all chiefs of mission throughout Africa and all over the world to persuade the host governments to speak out against the Soviet invasion which was an egregious act of aggression. We thought the Third World's expression of condemnation would be very valuable. I went to see the foreign minister about it, and the foreign minister said, "You have to understand we're very distant from the

scene of this issue, and we don't understand the complexities of it. It is not our traditional pattern to condemn these things." The fact of the matter was the Soviets were in Mali in substantial numbers. There were probably some 200 to 300 Soviets in the country. They had a large embassy; they had a technical assistance program; doctors and teachers in the school system. Mali was receiving a significant amount of support. We found out later that it was even more to it than that. The Foreign Minister temporized about any kind of statement; "We will consider your request. I'll talk to the president about it." A very frustrating exercise. About the third or fourth time that I had been to talk with him, I said, "You realize that if you cannot be more responsive to our request which is of great importance to the U.S., this may have an impact on our bilateral assistance program." He took that onboard and didn't comment much about it. I reported this to the country team at which only the Deputy USAID Director attended. The USAID director went ballistic. "You had no authority to threaten him with a cutback in the AID program. This is not your program, it's AID's." I asked, "Why do you think we have an AID program here? We are not here solely to provide development to this country? USAID is part of our effort to support U.S. policy objectives in this country, and in this particular instance the objective we're talking about here is getting him to speak out on this egregious act." He was livid about it, and I'm sure, as he threatened, he appealed to Washington about it. His protests went nowhere because he was wrong, and I was right. To go back to the AID program, we were involved in a number of projects. The Niger River flows through Mali and the agricultural potential there is reasonable for irrigation and production along the floodplain of the river. We were involved in several multinational projects of that sort, but the key constraint was that the Malians administrators were really not capable of carrying out what we had all agreed were the common objectives. The numbers of projects just multiplied and multiplied and I don't mean any disrespect of Pat Byrne, she's a great person, but frankly I don't think she monitored carefully enough what the USAID director was up to. At one stage I was traveling with her. We were in Mopti in the AID guesthouse there. She asked the deputy USAID mission director how many projects we had in Mali. He replied it was up to about 36 projects. She said "The last time I checked it was only 23 or so." This was indicative to my mind that she hadn't been keeping as close watch as she might on the burgeoning USAID empire. Of course, USAID also had the most senior of the Foreign Service Nationals at the top of the FSN pay scale, perhaps 12. At the embassy there were maybe two. After the USAID director moved on, in part we believed because Ann Holloway and I were increasingly demanding of project information, in part because he had been there for six years when I arrived and he'd already had a really good run. He had excellent accommodations. He had a massive staff. He had all the perks you could possibly want. He had had pretty much a free hand and then, all of a sudden, we began to ask a lot of detailed questions and he found this more and more uncomfortable and more and more annoying.

Q: In the first place you were there from 1979?

WAUCHOPE: To '81.

Q: To '81. When Ann Holloway came out, what was her background?

WAUCHOPE: Well, she had graduated from Bennington College. She had a Ph.D. from an institution in Philadelphia. She was a bright, capable sort of person. She had recently been

divorced and she had her two daughters with her. She was very much into the African experience and culture. Her attitude reflected the attitude that Dick Moose had enunciated; activist and sympathetic, but not aggressive. She was inclined to accept Africans for what they are. During her tour in Mali, there was increasing political agitation against the government. Students were unhappy with the limited opportunities once they graduated. Like many African countries there were more graduates than jobs. They were frustrated and they took to the streets. By June they were creating rather major havoc and the military was turned out against them. The military handled them pretty roughly. Her relations with the government were tempered by our continuing effort to get out of the government an expression of condemnation vis-à-vis the Soviets in Afghanistan. Then there was the issue of boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics as a protest about Afghanistan. Again, we were under instructions to persuade the Malians not to participate. In fact, they didn't have a very large Olympic team. There were about six people of Olympic quality. The ambassador shortly after arrival was instructed to go talk to the president about the boycott. So, there was great fanfare and expectation because it was the first formal visit after she presented her credentials. The President's expectation was that we had yet another grand new program to propose to him. Instead she had to present him with the fact that we wanted him to boycott the Olympics and as we had asked other nations to do. I accompanied her to make her presentation. She was nervous and had a little trouble getting her point across. Her mastery of French was never that good. She made a labored effort. The President seemed agitated, and drew himself up, hesitated and said, "Je prends acte;" I take note of what you have to say. Nothing beyond that. He didn't say that we would consider it or discuss the merits. With that, the meeting came to an end and we were ushered out. The media's cameras were all out there expecting the announcements of new accord or assistance, but we said nothing. We left it to him to say how he wanted to handle this with his own press. But, that was not a particularly fortuitous start with the president, as you can imagine.

Q: Who was the president at the time?

WAUCHOPE: Moussa Traore, a former military officer who had come to power in a coup. Regrettably, his wife, who was part Lebanese, was known to be deeply involved in a range of corrupt activities. Among others was the government monopoly on the import of pharmaceuticals, which she ran. This was a money-making machine and she was the beneficiary, and he benefited ultimately as well. In part the students were angry that the economy was not going well, and they were unhappy about government corruption. So, they took to the streets. One day in June, Ann Holloway was out driving around the city and she saw a dump truck load of detained students being hauled off. They had been thrown into the truck, and the military got in and were pounding these kids with rifle butts. She witnessed that, and, all of a sudden, her attitude towards this government began to change. She realized that we really shouldn't be quite so sympathetic to the Malian government, as they were little better than thugs. Then she sent a telegram about the situation and it reflected her change of attitude. She proposed that we try to find ways to get Traore to reform. We ought to be helping to educate people who would possibly be alternates to Traore. But Traore was no fool. He was going to stay on top and anybody who was a real contender for power was sent out to the "brouse," or sent to the salt mines. He wasn't an extraordinarily repressive leader. His ultimate downfall years later resulted from his security forces refusing to fire on a mob of students, which led to his collapse. This occurred after he had

directed them to set fire to a school full of students which killed a great number of children. After that his people went crazy, and the government fell.

During our time, the government was not easy to communicate with. You could talk with people who were supposedly responsible. Blondin Beye was the Foreign Minister; an opaque and cautious fellow. After Traore's government fell, he became a UN official of some note. He was involved in mediating in Angola I believe, and was killed in an air crash. You could talk to officials around the President, but Traore himself was really not very approachable. By comparison to my days as ambassador in Gabon where I could see Bongo virtually anytime if I had something important to say. Traore was the typical of Francophone African leaders, and none of the other ambassadors, with the obvious exception of the French, really had much access to him.

Q: What was the role of the French there?

WAUCHOPE: Well, it was significant, but not dominant. The French were principally concerned about maintaining a good relationship with their former colonies primarily to keep their finger on their pulse to make sure that they didn't go radical which could adversely impact French interest in the coastal African nations and in North Africa. Granted, they had more than enough problems with the Algerians and radical north Africans as it was, they didn't need turmoil in the Sahel threatening their more productive relationships with the Ivory Coast and Togo, for example. There were significant numbers of French *counseilliers technique* and teachers, and they made a significant contribution to the nation's stability and management. The Soviets, with their large presence, permitted the Soviet ambassador a fair amount of access to the chief of state or so it seemed. We knew the Soviet ambassador. He was a fairly reasonable human being. He was from Tajikistan; a Tajik. He had his issues with his own government sometimes. The Soviets were locked into a role in Africa not unlike ours, as they wanted to influence local events for international purposes, but had limited resources. So, they were able to pressure the Malians to avoid condemning their involvement in Afghanistan. The Malians did, in fact, send a delegation to the Moscow games. It turned out that their athletes were all being trained by the Soviets and the Soviets paid their way and provided accommodations in Moscow. They just couldn't turn it down. So, we lost that battle. It was probably a losing proposition from the beginning unless we were willing to pay for them to stay home. The Soviets had this massive Embassy compound with barracks-like staff accommodations; like low cost housing projects in the United States. Of course, they couldn't have any local staff because of security concerns, and they were all watching each other. They couldn't have any contact with Westerners unless it had been approved, except at the ambassadorial level. I had the good fortune of going to the Soviet ambassador's residence for the farewell luncheon for Ambassador Byrne and they really did put on the dog. They had their own dependents doing the serving, and they laid out this fantastic table. There was a phalanx of glasses at each setting. I'll never forget this; there was a tiny vodka glass on the right to the water glass to the white wine glass, the red wine glass, the champagne glass on the left. It was all this beautiful crystal. Contrary to protocol, our Ambassador was at the far end of the table she by the Soviet ambassador's wife. Ed Brynn and I were on either side of the ambassador. We got in a conversation with him about cars. He was quite pleasant and his French was quite serviceable. Every time they served a wine, the hosts would say, this is a Russian product. The champagne was from Georgia; "People tell us that it is better than the

champagne made in France.” The wines were all from Russia. Of course, the vodka, and they kept your vodka glass constantly full. At the end of the meal, they served something called Armeniac from Soviet Armenia. They said, “It’s just the same as cognac. Some people say its better.” It was terrible; execrable. We mentioned to the ambassador, with all this talk about all these superior Soviet products, we noticed that he drove a Mercedes. “Why don’t you drive a Russian car?” He said, “Oh, no, we have excellent cars, but we want to be consistent with all the other ambassadors’ cars; and they all have black Mercedes.” By comparison our DCM vehicle was a God-awful mustard yellow AMC vehicle. It was on its last legs as it had flipped over several months before. So, we were no one to talk about our vehicles, I suppose. The Soviets were constantly in a panic that they would be compromised by the Westerners. Of course, we were always interested in getting Bloc diplomats to defect, which was the CIA’s principal job.

Q: Yes, because basically that’s what they did.

WAUCHOPE: That's right. If they didn’t have that mission, we wouldn’t have had agency people there. That wasn’t just the Soviets, we were after the Chinese, Cubans and Eastern Europeans. Either they were aware of it, or they suspected it, as they were so constrained in their movements. When you could talk to these Soviets, they would tell you, "We like it here in Mali." Their conditions were pretty bad, all things considered, in Western terms. Nonetheless, it was better than life in the Soviet Union at that time. They wanted to stay on. They didn’t want to get themselves in a compromising situation where they’d be sent back to the Soviet Union.

Q: So, you really end up with an aid mission that’s there for its own benefit. I’m exaggerating. The Soviets are there because it’s a good deal, I mean this is.

WAUCHOPE: Our bilateral relationship was in a holding pattern. Those nations represented in Bamako were there to see that things did not go against their interests; that’s to say the French, the Soviets, and the Americans. While our assistance program had an idealistic dimension and we hoped to achieve reasonable development objectives, the size and scope was really driven by an empire-building mission director. It was well in excess of what we needed to maintain that basic watching relationship. After I left Bamako, “60 Minutes” with Leslie Stahl, did an expose on the waste in AID programs in Mali. CBS showed a whole parking lot of USAID-furnished vehicles that were broken down and rotting away. Of course, the lack of spare parts and maintenance was to blame, as well as management hubris. But there they were with the USA handshake symbol on them. So the USAID got its head scrubbed in successive years.

Q: When Ambassador Holloway came there, did you sit down and tell her your impression of AID thing?

WAUCHOPE: Oh yes. I said we have a real problem on our hands. Shortly after my arrival, while Pat Byrne was still there, I did my initial orientation to all U.S. activities. I went over to see the USAID mission director, Ron Levin, a name you may or may not have heard of; a world-class bureaucratic gamesman. He high-hatted me from the moment I walked onto his compound to the time that he dropped me off at the Embassy in his chauffeur-driven Peugeot 604 sedan, where he made a point of sitting in the right rear seat, the position of rank. After showing me all the things that needed to be repaired and upgraded in his kingdom as if I were his GSO, he

allowed as how if I ever had any questions about the USAID mission, that I could just call his deputy and the deputy would give me a response. I was amazed and amused, so I talked to Pat Byrne and recounted the entire episode. I said “Can you believe this guy’s gall?” To her eternal credit, she immediately said to her secretary, “Get Ron Levin on the phone; I want to talk to him.” She said, “Now, Ron, you listen to me. I’m telling you how things are going to be. When my Deputy wants to find out something about what’s going on in the USAID mission, he will call you, and you will provide him the information, is that understood?” “Yes, Madam Ambassador.” So, while she was still there he had to bite his tongue. In the period that I was the chargé, he refused to visit the Embassy or to attend the Country team meetings. He made a point of either being out of the country on some pretext, or he would just send his deputy. I assume that was because he outranked me, and he was certain he was superior to me in all things. The principal tactic USAID used to maintain its independence was to deny us the information we needed to know what their program was expected to achieve. The way USAID played the game there was to ensure that any policy documents like the country program plan, a 160-page largely unreadable document, which they were supposed to submit for COM review and approval would not be provided to the Embassy until the evening before it was to be submitted to Washington. While it was supposed to be signed off by the Ambassador, they would deliver it to the ambassador's office at 3:00 pm in the afternoon and say somebody was hand-carrying it at 6:00 pm to AID Washington. She had less than three hours to review it. I said to the ambassador if you let him get away with this, things will never change. You will never have a chance to have any input, to say nothing about asking him any questions about the program or the process. It was a constant struggle. Nonetheless, we figured out his game and did start asking questions. Major policy documents would not go out until the ambassador has had three days to review it. I just told him that’s what the Ambassador wants. Such constraints on his long reign of unbridled empire building proved a sufficient nuisance that he asked to be transferred after seven years. He was transferred about a year after we arrived, apparently because the fun had gone out of the process for him. AID does some good work, but this situation was an example of the worst face of AID.

Q: Yes, and a system, you know, it was one that allowed for this unless there was very close supervision which.

WAUCHOPE: Levin was essentially a very capable guy. He was a bright, a graduate of Harvard Law, I think. He spoke 5/5 French. He was married to a Swiss-French woman and his French fluency was so superior to anybody else’s in the mission, and he flaunted it to the fullest. He had a wide circle of contacts in the Malian government over the many years he was there. Many Malians viewed him as the representative of the U.S. and I am certain he did not try to disabuse them. The bottom line was that he viewed the program as his own, and not the United States government’s. He would say as much. I tried to make the point that there were U.S. taxpayer dollars, and to remind him why we provide aid to these nations. There were those in AID Washington and many of his own subordinates were unhappy with the way he ran things. He had an iron fist over his own operation, and advancement went to those who were loyal to him and not to the most capable. Ultimately he overplayed his hand in Central America, and he got shoved out of AID.

Q: Well, during this time you were there from '79 to '81, we've talked about the AID thing, were there any other particular developments?

WAUCHOPE: Well, other than trying to get the Malians to support us on international issues against the Soviets, in which we had little success or no success on. The relationship remained cool as a result. The idea of further expanding our aid program or having any dramatic improvement in the bilateral relationship was unlikely. After the repression of the students, Ambassador Holloway was less inclined to promote closer ties. We maintained good relations with officials on an individual level, but we never made a breakthrough with the president. In fact, life in Bamako, was rather hard. You have to remember that this was the period following the great Sahelian drought of the early 1970s. The Malians had received a vast amount of assistance to deal with the drought. We wanted to try to provide some degree of food security so that the drought would never have quite the devastating impact that it did during that time. There was an area in Bamako south of the Niger River which was known as the quartier de la sechresse, the neighborhood of the drought. All the villas were built by officials who were beneficiaries of foreign assistance funds meant to relieve the drought. Instead of going to the people who had been impacted, they had been able to divert it to their own ends, and they built nice villas. Then they wanted to rent them to Westerners, and the U.S. Mission did rent a few of them. You'd see these tremendous cement villas and there were no roads between them. There was just a space remaining between them and that became the road. The other issue was the continuing crisis in the supply of electricity and water. The Canadians and the World Bank were completing a dam on a tributary of the Niger. There was to be a power line from the hydro plant to the capital. There was also an issue about completing the road to the dam. The Canadians were in charge of the power transmission line. They were remarkably efficient in this effort. The capital was dependent on the local generating plant for its power, but the city had grown more than double its designed maximum population. The infrastructure left by the French, and this is repeated all over former colonial Africa, was breaking down. 20 years is about the useful life of any capital equipment. Most African nations became independent in 1960, and the operative infrastructure, power and water plants, were not maintained as they had been by the colonial powers. As a result, Bamako would go for extended periods of time without electricity, in particular. When the electricity was down, the water pumping station didn't operate.

The ambassador and I lived in the Quartier de Fleuve along the river, as did a number of the senior government officials. So, our power and water service was generally better than others areas, but the rest of the mission was scattered throughout the city. We did have an effective generator program that could keep at least lights and one or two air conditioners going on in every house at night. There would oftentimes be no water. There was little we could do about that except set up a system to fill their rooftop water tanks. This situation wears down peoples' dedication and commitment to the mission. As the Deputy Chief of Mission, one of my principal responsibilities was to try to keep our people happy, and to deal with their complaints and concerns. We had an officer who was a pretty tough, experienced character who said, if we don't get power and water in the next two weeks, my wife and kids are going home, and he would leave as well. I said, "Look I'd love to be able to promise you it's going to get better, but I can't, and you know I can't." I was sympathetic as we had a baby in our house as my son Ian had been born in the U.S. in June 1980 and while I had been fortunate enough to return home to be with my wife for his birth, we both had some trepidation about bringing him back into that situation.

Our community was constantly under these pressures. I remember a colleague of mine saying, he'd come home and ask his wife if there was any power today. Without power there would be no water. If she said there hadn't been any, he'd just drop his briefcase, take off his suit and shoes and jump directly into the swimming pool. He figured what the hell, what difference does it make when you get down to it? It was very demoralizing after a while. Reliable power was not available until after I left.

Ann Holloway arrived at in December of '79 and when the new administration came in January of '81. One of the very first things the Reagan team did in the transition was to identify the Carter-appointed ambassadors. They were going to be notified very quickly that they were out. Within three days of Secretary Haig being sworn in Secretary of State, the ambassador received a cable from him which she showed it to me. She said, "What do you think about this? What should I do?" The cable said, we appreciate your service to the United States government, and so on, and we would like you to wrap up your affairs in 15 days and turn over your mission to your Chargé. I thought that was unbelievable. I had never heard of it being done in that short a period of time. I suggested that she send a reply saying that it would be detrimental to our bilateral relationship if she were forced to leave Bamako in only two weeks. Further, there are ongoing activities that require her oversight and participation, and she would need a minimum of 60 days to get things in order. So, we drafted a telegram along these lines. They responded giving her a month to leave. So, 30 days later she was gone and I was the Chargé then from late February until I left in July.

One of the early requirements in the Reagan era was to sell the Africans on the idea that U.S. Africa policy under the Reagan administration was going to be equally as concerned as its predecessor although all the statements being made in Washington belied that. In particular, we were asked, as part of the USIA program, to invite key Malian leaders to my residence to show them a tape of the confirmation hearing of Secretary Haig. When, the Senators asked about Africa, his response essentially said the U.S. sees the region as a battleground of the Cold War. Well, our script told us to persuade Africans that we were interested in the Africans for themselves and not as a factor in the East-West struggle. We were still going to try to provide development, but that there would probably be a greater emphasis on their willingness to support American views, particularly democracy and free enterprise, read capitalism. We made that presentation and they listened respectfully. They responded, your Secretary said that Africa is a battleground and we don't want to be a battleground between East and West. We have our agenda, our own concerns about development and you are essentially reducing us to a role we don't want. We would like you to tell Washington that we don't appreciate that. We told Washington that and it didn't get us anywhere. We continued to peddle this line, but assistance levels were on the decline. Our programs were beginning to wind down, either running out of funds or failing to meet the objectives that they were intended to achieve.

The relationship cooled further. We tried to sell this idea that we were equally as engaged as we had been in the previous administration. It simply didn't fly. To some extent the Soviets and the French gained on us in this time, not that there was much to be gained.

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

WAUCHOPE: Okay.

Q: You left there in '81 and whither?

WAUCHOPE: We went back to Washington and I was working in Personnel. I was chief of African assignments in PER/CDA, which turned out to be a surprisingly good job.

LEWIS LUCKE
Design & Evaluation Officer, USAID
Bamako (1979-1982)

Ambassador Lewis Lucke was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1951. He graduated from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill and has an MBA from Thunderbird. He joined USAID as a Development Intern in 1978. His overseas assignments include Bamako Mali; Dakar, Senegal; San Jose, Costa Rica; Tunisia; and La Paz, Bolivia. He was mission director in Amman, Jordan and Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He lead the initial USAID team in Iraq Reconstruction (2002) and was Ambassador to Swaziland (2004-2006). Ambassador Lucke was interviewed by Mark Tauber in 2016.

Q: [Laughter] As you enter USAID in 1978 was there any training or introduction orientation that you went through?

LUCKE: Yes, there were several rotations through various offices in Washington. The Latin American bureau tried to get me assigned to them but I had my mind set on Mali and since it was hard to recruit for that country mission they were happy to take me. We were off to Bamako.

I did have some acquaintance with Africa from my travel to Algeria and Tunisia and had worked in the Africa Bureau, so I had some inkling of what working in Africa would look like. Also, as I said, we were mentally pretty much set on Mali by that time. I had interviewed with the Mission Deputy Director while he was in Washington on TDY and had accepted to go to Mali to him so I felt committed.

Q: What were the key USAID objectives or mission goals for the Sahel at that time?

LUCKE: We were designing and implementing a number of projects related to rural development, agriculture, health and so forth. There was a big push to increase the amount of funding and USAID's presence throughout the Sahel to address the effects of a major and recent regional drought. My job in Mali was to be a design and evaluation officer. I had done some prior economic analyses of Mali agricultural projects in DC so I was looking forward to seeing what the projects were in fact doing in the field. I wasn't very experienced of course but I loved the subject matter. It was all very interesting.

Q: How would you describe Mali's basic political-economic situation when you arrived.

LUCKE: Well, Mali was my first USAID country and first post. It was also one of the poorest countries in the world. It is a very shocking and eye opening experience to arrive there and look around. It was a dirt poor, one-party state trying to implement the response to a major drought that had damaged an already weak economy made worse by terrible policies related to agricultural pricing controlled by the government. Farmers were vulnerable to start with and received too little for their products since the government decided to keep prices artificially low to favor buyers in the cities. We eventually spent a lot of energy on that issue. I went into this at some length in the book I eventually wrote about Mali called “Waiting for Rain: Life and Development in Mali, West Africa”. I’m still waiting for the movie to be made but it’s for sale on Amazon.

Q: To what extent did the differences between the northern part of Mali and the southern part of Mali play at all?

LUCKE: We were increasingly becoming more aware to all this kind of thing. It is not politically correct to refer to “tribes” but there were plenty of different ethnic groups in Mali. There were Tuaregs in the north, and Songhai, Peul, Dogons and others further south, and Bambara--the largest group--scattered all around the country. Bambara was the major spoken local language in Mali. Unlike many other African countries, there was mostly ethnic harmony in Mali though the Tuaregs would rebel occasionally. That conflict got much more serious in 2012, I think it was, when Al Qaeda stirred things up in the north and the French had to intervene but that was far in the future. In our time there was mostly ethnic harmony though there was a lot of joke telling between the different ethnic groups in Mali done in a good natured way. Except for the Tuaregs in the north, Mali was blessed to not have many ethnic tensions at all.

Q: Did you find that the training USAID had given you reasonable preparation or how would you characterize that?

LUCKE: There was only so much a “non-technical” person like myself could apply except for possibly economics. I mean academically you knew how to do an economic analysis or evaluate a project but much more of the preparation came about as a result of practical, on the ground experience. I learned a lot about agriculture for example and I certainly had no formal schooling in that area. There really was only so much you could do in advance to prepare for being dropped into one of the poorest countries on the planet with a per capita income of about \$300 a year. That was a real shock and there was only so much you could do to prepare. Being resourceful, interested in learning and hardworking were probably the best preparations. I learned tons of Mali lessons from one particular colleague who was an anthropologist who had lived in Mali for many years, spoke Bambara and was willing to teach me many things about Mali, the culture, traditions and so forth. He was the right guy to know and become friends with. He is still one of my best friends today.

Q: While we are on the topic of anthropology, did your wife also find an opportunity to use her degree there?

LUCKE: Not per se. She got a job with the Mission in the management office where she was an effective manager and a real asset. She later worked for a livestock project we were implementing with a DC based contractor. She did a few field trip in the hinterlands too but soon we had our first daughter so she was plenty busy with that obligation in addition to the USAID work. She was very flexible, got along with Malians and even had learned enough French to get along pretty well. I was lucky to have such a flexible partner as Mali was a shock to many spouses and more than a few marriages would not survive such tough situations.

Q: OK, at that time how large was the USAID mission in Mali?

LUCKE: I would say we had about 20 US foreign service officers and some 60 or so local employees. We counted on the FSNs for everything. All in all the FSNs were an impressive group.

Q: It was a big group and in comparison to the embassy obviously, I would imagine quite a bit larger.

LUCKE: I would guess USAID had a few more FSOs than the Embassy and a lot more FSNs. It would be correct to say however that we were ALL Embassy people as we all worked under the Ambassador. The USAID Mission was physically separated from the Embassy in those days which was not ideal I suppose but it worked. Our first Ambassador was Patricia Byrnes and she was wonderful--traveled everywhere, knew everyone, loved to visit USAID projects in the field. The next one--a political appointee-- was pretty weak and actually was sent home for bouncing too many checks, if you can believe that. The last Ambassador we had was Parker Borg who was a great guy and a real pro as an Ambassador.

Q: In terms of your actual mission activities was there any interaction with the Embassy? Was the Embassy interested and involved? Did they periodically go out with you to project sites, or was it pretty much separate?

LUCKE: The two good Ambassadors were interested and involved. USAID was the biggest US thing going on in Mali so it was natural for them to care and be involved. There was also the little fact that at the end of the day we were one team and we tried not to forget that. I recall one of the junior officers at the Embassy was offended when Washington decided USAID officers would have diplomatic passports as opposed to official passports. I think there may have been some resentment that USAID had the money and the motive to travel throughout the country but I never thought much about it. For the most part, we all got along, entertained each other outside of work and saw ourselves as colleagues and friends.

Q: And the AID mission did it rely on the embassy for its housing and all that or did AID have its own?

LUCKE: At the time, it was all separate. We had our own motor pool and our own housing. We took care of ourselves mostly but relied on the Embassy for access to medical care at the Health Unit, check cashing and the like.

Q: I imagine also that you had to rely on FSNs to a certain degree to navigate the culture and geography of the country and who could give you some good advice about how to direct your efforts.

LUCKE: We relied on them to a huge degree. I mean without the FSNs I think we would have often been totally lost. So, we could have more FSNs than State and they tended to be higher ranked since we used them often for their technical and professional skills. We needed them and valued them..

Q: Were there other elements of the mission plan that were also going on?

LUCKE: There were a number of agriculture and rural development projects, health projects, forestry, environment, small community-based programs like well digging. We built a road or two and even designed and implemented a resettlement project to move and reinstall 12,000 rural villages in the far western Mali away from the effects of a dam being built there. I was to be very involved with this project later in my Mali stay.

Q: Did you supervise many local or U.S. employees?

LUCKE: I was too junior then to supervise much of anybody. I had a secretary and a number of close colleagues throughout the Mission not under my supervision. Also we worked with a number of USAID contractors helping implement projects. That is not to say I did not have real responsibilities. I was dealing with projects and programs that totaled a lot of money and that was a major obligation and responsibility.

Q: Yes. And was the Mission management there more or less effective separate from the embassy?

LUCKE: Our first Mission Director was a strong leader and personality who spoke excellent French and intimidated a lot of people. I liked him fine and we always got along. Our second director had come from the Chad mission, spoke French less well, but was an effective manager and one of the boys especially when it came to sports. I played some competitive tennis with the second Director and we became friends.

Q: But now all the work you did was with direct hires or FSNs or were there also contractors there?

LUCKE: We worked with contractors as well. Since my job was to design and evaluate projects I worked across the spectrum of projects. For each different project, we would have different contractors, universities or NGOs on them.

Q: In general, how would you compare the practice of project management by direct hire officers versus contractors?

LUCKE: Is it better the way it is now?

Q: Yes.

LUCKE: Well, I think we gave up an awful lot when we decided to basically stop implementing programs directly and gave it mostly all up to contractors or NGOs. To me the fun and most interesting part of the job was being in the field making projects succeed. Today most of USAID's work is done by others we fund and hire. We call our NGOs and contractors "partners" and that is the reality. We rely on them and but I think they're now having more fun and more impact than most USAID direct hires. .

Q: What would be an ideal outcome at the time you were there? What would be the project that particularly succeeded, at least in its own terms?

LUCKE: Well, I can give you a negative example and a positive example. A negative example would be when we evaluated a rice production project where we had built dikes and water control systems in order to increase rice yields. We found that yields were lower than expected because the fields were not properly leveled and the dikes and other water control systems were not adequately maintained. Yields therefore suffered. That was a negative example. The positive example would be the design and implementation of the Manantali resettlement project in western Mali where we successfully resettled 12,000 rural villagers from the impoundment area near a new dam being built. There really wasn't any such thing as a successful forced resettlement project in Africa before, but this one worked because we knew the "lessons learned" from prior failures and completed a very thorough design with the help of our Malian colleagues. You can read all about it in my book.

LUCKE: We studied all of the negative examples of resettlement failures all over the Africa including Mali--- what had gone wrong and why it had gone wrong. We applied those lessons to Manantali. If we hadn't done it correctly, we would have all likely ended up on "60 Minutes". At the end of the day, the villagers were resettled, no one drowned and their rural economic production was reestablished. We got some crucial help from other donors along the way--the Germans and UNDP for example--and we helped turn the entire project into one that was led and implemented by Malians. That's the way it's supposed to work and in this case it did.

Q: How was the relationship between the mission and the government there? What did you need to do in order to work with the government effectively?

LUCKE: We tried to be full partners with our counterparts in the government. For example, when we started designing the Manantali resettlement project we approached the Ministry of Hydrology, the water agency, to get them to name good and qualified counterparts we could work with for the duration of the project. They set an implementation unit and staffed it. So we tried to be good partners. After all, it's their country.

Q: Was part of the reason you had a good relationship with the government due to the connections of your FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals)?

LUCKE: I suppose so. The government at the time was a one-ruler, one-party state and you would never confuse Mali's leader at the time with Thomas Jefferson. After I had departed Mali,

there were a succession of elected presidents and it was good to see that improvement, though they went through another coup when al Qaeda launched its attack on south in 2012, I think it was.

Q: Yes, because I imagine when you are hiring an FSN, you consider the networks they bring as part of the expertise they can offer.

LUCKE: Sure. We had a couple of stalwart Malian FSNs who were friendly, gregarious, experienced, smart, friends with everybody and we thought they were gold. We relied on those good folks a lot.

Q: Is there a particular when an FSN who really made the difference that you can recall?

LUCKE: I am sure there are many examples but I can't think of one right now. Often times, when we had an issue that needed ironing out with government, the FSNs could make the first contact and smooth the way for us, or in fact get the desired result themselves.

Q: Can you comment on the sustainability of the projects you were involved in?

LUCKE: One of our agriculture projects was designed to develop more drought resistant varieties of millet and sorghum that the Malians consumed along with rice. The research and trials eventually resulted in more drought-resistant varieties just as had been planned. That protected Malians from the cycle of drought and hunger and I am sure these varieties are still being used today. I would call that a sustainable success. Sustainability was a function of properly and intelligently conceiving programs that made sense, were not convoluted or overly complicated, that used technology properly, that had good local counterparts who could eventually run the show and take ownership and therefore have many of the aspects of that would amount to something that would last and therefore be sustainable. There were some project failures of course and some successes. Mali was in fact a tough place to live and work though we were young enough and energetic enough to keep trying hard to make it work. Most of us came to love Mali despite all the hardships.

Q: Were there any particular difficulties that stand out?

LUCKE: Well, we always tried to treat allies and colleagues correctly and with respect but some things were out of our control. I recall our wheat irrigation project outside of Timbuktu at a town called Dire. Wheat was being grown but we had a devil of a time getting pumps there and keeping them operational. Also, it didn't help that the Malian project director took off one day with the project vehicle and all the petty cash, He was last seen disappearing over the horizon into Upper Volta as Burkina Faso used to be called. Sometimes things would work and sometimes things fell apart. Sometime counterparts were great but occasionally a few were not. You had to deal with it.

Q: So, before we leave Mali, what would you say were the high points of the tour there?

LUCKE: I guess on the existential level, my wife and I could live and work there happily and productively and that apparently I had not made a terrible career choice with USAID. Au contraire, I had picked something that I could be possibly good at. So, that is one answer. Also from the point of view of a specific success and high point, I would look to the Manantali resettlement project that turned out pretty well.

Q: Now as you are approaching the end of the Mali tour you are obviously thinking about where you are going to be going next. How did you communicate that to Washington and how did Washington respond?

LUCKE: I didn't at all.

Q: Oh.

LUCKE: That's not always the way it would work with USAID, at least back then. I can honestly say that I never bid on a position that I had not already been offered previously by another Mission or by Mission management. State is different, I guess. It has to do with one's reputation and the openings you knew about or came about. My move to Senegal happened because the Manantali project was part of a bigger River Basin Development portfolio run out of our Dakar Mission, so we got to know each other, a job was open to run a new river basin project, they decided they wanted me and the paperwork got done to reflect that mutual decision. That's the way it worked or at least it used to. It is much more formalized now, I think.

Q: Before we get into Senegal, your next tour, while you were in Mali did you receive any mentoring or career counseling?

LUCKE: Yes, I guess so. I got to be pretty good friends with my boss, the Mission Director, the second Mission Director we had in Mali who had a lot of experience and had been in a lot of places where I ended up going later in my career. He and I were tennis buddies so we had these ferociously competitive matches and he and I got to be good friends. He was really supportive of me when I had this possibility of moving to Dakar though he really didn't want me to leave. We sat down actually in Dakar and he said, "Look, I would never hold anybody back professionally. If you think this is the right thing to do, I will support you," so I always appreciated that.

Q: How did they describe the job that you would be going into?

LUCKE: We were based in the River Basin Development Office, part of USAID/Dakar. The boss was Vito. He wanted me to come in and take over a job in charge of the Gambia River Basin Development project. This was opposed to Senegal River Basin portfolio than Manantali Resettlement was part of. It was the same office but a different orientation but my Gambia basin project was the only one not part of the Senegal Basin projects, called OMVS in French.

Q: As I understand, there are specialties in USAID that officers tend to stay in, be it education or let's say rural development or economic development or so on. Were you already thinking of specializing in a particular area?

LUCKE: I came into USAID with a certain specialization, the equivalent of what the State Department would call a cone. In the State Department you would have economic, consular, political, management or whatever. In USAID our specializations included programs, controller, economist, project development, general development, health officer and so forth. I was a Project Development Officer--in other words, people who basically design and evaluate projects and a whole lot of other tasks as well, "miscellaneous other duties" as it is called. That is what I did in Mali, for example, helping design the Manantali Resettlement project. In Dakar I became a Project Officer, in other words, charged with managing a specific project. It was a little bit of a deviation from my normal specialization track, but that is perfectly normal and I wanted the additional and different professional experience.

CHARLES O. CECIL
Public Affairs Officer
Bamako (1980-1982)

Ambassador Cecil was born in Kentucky into a US military family and was raised at several military bases in the US and abroad. He was educated at the University of California, Berkeley and the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. A trained Arabic Language speaker, the Ambassador served abroad in Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, Beirut, Jeddah, Bamako, Muscat, Tunis and Abidjan. He was US Ambassador to Niger from 1996 to 1999. He also had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. Ambassador Cecil was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006

CECIL: Right. With time to go back overseas after five years in Washington, I was anxious to go back to what I considered the real Foreign Service. I wanted to get back into an embassy somewhere, and I was looking for ways to broaden my knowledge and my professional expertise. I wanted to go to a French-speaking country. Although I had studied French at FSI in 1969 when I thought I was going to be assigned to Lubumbashi in Zaire, in the end the Department sent me to Zanzibar, so I didn't use my French. I had been wanting to acquire fluency in French, so I was looking for a French-speaking country. I wanted to go back to Africa, and I also had very much enjoyed my time on Zanzibar as the branch PAO running the USIS library on the island after the Branch PAO had been PNG'd.

I talked with USIA about an out-of-agency assignment, and one day I got a call from a friend of mine in USIA personnel. I had been hoping to go somewhere as a CAO—Cultural Affairs Officer—thinking that was the most I could hope for as a State Department officer, but I got a call one day asking me if I would like to go to Bamako, Mali as PAO.

Q: That's Public Affairs Officer which is the top officer in the public affairs.

CECIL: Right, and I wasn't even the sole officer. The post actually had a second, an assistant, Public Affairs Officer, so I would have another American to supervise and a small local staff.

My friend was quite honest. He said, “We can’t find anyone in USIA that wants the job.” They thought of me, and I jumped at it. I said, “That would be wonderful. It would be a French speaking country, a Muslim country.” Having served in East Africa, I would now get to serve West Africa, and it would be a USIA experience. So I jumped at that opportunity. I guess next time we meet we could talk about it.

Q: What was your family situation at the time?

CECIL: Our first child, a son, was born in Nairobi during my Zanzibar assignment, and then during my Beirut assignment our second child, a daughter, was born in Beirut. Then during the five years in Washington my third and last child, a son, was born here in Alexandria. In 1980 we had a ten year old son, a nine year old daughter, and a three year old son. That’s what we went to Bamako with. That would probably be a good chunk to devote the next session to. I spent three years in Bamako, Mali.

Q: We’ll pick this up in 1980 to ’83 when you were off to Bamako as public affairs officer, and we’ll talk about the issues there and also the governments they had.

CECIL: When I arrived, which was August 30th of 1980 the country was headed by President Moussa Traore. Traore had gained power through a coup in 1968 when he overthrew the first president, Modibo Keita. The country had a socialist government, I think we could call it, with strong Soviet influence. They were beginning to become a bit disillusioned with the Soviet formula. They saw that the Soviet approach to economic issues wasn’t really producing the kind of results that they perhaps had hoped for originally. They were beginning to be more open to other points of view besides the Soviet point of view. That was pretty much the atmosphere during my time. I would say they were cautiously open to American ideas and contacts but certainly had not cast aside the strong ties to the Soviet Union and the strong reliance on the Soviet Union for economic assistance.

Jumping ahead I’ll just say Traore himself was overthrown in 1991, so he had another 11 years to go from the time I arrived before he was finally tossed out by General Amadou Toumani Touré—ATT as he is called—and I can talk a little more about that later.

Q: We’ll talk about that.

CECIL: Let me just say, and maybe we said it on the last tape, I arrived as PAO—Public Affairs Officer—an out-of-agency assignment working not for the State Department but for what at that short period of time was called the U.S. International Communication Agency. You recall the name was changed from the traditional U.S. Information Agency and then after a few years they went back to being U.S. Information Agency, but during my time it was called USICA.

I had wanted to serve with USIA ever since I had managed the USIA library in Zanzibar on my second assignment. I had gotten to know something of USIA materials and their usefulness, and I wanted to have the full dose, so to speak. I went out as PAO and as it happened as I approached the end of my two year tour as PAO, the ambassador at the time, Parker Borg, asked me if I would stay a third year to be his DCM. He had a DCM who had family problems and curtailed

his tour, so Parker was looking around to find a quick fix, and there I was. Obviously, it was advantageous to be a DCM, so I stayed the third year in that role.

Maybe I've jumped ahead.

Q: About Bamako. What are the boundaries of Bamako, the countries surrounding it and a little about the economy at the time.

CECIL: It's a Muslim former French colony in West Africa. Most of the area of the country is the Sahara. Algeria borders Mali on the north. One of the perennial problems of Mali and also Niger where I served later is the Tuareg people. The Tuaregs are very independent people who historically were known to be bandits and people who charged tolls to the caravans to allow them to pass through their territory. In modern times they've been a difficult minority to control because they've always felt they were not properly represented within the governments of Mali or Niger.

To the west is Senegal. The people of Mali are Malinke people, and they have a lot of cultural ties throughout West Africa. To the south is Ivory Coast—Cote d'Ivoire—and if I looked at the map, I could tell you if there's another one in there. You don't have a map, do you?

Q: Yes, I do!

CECIL: I think the most important thing about Mali was the French colonial experience and the adoption of French as the official language of the country.

Q: The ambassador when you got there was...

CECIL: When I arrived the ambassador was Anne Holloway. She was a political appointee. She had some kind of a professional or personal relationship with Andy Young. I think she had worked on the Hill. In any case, she was important enough in Black democratic circles that she was given the appointment. I arrived on August 30 of 1980. The election, of course, was that November, and Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in his bid for a second term. That was a very interesting insight into a new administration preparing to take over all the authority it earned in the election.

It was a matter of days—literally days—before Anne Holloway received a telegram from Secretary Haig asking for her resignation. He gave her a week to leave the post. She protested that she couldn't do it in a week, so the answer came back, "All right, you can have two weeks." Walter Carrington, I understand, who was our recently arrived ambassador in Dakar, Senegal, another Black-American democratic political appointee, received a similar telegram. He had only been at the post a few months. In the end Anne Holloway left February 27, so I think she managed to get a month or so. It was very quick, and the republican administration was very quick to assert its authority and to start moving Democratic appointees out. We had an interim where the DCM Keith Wauchope was charge until the arrival of a career officer as ambassador, Parker Borg, who came in August or September—I think it was September—of 1981.

I know that Anne Holloway had resisted my appointment as PAO. The deputy PAO told me so when I arrived because she really wanted a career, experienced USIA person, and she was afraid that a State Department political officer would not be as effective at the job. I hope I showed her that I could be just as effective. I think I put her doubts to rest after being there a few months.

I would say that because she was a political appointee she did rely heavily on her staff. I don't want to get too personal about it, but I don't think she ever fully appreciated all the power and influence at her disposal as an ambassador. Her French was not that strong, either, so she was at a disadvantage. The rest of the staff was very capable, so we did our own thing and helped her as we could to play the role she should play.

Q: What would you describe as American interests at the time in Mali?

CECIL: Because of the Soviet influence we as a reflex action wanted to counter that Soviet influence, to weaken it, diminish it, and to do what we could to ensure that Mali was not aligned in the genuine sense—if not pro-American, at least objectively non-aligned.

As I got there and began to size up the situation, I found some other issues that I thought were extremely important. I'll say as PAO I conceived of my work in two categories. One was what I would call "strategic." These were issues of national importance; that is, to the country of Mali and to our own national interests, maybe even of regional importance. I'll give you a couple of examples of what I mean. Then there were the "tactical" issues, as I called them. They were more of the day-to-day things where we were charged with distributing information about current issues or policies and responding to a lot of requests, both local requests from the Malians and requests from Washington for information. You always have this constant stream of short-term, quick reaction requests. Hopefully you don't get so many of those that they prevent you from thinking about the larger context in which you're working.

The best example of a strategic issue that comes to mind was the subject of American studies. After I had been there a few months, I was able to find the books that were used in the Malian school system to teach Malian students about the United States. They were atrocious. They were French publications. I'm sure that in the past they had been used in France. Maybe they still were. The one I remember most clearly was a collection of selections from American writers. These were the most unfavorable, most highly critical commentaries on America that you could possibly find. Some of them were from novels, writers like Richard Wright, and some of them were from commentators and observers. The writers or the editors of this book, and one or two others like it, were almost diabolical in selecting these things. If an American ever criticized the content, they would say, "Oh, these are just American writers we are selecting. We're just quoting your own people, so what's wrong with that?" These were really, really highly critical and presented our society in the worst light, especially the racial issue in the worst light.

Once this came to my attention, I started by surveying the PAO's in other countries in West Africa to see if they had noted the same or, I suggested, that if it hadn't come to their attention that they should inquire into the materials being used in the local school system. I proposed to Washington that USICA fund the drafting of a textbook on American studies which USICA could either print itself or subsidize some publisher to produce as a French language textbook on

American studies that could be promoted in French speaking Africa or, for that matter, other French speaking countries.

As far as I know, nothing happened to that idea, at least during my time. Washington's initial reaction was, "Well, it's a really great idea, but we don't have money for that kind of an undertaking." So I did what I could with my own local budget. The first thing I did was to purchase enough American studies books recommended by our office in Paris that was called ARS, African Regional Support. I asked them to help me identify good French language books that presented the United States and its history in a favorable light. I was able to buy enough copies of what they recommended to provide a set to each of the 22 lycees in Mali all over the country, lycees teaching English at that time. I also got a special somewhat larger collection of books for what we called ENSUP, the Ecole Nationale Superieure, which was the teacher-training college of the country. At least we ensured that resource materials that we thought were acceptable were available to the teaching staff in all the lycees around the country.

Q: What was the reaction? Were you up against the French establishment which probably enjoyed sticking it to the Americans or not?

CECIL: I don't know to what extent the French themselves were really encouraging this at the time. The materials were already somewhat old and dated in Mali. It's not atypical that Mali would get hand-me-downs or castoffs, just like the market is full of used clothing. Old textbooks that are no longer in use in France might be donated or sold cheaply to the French West African market. I did not ever blame the French in the early '80s for doing this. Maybe earlier there had perhaps been some French influence in this. Even communist influence in France. I don't know the origin of the books themselves, but they were certainly anti-American in content.

Another way to try and approach the issue and to put pressure on Washington was that I urged every PAO in French-speaking West Africa to include this issue in his 1983 country plan to try to build a ground swell of support for the issue from the field. But again, when I left Mali in the summer of '83, I had not yet seen any real response from Washington. I think it's a good example of how the field often can see issues that seem important in the field, but it's almost as if you're not allowed to discover anything new during your tour because the budget's already been made a year ago or two years ago. If it's not in the budget even though it's a great idea, we can't do anything about it, at least not in the short run.

Another issue that I thought was of strategic importance was the question of English teaching in Mali. Through contacts that I developed I managed to get a list of the 96 Malian teachers of English employed by the ministry of education. The first thing I did was I quadrupled our subscription for the USIA publication called "English Teaching Forum" which was a professional magazine about English teaching methodology with lots of classroom exercises and aids. I started buying enough of those with my budget so every one of the Malian teachers of English could have his or her own personal copy.

We did provide some other books to the Malian school system. There was a wonderful book program. I forget what its official name was, but it was managed in Paris, in which well known and important books in English were identified and then translated into French and printed in

paperback editions. Ideally they were for sale through book stores in West Africa at very low prices, but in many cases the commercial channels didn't work because there weren't, frankly, too many people in Mali who could afford to buy a book. Even the educated people had limited salaries.

Through USICA we could obtain copies and make distribution as we saw fit. We were supposed to be careful not to undermine any potential commercial market but the market was so small in Mali that it hardly mattered.

I was able to get, for instance, the French-language translation of Paul Samuelson's Economics. It was the same textbook that I had used to study economics.

Q: I had that in college, too back in the '50s!

CECIL: It was translated into French and another one by Kindleberger called International Economics was translated into French. I got 200 copies of the International Economics book and provided them to the ENA, the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, which was the highest level educational facility for training government employees. We did things like when the magazines in our USICA library were replaced with newer ones, things like Time and Newsweek and Ebony and Black Enterprise, I would send those usually either to ENA or to ENSUP to their libraries. Those were in English, but just to try to get information out. And we provided other book collections to those facilities.

Another strategic issue was the question of degree equivalency. This was an issue that affected all of the Francophone countries of West Africa. In Mali if a government employee had the French degree of Doctorat d'Etat, he got an extra allowance, an extra salary payment. If a Malian had an American PhD he didn't get any extra allowance. In 1982 there were about 12 Malians who had American PhD's. Several of them came to me one day to discuss the issue. They were led by a Malian named Soumana Sako. He had a PhD in economics—I forget which university—and he was quite an articulate and forceful personality. He later became prime minister of Mali. We can talk about that later when we get to that period. They laid out their grievance and asked me as the PAO to please go to the Ministry of Education and convince them that an American PhD was every bit as hard to get as a French Doctorat d'Etat.

It wasn't quite that simple. I did open up a dialogue with the Ministry of Education and even got Paris to send down to us an expert that we had on the French and American educational system, a fellow named Ray Wanner. He came down and spent several days with us meeting with government officials and with the PhD students themselves trying to explain to them the American university education system.

The problem was that our system of accrediting associations was very difficult for Malians to fathom. They were very skeptical over the absence of national, nationwide government control of education. They said, "How do you ensure the quality of some university here or there?" Attempts to say, "That's what accrediting associations do," didn't seem to carry much weight. During my time we didn't succeed, but just to close that issue and jump ahead quite a few years, I went back to Bamako on a personal visit in December of 1992. I found Soumana Sako and met

with him. He had during that period been the prime minister. He said to me that once he became prime minister he was able to do a little more to solve the problem. It took a few years, and I don't know to what extent other PAO's in other Francophone countries took up the issue—whether it was an identical problem there or not. It was certainly what I called a strategic issue that deserved our attention.

I can tell you about the other category is you want—tactical issues—but maybe you have other questions.

Q: I'd like to continue. Did you, while there at the strategic level, was there an attempt by the Soviets to do stuff or by the French, or had the French gotten over America trying to poach on their territory? How was it at that time?

CECIL: This must be a terrible gap in my memory, but I would have to say I don't recall an antagonistic relationship with the French embassy nor with the French cultural center. I can't say that our relationship was close and warm, no. I think we had probably not a whole lot to do with each other, but I do not recall at this time any active French opposition to what we were doing. I think probably on an embassy-to-embassy level the French would certainly not be happy with any inroads we might be making because they would probably see it as a zero sum game in which any influence we gained would be to their detriment. But I don't recall it as being a confrontational-type atmosphere.

Q: Were the Soviets building stadiums or doing other things? Did you find yourself trying to conquer them?

CECIL: I think the answer is pretty much the same. As for the Russians, I think the answer is something similar: no head-to-head confrontations, really. We both went about our own thing. I can give you another example of where you might say I had an opportunity to try to come to grips with ideology or at least atmosphere. There was a local newspaper—only one, L'Essor—edited by a Malian of Vietnamese descent. His mother was Vietnamese; his father was Malian. I think they had met when the Malian had been in Indo-China.

Q: I think they all call them Sinhalese, but there were a lot of French troops there.

Q: I think if I recall, and I haven't thought of his name in 20 years, but I think his name was Gausu Grabo. He was the editor. He was quite a nice person, but the paper, in some ways like those school books, was frequently critical of the United States and sometimes in a very superficial and silly way. The thing that set me off on this little campaign was one day I found an article whose headline said, "Man Kills Wife Who Served Him Pork." It purported to quote a little news item from some American state, I think in the south, that said exactly what the headline said—that some husband was so enraged that his wife had served him pork for dinner that he shot her. And this was a news item!

I said to my staff, "There's a little too much of this kind of stuff." This was probably the silliest. I said, "For the next two months, we're going to do a very careful content analysis of L'Essor,

and I want every article that's critical of the United States in any way to be cut out and noted, and we'll make a file. After a couple of months we'll see what we can make of this."

As a matter of fact, there was enough in the file after those couple of months to give me the basis of going to see Gausu Grabo. I said as I turned the pages, "You know, it's hard for us to understand why a non-aligned country, one that purports to be on good terms with both sides of the current international conflict, why you would go out of your way to put these kinds of articles critical of us in your paper? And by the way, I don't find the same kind of articles critical of the Soviet Union. I don't know where you're getting these." The unspoken thing was maybe the Russians were providing them. I don't know to this day where he was getting this kind of stuff.

I think he was actually quite startled when he saw the record day after day as I turned the pages in front of him and the cumulative effect did leave its impression. I would have to say that the number of such items certainly did diminish after that. We had some other successes with the paper. There was a time when they reviewed in a book review column one of the USICA publications that I referred to earlier, the French translations of the American works. I forget which one it was now. That had never happened before.

I think that was an example of how we did in a small way move the Malian media slightly more toward an objective position. I have to add there was no television in Mali at that time, so the paper and the radio—radio especially—were the main vehicles for the distribution of information.

We offered VOA tapes to the Malian radio. Various kinds of features were provided to us by VOA. The Malians rarely used them. I guess that was maybe farther than they were prepared to go at the time, but we made them available on a regular basis. We sent them over regularly to the radio stations, but we weren't very successful in getting them to broadcast them.

One of the things that attracted me about working for USIA was that I saw the role of the PAO basically as a catalyst to help other members of the embassy open doors and to provide material that could serve as a basis for discussions and meetings and dialogues with other local officials and people outside the government as well. The other thing I liked about it was I was political by cone [i.e., Foreign Service specialty], but I liked the fact that the PAO could talk to virtually anyone. I could always find materials that were of interest to someone, and it gave me many, many opportunities to talk to people outside the foreign ministry or other political parties, let's say, or other than officials who were dealing strictly with political issues. I liked to talk to journalists; I liked to talk to artists.. I had an opportunity to meet a few writers and even film makers. Mali had a small number of film makers at the time. I really liked the broad scope of the PAO's mandate and appreciated that opportunity very much.

Another thing I liked about working for USICA at the time was because it was a smaller agency there was perhaps a little more camaraderie. It was a little bit easier to talk to Washington, and the agency was willing to help us when it could. Before I went to Bamako, for instance, I quickly learned that the sister city of Bamako was Rochester, New York. I asked the agency if they would send me up to Rochester and let me meet with the sister city committee, and they did! They paved the way and sent me up for a three day trip: one day up, one day back, and a day

there. Very nice of them to do that. During my time in Bamako we were able to get the head of the Rochester sister-city committee to come for a visit.

USICA also sent me to a private language school to refresh my French. I had studied French at FSI in 1969 as we noted way back in this series of interviews, but I'd never had a French speaking assignment. Even though I'd gotten a 3-3 in class, it had been slowly deteriorating on the shelf. Rather than send me back to FSI, USIA sent me to a school up on DuPont Circle called the International Center for Language Studies and gave me a Moroccan instructor who spoke beautiful French. There I was a one-on-one with him for. I think, eight weeks, which got me back up to speed. It was a wonderful benefit of working with the agency at that time.

Once I got to Bamako I tried to make the most of all of these materials, and I did have a wide number of contacts throughout the government and in private society. That goes in the tactical heading of trying to deal with daily issues and seek out targets of opportunity. One little triumph that I was very happy about was the time that I got President Traore to look at a USIA video tape. Because there was no television, video tapes were strong tools to attract interested Malians.

I had gotten to know the Minister of Education, an army colonel named Seiko Li, and I knew that he was very close personally to President Traore. I called him one day and I said, "From time to time I get interesting materials here on video tape. All I need is 24 hours notice from you, and I'll bring my equipment and my tapes to your house and set up a show for anyone you want to invite. You don't have to tell me, I don't care who, but just your friends, your family, anyone you want to invite. I'll be there with 24 hours notice." I told him that I had a very interesting tape about a fly-by, I think of planet Jupiter, it might have been Saturn. It was one of the early space launches, a nice little 30 minute documentary about some of our technological achievements in space. I told him I had that and a couple of other things, but that was the main one. He said yes, he'd like to see that, so he gave me a date.

I came over with my assistant PAO, and we set up the equipment in his living room. I noted when we arrived that at that point there were no cars, no guests. We were a little bit early before the stated hour, and in the end he only had one guest, but it was President Traore! President Traore came and watched the program, was very interested, asked a few questions. What surprised me was when I told Washington that we had shown a couple of USIA tapes to the president, they hardly even responded. There was a case where even if it's small and collegial, it didn't seem to make any impact. I guess they thought, "Well, it's a nice little fluke, but what's the impact on policy?" maybe they were thinking. But it made us feel good that we had that kind of access.

I liked working with the International Visitor program. That was a very valuable resource. One thing I did probably my second year there was I took three of our international visitor grants and awarded them to important Malian businessmen. They were businessmen who were locally successfully, but their business links were all with France. While perhaps they could have paid for their own trip to the United States, they never even thought about looking into American markets. With some help from State and the Department of Commerce we set up a program for them, and we sent three Malian businessmen for... I don't think it was the full 28 days. I think they wouldn't give us that much time, but a couple of weeks as I recall, 14 days or so. They had

some meetings. This was another tool we could use to try to orient Malians to the United States and try and expose them to other kinds of thinking besides French and Soviet.

Q Did Mali have any export products that were of value?

CECIL: Mali had gold for one thing, and then an American company came during my time, probably during my third year, and started developing some gold deposits that had previously been explored by the Russians but for some reason had not been developed by them. On the whole it probably was a small deposit, but it was at least an example of how we could draw Mali to the attention of certain American business circles. Otherwise, it's a pretty poor country. I'm not sure what agricultural products they export. Near the border with Ivory Coast they grow cotton. In Niger, for instance, I know they exported cattle to Nigeria mostly. Whether Mali did that now I don't recall. It was not a rich country. It didn't have uranium like Niger. No other important mineral resources that I can recall.

PARKER W. BORG
Ambassador
Mali (1981-1984)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: So you went to Mali from '81 to when?

BORG: '84, three years.

Q: What rank were you at that time?

BORG: I may have just become an OC in the new Foreign Service. It was very recent.

Q: So you were in senior ranks at that time?

BORG: Yes, I think I had been just promoted.

Q: We really haven't talked about Mali when you were doing West Africa.

BORG: There were lots of countries.

Q: I know, but I was just going to say it obviously hadn't risen to the top of your interest.

BORG: No.

Q: When you went out there in '81, what was the situation?

BORG: Mali was another poor West African nation that was suffering from the Sahelian drought, had no particular resources of note, and was at the bottom of everybody's list in terms of interests and in terms of potential for the future. Mali did have one thing that gave people cause for concern, and that was that the Russians seemed to have an unusual interest in the future of the country and had spent some money helping the Malians expand some of their airports so that they could take long-distance aircraft. Military strategists knew exactly what that meant, and so if there was a watching brief that I was to maintain out there, it had to do with what the Russians might be doing.

Q: When we talk about the Russians, we're talking about Soviets.

BORG: That's right.

Q: When you look at it, it's all very nice but what do you do with it?

BORG: It leads to where?

Q: You know, I always think of these strategists drawing up these wonderful things, but it is surrounded by a bunch of other countries. Did you ever sit down and try to figure out what does this mean?

BORG: We looked upon the Russian interests just as our military likes to have staging points where they can land aircraft for crises further away, that this was a potential staging craft for southern Africa or possibly even across the Atlantic into South America. None of this was ever specified. Nobody ever told me what this was for, but we were watchful of it. Our own strategic interests in Mali were not on anybody's horizon. That's why they sent me.

Q: Well, you've got to start somewhere. What was the government like?

BORG: The government in Mali when I got there was a dictatorship run by a man by the name of Moussa Traore, a military officer who had taken power maybe three or four years, maybe five years or 10 years, previously and ran the country with an invisible iron hand. I say that because he was considered strong and all powerful and yet his troops were not omnipresent. There was no strong repressive activity that was going on at the time. He had made his points, he had put his enemies in jail, and that was many years beforehand and now he was sort of tolerated by his people and there was no significant political opposition to him. He was a surprisingly uncommunicative leader. One hears about firebrands making speeches and inspiring their people to do something or other. In my conversations with him, I always felt he was ill at ease at the podium and in private conversation. I imagine that in meeting with his cabinet he was probably equally ill at ease. You wondered, just coming in as I did, how is it that this man, who seems like

Mr. Milktoast, can be in charge. He just wasn't very dynamic. At the time that I was there, it was a very pragmatic period in the country's governance. We had some excellent ministers that we worked with. My priorities focused very much on economic assistance. As I had seen in the past, our economic assistance programs were a disaster, so I interfered excessively in trying to make our programs effective and trying to prevent AID from canceling programs that were ongoing and seemed like they might succeed just because they weren't the priority of the moment or that some new specialists had come in and said, "This one doesn't make economic sense. We can import wheat more cheaply from the United States than the way they can grow it here." So I was doing almost continuous battle with the economic assistance mission. We established some really interesting programs there. The primary one was focused on food production, in which we recognized that so many countries in this part of the world had done what they could to provide cheap food to the masses in the cities and this had all been at the expense of the rural communities which were no longer prepared to continue to produce the food at the rate that was necessary because the money that they were receiving for it wasn't a living wage. So the food production declined and the economic assistance increased to take its place, and there were food shortages. We recognized that this was something that we ought to try and change. We had a really interesting program with the World Food Program – I guess World Food Program was the name of the organization. Ourselves, the World Bank, the European Community and the French embassy would get together and we actually cooperated on a project that would stimulate agricultural production in the rural areas. The project worked because all of the donors stuck together. We had one minister, the minister of agriculture at the time, who was a very strong supporter of what we were doing, and he'd feed us information: "Put pressure at this point and this point." None of the donors broke with each other. The French did not feel that they had sufficient cause to do anything different than what all of the other donors were doing, and so we worked together and we were successful at forcing a change in agricultural policy in the country which lasted and I think was probably one of the reasons why Mali was able to become a much more successful country in the coming years. It took a couple years to do this.

Q: What were sort of the ins and outs? How were you getting the farmers to receive due recompense for their work?

BORG: This is written up in a World Bank study. The World Bank came out and studied it afterwards. I can't remember all the details, but I know you could find them. We provided food as an incentive. We provided food at one rate one year, a declining rate the next year, and so forth, but we kept the subsidy for food consumption through our food assistance programs but provided a subsidy at the same time for the agricultural producers until we could get a better balance, a level of production that the farmers would produce, at a level that was sufficient incentive for them, and kept food at a reasonable level for the people in the cities.

Q: I was in Korea, and one of the great successes in Korea was that the then dictator, Park Chung Hee, had made sure that the rice farmers did well. The rest of the people paid for the rice at a premium, but there was no great incentive to leave the rice farms to head to the city.

BORG: That was probably a wise policy.

Q: It was considered to be one of the keys. Koreans are hard-working people anyway, but the fact that they didn't denude the countryside.

BORG: The problem in most African nations is that the people who go into the streets and push for an overthrow of a government are the urban people and they are upset most often when the price of food goes higher than what they feel they can pay. So the response in Mali and in other countries around the world has repeatedly been to keep rural production down in order to keep the cost down for people in the cities.

Q: Did the French play much of a role in Mali? Did you find that they were sort of the leading guys?

BORG: I made a point of always telling the French ambassador how much we respected the work that France was doing in Africa. Basically the French were subsidizing the economy of Mali and the other nations in the area because the currency was pegged to the French franc, and when their balance of payments got out of kilter so that the imports exceeded the exports, the French covered the difference. And when the real value of the currency changed, the French covered the difference. The French stepped in. Mali was not part of the franc zone. It didn't have the same franc. They had a Malian franc and there was a West African franc, and the French covered both of them. And Air Mali, the French helped Air Mali survive. So there were many invisibles that were done by the French. As far as we were concerned in the United States, this was great because it kept stability.

Q: Were the Soviets messing around other than laying cement for long runways?

BORG: The Soviets had an even larger presence than we did. Just exactly what they were doing was never clear. This was the beginning of a time with better relations with the Soviet Union. When there would be a signal of some kind of a summit between Reagan and whoever was running the Soviet Union...

Q: Gorbachev.

BORG: No, this was pre-Gorbachev, I think.

Q: Maybe not. We'd run through a series of...

BORG: But we had frequent exchanges with the Soviet embassy in which we would have ping-pong matches or sports competitions or some activity or other. The Soviet embassy was large. The number of Russians and Soviet citizens was greater probably than the number of Americans, and just as I didn't know what all of the Americans were doing sometimes, I couldn't begin to figure out what all the Russians did. Now, the only even greater anomaly was that the Chinese also had a huge embassy, and the Chinese, as far as we know, did nothing at all for the country, but they were large and an important presence. The other country that was an important presence were the Koreans, the North Koreans. They built a cultural center, a huge cultural palace, for the Malians, and I think they imported all of the workers for it. It was an interesting diplomatic situation to become involved in in that the Western nations consisted of the French, the Germans,

the European Community and ourselves, and the other representatives were the Chinese, the Russians, the Yugoslavs, the Libyans, the PLO organization, the North Koreans. The Saudis were there too and the Egyptians. There were a number of countries that we didn't readily associate with that were part of the line-up. Whenever we participated in official diplomatic functions, we were always seated in the order in which we presented our credentials, and this is how we moved up the line as people left. But I found myself, for almost the entire time that I was there, between the Palestinian rep and the North Korean, the two people that I had on either side, and I never could figure out just what I might be saying to these people. With the North Korean, of course, there was no language that one could speak in common. He was rumored to have been the chauffeur to somebody.

Q: Was there any political life or anything to report?

BORG: The political life was pretty dead. There were occasions when there were student riots, but there was really nothing happening on the political front. The government was being quite accommodating to outsiders. There was a young man who had gotten his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh and he was a very bright economist.

Q: Malian?

BORG: Malian. He came back and could not find any job for a period of time. We followed him very closely because he wanted to talk with us because of his American experience. He was picked up by the Minister of Agriculture, the person that we were working with, and he moved up very quickly once they realized they had this talent in their country. He became a speech writer for the president. So by the time I left he was the president's primary speech writer and he was the one that was writing all of the speeches thanking us for what we were doing and saying that now here's what we're going to do in the future. This man left the country shortly after I did, but when they overthrew Moussa Traore, a group invited him to come back and be the chief of state, so he was the interim chief of state for a couple of years. He was still in his mid-30's when he did this. The point that I was trying to make was that, yes, this was a military dictatorship but it was really quite open to outsiders and bringing talent back. We saw, over the course of the time that we were there, a lot of the Malian people who had fled to France and taken jobs as sweepers and working in the airport were coming back and were involved in commerce, and commercial life was expanding and it was not restricted in any way. Mali, despite its friendship with the Soviet Union, was moving away from being a socialist state. It had never adopted the rhetoric of other socialist states, and it had curiously kept as the Secretary of the Air Force one of the most pro-American military officers I think I'd ever met. Yes, we were concerned about the Soviets, but we felt that Moussa Traore kept the Soviets off guard by having someone who was clearly anti-Soviet as their primary contact. He used to tell us all the time, "Here's what's happening."

Q: Did you have a political section, economic section? What were you all doing?

BORG: It was a small embassy. We had one person doing political reporting, one person doing economic reporting. We had an international relations officer. I focused my attention mostly on assistance matters. Despite the fact that we had something like 30 Americans in our AID office,

there wasn't a single one of them that spoke French well enough that they could participate in these meetings where we were trying to adjust the economic policies of the country and make the agricultural sector more productive. So I attended a lot of these meetings myself, and then I found a Belgian who was a World Bank employee whose wife was working in the country, and I got the AID mission to hire him. So we had a Belgian as our principal liaison working on food security because there was nobody in the mission who had the capability in French or who had the portfolio that would let them go out and look at whatever the small project of the day was.

Q: Looking at the AID mission, did you find the problem that you talked about before, that these were people somewhat removed from everything?

BORG: Absolutely, totally. There were some who were absolutely awful, others who tried hard, but the people who implemented the projects were the people who worked for the contract organizations. I used to go out in the countryside as often as I could. I like to travel, like to go out to villages. I went around and I went to every single Peace Corps house and spent time with different people in different villages. The AID people complained that I was going to visit their project more often than they were. I said, "That's not my fault. That's your fault. You should be going out twice as often as I am to see what's happening at projects. You shouldn't be going out there only when I decide I'm going to go and see what's happening." But they were so tied up at internal meetings, writing memos back and forth to each other, getting approval from Washington and finding out where different papers were lost in Washington that they rarely had time to manage the programs that they were supposed to be managing.

Q: How did you get on with your AID director?

BORG: Very well. We had a polite relationship. I got along very well with him. Just as often as I harassed him about various programs, I made a point of going to bat for him and the programs when I went back to Washington. I spent more time on AID issues than I did on other issues, and I battled his bureaucracy for him to get the resources needed to do the jobs that we were doing. So we had a very good relationship.

Q: Was there any change with the Reagan Administration and how AID was administered?

BORG: It was a repeat of what I had seen in previous administrations, that "We have a new set of priorities, so we now want to focus on rewriting everything that we're doing, redesigning everything that we're doing, and refocusing what we're doing. Forget about the past projects. Let's move on to something new." So from my perspective it was one more round of misapplication of resources.

Q: How about the Peace Corps? What was your impression?

BORG: I had followed the Peace Corps very closely. I had been overseas as a former volunteer. The Peace Corps was involved in a number of discrete projects. When I got there the Peace Corps was scattered pretty widely throughout the country, but they had moved so that they were all within maybe a two-day drive from the capital at the most so that they could be managed more effectively. The number of volunteers grew while I was there, and the number of

extensions of their people after their two years expired. There was something like a 60 percent request to stay on for a third year. To my mind that signals a program that the volunteers like. It got excellent ratings in the villages everywhere that we went. The volunteers seemed to enjoy themselves, seemed to be involved in specific projects, and seemed to be appreciated by the villagers. They were involved in small-scale agricultural production, they were involved in health care and community development. They were all rural sorts of projects, again still focused on basic human needs. But I felt that per dollar spent we got much more out of our Peace Corps investment than we did out of the AID investment. In fact, if one had to measure the impact of the total AID mission with the impact of the Peace Corps, the Peace Corps was probably more effective. We also had something called the Ambassador's Self Help Fund which we could use to fund projects that villagers had come up with on their own or which Peace Corps had come up with and wanted, I think, up to \$10,000 to build something, to build a dam or a bridge or something or other like that in a particular community. I remember going out and looking at a series of dams that we had constructed for a very small amount of money using village labor and comparing them with the more expensive dams that the AID mission had built, and feeling that for what they were trying to accomplish the small-scale project was probably the much more effective one. I saw this over and over again, that with AID we would try to do things that were too big, that we couldn't manage, that were not appropriate, that we tried to universalize some program or some idea that just didn't take.

Q: With the Peace Corps was there sort of a new breed of cat? At one point the Peace Corps had been full of people who had sort of joined in the movement of the '60's and '70's sort of against government but they wanted to get out and do something, and so they were trying to keep themselves pretty aloof from the embassy and all. Did you find a difference?

BORG: I felt that the idealism on the part of the volunteers wasn't much different from the idealism that I had experienced when I first joined the Peace Corps myself. I never felt any particular hostility from the Peace Corps towards myself or to other people in the embassy, but I'm not sure if part of that wasn't because we went out of our way to talk with the Peace Corps people when they first arrived and go out and visit them when they were in their communities and try to help them solve problems within their communities. If they were having difficulties with some local official, on more than one occasion I would try to meet with that official to see what we could do to solve their problems. Again, I did this usually with somebody from the Peace Corps, and it was only after the Peace Corps staff had said, "Look, this is a tough one. Will you help us on it?" and so I intervened and we could usually work some of these things out. So there may have been less sensitivity to people from the embassy from the non-Peace Corps community, but we also worked at it.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover? I take it the military in Mali was pretty well taken care of by the French.

BORG: We had a military attaché out of Dakar. They came and visited periodically and we would have receptions for them. We had a small IMET training program in which we sent military officers to the United States and, again, particularly with the Air Force but with the other services I also had what I felt were pretty good relations. I could talk with them about any

particular subject short of “What are the Russians doing today?” They were trying to keep us off balance and they were trying to keep the Russians off balance.

Q: How about UN votes? Did they go along with the OAU?

BORG: We, as most missions, would regularly take the American position into the foreign ministry and say, “This important issue is coming up, and here is the American position and here’s why.” There were no serious issues where I was asked personally to become involved in pushing Mali for a particular UN vote. We didn’t have much leverage, and Mali was known for being much more in the socialist camp than in the camp of nations friendly to the United States, so perhaps there was nobody in Washington who thought it was worth the effort. But I was happy with that, because the sorts of things that they were usually pushing us on were to condemn the Cubans for something or other – the issues were so far removed from anything that the Malians had ever thought of that they would have considered it rather high-handed, that for the 20 cents that we were providing we thought that they could be stiff-armed. So we let them know, and this was one of the primary activities for the political officer, to take these notes over and make that position known.

Q: Who was your DCM?

BORG: I had a series of DCM’s. The first DCM was a man by the name of John Vincent, and John stayed for a year and then he was having problems with his wife. He decided that he really couldn’t live in the place where he and his wife had been living and so he left, and his wife stayed for a while and then she left. He married another Foreign Service Officer. Then it was very late in the cycle, so I asked the PAO, who was a Foreign Service Officer on detail to USIA, I asked him if he would stay for another year as DCM. He thought that was a great opportunity, so he did. He stayed for a year. That was Chuck Cecil, who became ambassador eventually to Niger among other places, I guess. Then for the third one I was able to get into the bid cycle and I chose – he’s a good guy; he became ambassador to Sir Lanka. Anyway, he came for the third year and he did a very good job. I was very pleased.

CHARLES O. CECIL
Deputy Chief of Mission
Bamako (1982-1983)

Ambassador Cecil was born in Kentucky into a US military family and was raised at several military bases in the US and abroad. He was educated at the University of California, Berkeley and the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. A trained Arabic Language speaker, the Ambassador served abroad in Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, Beirut, Jeddah, Bamako, Muscat, Tunis and Abidjan. He was US Ambassador to Niger from 1996 to 1999. He also had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. Ambassador Cecil was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006

Q: What was happening in the Sahara at the time?

CECIL: Not much. There had been the very serious drought in the mid-70's when there were a lot of people who died, and there was an international assistance program mounted. During our time there was no particular crisis, just the general poverty that characterizes Mali.

I do want to say something about living conditions in Mali for a young American family at that time, to give a little bit of the flavor of the environment. Maybe before we get to that, let me quickly sketch my time there.

In the summer of '82 we did have home leave, came back to the States. I think it was at that time that I went to the DCM's course and returned on August 23, 1982 as DCM. Actually, my last week in Washington I ran into John Countryman in the hallway at the State Department. He had been the deputy country director of NEA/ARP when I was Saudi desk officer. That's between '75 and '77. He asked me if I'd like to be DCM in Muscat when I finished in Bamako. I said, "Yes, that would interest me greatly." Suddenly my next assignment fell quickly into place just before I went back to Bamako, and I was able to tell Parker Borg the day after I arrived, and it was only another day or two before some cable on the issue came. I remember Parker saying, "I'm glad you told me before I got this cable."

The very day after we returned to Mali, Parker sent me on a trip around the country with our defense attaché who was resident in Abidjan. He had a small C-12 aircraft. He came up to make an orientation visit to Mali. The next day after arriving from the States I flew with the DAO to Kayes in the northwestern part of Mali over near the Senegalese border. After Kayes we over-nighted in Bamako probably, and then we went east to Timbuktu and Gao where we had brief visits. The Soviet Union had built one of the longest runways in Africa at Gao, so they could use it to land large aircraft for refueling on the way to Cuba. Our tiny C-12 was dwarfed by that runway. That was my first opportunity to see much of the country outside of Bamako. My work as PAO had not given me the opportunity to travel much.

Because Mali's infrastructure was so poorly developed, there really weren't tourist facilities in the country and with children the age of mine, we didn't travel much as a family. I was very happy as DCM to have a chance to see the eastern part of the country.

Q: What was Timbuktu like? This is one of the names all of us conjure up as being beyond beyond, sort of.

CECIL: It's a pretty dreary place. It doesn't take much time to see it. There are a couple of mosques which were interesting. For historical researchers there is a wonderful collection of Arabic manuscripts there. At that time they weren't very well maintained. Air conditioning often did not work, so they were subject to bad temperature conditions, and they were probably deteriorating at a serious rate. I think I've read that since that time they have managed to build a nice library to preserve them.

For the casual person there's not a whole lot to see there. I do remember that when you go to Timbuktu—at least at that time—you're supposed to get a stamp on your passport at the local

police station, and they charge a small fee for that. I thought this is an interesting example of extortion that persists in Mali at that time. There's no reason to have to get a visa stamp or any kind of a stamp except that it was a source of revenue for local officials. I was only there probably a day or two. Maybe we arrived one day and left the next. I think that's probably what it was. I don't have any meetings of importance to report.

Later, in January of '83 I made a second trip to Gao. The USAID comptroller wanted to go to Gao to check on the finances of a project that AID was supporting near Gao. We drove. That was a very interesting trip. The paved road only went as far as Mopti in those days, then we were on a desert track. There was one set of sand dunes that was exciting to go up and down and over to try to make our way through, but we had an experienced driver and a four wheel drive Land Rover of some sort.

We did arrive in Gao, and I did have a chance on that trip to meet a couple of Malian English teachers, and I was carrying materials for them, and met a couple of local officials. The comptroller ascertained that the Malian in charge of the project was siphoning money off, so it was worthwhile from his point of view to make that trip. That was a small adventure of being able to drive all the way to Gao and back.

There was another small incident of minor historical interest during my time in Bamako. In June of 1981 the aircraft carrying the foreign minister of Algeria crashed at Bamako Airport. The foreign minister was on his way I believe to Sierra Leone to engage in some kind of negotiation between conflicting parties there. I think Algeria was trying to play a role as mediator.

The plane coming from Algiers was intending to land at Bamako to refuel. It came in very late in the day, around 6:00 which is about when the sun goes down most of the year. Day length doesn't vary a whole lot in Bamako. There was some stormy weather, and the plane didn't make it to the runway. It suddenly just lost radio contact. The Algerians started inquiring.

The way we first learned of it, a very interesting demonstration of our communications at the time, was when the DCM Keith Wauchope got a call from the State Department ops center in Washington. The first question was, "What can you tell us about the condition of the Algerian foreign minister?" Keith, as he related this to me, said, "Well, you've reached Bamako, Mali." They said, "Yes! Yes! Exactly! What can you tell us about the condition of the Algerian foreign minister whose plane crashed in Bamako a short while ago?" Keith had to say, "That's the first I've heard about it. I'll have to get back to you."

He started making calls, and he called me. I was PAO at that time, June of '81, and we did quickly learn that, indeed, the airport tower had been in contact with the airplane but then radio contact stopped. The fellow in the tower decided it was the end of the day and his shift was over, so he went home. He didn't set off any alarms. The next morning the manager of the L'Amitié Hotel—Bamako's main hotel—was a Swiss manager, and he was also a pilot. He got into his own little aircraft, and he said, "I'll go out and search." The Malians didn't have the capability, it seems. He said within a couple of minutes—literally—of taking off from the airport, he found the wreckage of the aircraft. It was only a mile or two from the end of the runway. It had

probably been caught in a downdraft and lost altitude too quickly and crashed in some rugged terrain. It had been there all night.

The Malians got to the aircraft, and they took the survivors into their hospital. The foreign minister had a broken leg. If I recall it was the co-pilot who survived, but the pilot was killed, one or the other. When Keith learned that they had been taken to the local hospital, he had our nurse call the hospital and ask if there was anything they needed. They started giving a list. They just needed everything. They needed saline solution; they needed IV tubes and everything. The nurse said, "We'll bring everything we can from our health unit, and we'll come up."

Keith asked me to come along. We went into the room where we found the foreign minister, either pilot or co-pilot, and one or two other members of the crew. The Malian minister of health was there. I forget his name, but he welcomed Keith, and then he escorted the two of us right into the emergency room to the bed of the foreign minister who was lying there obviously in shock looking straight up at the ceiling. He was such a thin man that my impression was that he had lost his legs, but they were actually under a blanket. The Malian said, "Here are your friends, the Americans! They've come to help!" The reason we were supposed to be his friends was that this was the Algerian minister who had played a role in negotiating the release of the hostages from Tehran during the Carter administration. I forget his name. We were able to witness this sad situation.

Fortunately the Algerians were able to get their own plane in within about 24 hours, and they evacuated their people back to Algiers for treatment. Unfortunately, the poor man later lost his life when his plane was shot down over northern Iraq by the Iraqis. It had strayed off course. He was headed toward Tehran; I think to negotiate the Iraq-Iranian war that was going on at that time. I forget what year, but it would be still sometime early to mid '80s. The plane strayed over northern Iraq, and the Iraqis shot it down, and they all lost their lives. A little vignette in history that we got to see in Bamako.

I'd also like to cite an example of the working relationship between the Peace Corp and the State Department. Paris prepared a weekly news bulletin in French, a collection of news articles and an occasional feature article, and sent these bulletins by air to each PAO office in Francophone Africa. Each post could then put its own cover sheet on top with a photo of some local event or activity, to tie it to our individual country. I went to the Peace Corps Director in-country one day and proposed that I take some photographs of Peace Corps Volunteers in their villages doing their work. Most were either promoting hygiene, nutrition, and good health practices, or working in agricultural improvement programs. This would be a good way to get the Peace Corps some recognition for the good work it was doing, I said. The bulletin was distributed to a large list of important Malian government officials. I was totally unprepared for the PC Director's response. The Peace Corps wouldn't want to be on the cover of our weekly news bulletin, he said. It would suggest some connection between the Peace Corps and the embassy. They would never want that. This was the mentality that prevailed inside the Peace Corps back then. They were so cautious about being tainted by appearing to be a part of the U.S. Government that they went to great lengths to maintain a strong buffer between themselves and the rest of the US presence in the country. This attitude had mellowed a bit by the time I reached Niger in the late 90s, but there were still elements of that mentality.

Living conditions. Should we talk about that?

Q: Sure.

CECIL: We had already served in Zanzibar which was a 25% hardship post. We had served in Saudi Arabia which I think was probably about 25% also, so we were used to the hardship. There was no doubt that Bamako as a 25% hardship post was by far the most deserving of that extra allowance. It was really a third-world, poverty-stricken country.

We had a very sudden introduction when we started to go out and buy food the first day or two that we were in town. There were shortages of everything. We went to the little supermarket called Mali-Mag. It was the only thing that could even merit the name of grocery store to be patronized by Westerners. The selections were so pitiful. We bought a few things. We found some very sick looking French hot dogs and bought mustard and bread and a dozen eggs which were very, very small. I remember I was so struck by the price, I think \$36.00 it was for his tiny little bag of groceries that I actually set it on a stool when we got home so I could take a picture of it to say, "This was our first purchase at the local supermarket, and it cost \$36.00." We'd only eat this for a couple of days at best, and not a very balanced diet at that.

The local market was a very basic African market. It was the rainy season, so it was full of mud. My wife quickly ruined her first pair of shoes when she went into the market to try to buy basic fruits and vegetables. Everything was strictly seasonal, and the supplies were very basic. It was a constant problem to keep ourselves well supplied with food. We did have the consumables allowance the Department was providing to some posts. They have expanded that program. Ours hadn't had arrived yet, so that took a while.

Our main concern as parents of young children was the absence of medical facilities. We had an embassy nurse. We did not have an embassy doctor at the time we arrived. Later, I forget what year but before we left, Washington did finally provide a doctor to the post, a regional medical officer.

My third day at post I broke a tooth. After having all my dental work done in Washington, I thought I'd be good for two years at least, but a broken tooth...! I went to the nurse and said, "What do I do? I've broken a tooth." She said, "Oh, that's easy. You go to Bouaké." I said, "Oh. Where's Bouaké?" She said, "Oh, it's down in Ivory Coast. It's about a day and a half drive from here. That's very good timing because the GSO has also just broken a tooth, so the two of you can go together. There's a missionary dentist in Bouaké with a very nice little modern facility. That's the only place in West Africa where you can get American dental care. They're very insistent, though, that you have an appointment, so you just can't get in the car and go down there. We'll have to ask Abidjan to call Bouaké and make you an appointment, and then you can go." So that's what happened.

We set out in September of 1980. We drove on very bad Malian roads and reached Ferkessédougou in northern Ivory Coast, Cote d'Ivoire where there was a Baptist hospital. They were accustomed to providing overnight lodging to American and European travelers, so we

spent the night there and then drove on to Bouaké the next day. It was several hours more to Bouaké. I remember we arrived in time for our 12:00 appointment on September 25. The dentist was able to solve my problem rather quickly. The other fellow had to be medevaced to the States eventually. I don't know what his problem was, but it was beyond the capability of the missionary dentist. The dentist was a Dr. Charles Deevers from Mississippi. He was bringing God's word and good dental care to the people of central Ivory Coast.

The wonderful thing about his clinic was he had seven Ivorian assistants, each from a different tribe so that each of them could speak the local language to the patients of their tribe. This American dentist was educating them, giving them on-the-job training to improve the dental care in central Ivory Coast. After our appointments we then went to the Bouaké market where we loaded up with as many consumables as the Land Rover would carry. I know we had a 110 lb. bag of rice, 110 lb. bag of sugar, a 55 lb. bag of potatoes because these were the kind of staples that were very scarce if at all available in Bamako. It was really amazing.

Then we drove back to spend another night at Ferkessédougou, the missionaries there, and then on back to Bamako the fourth day. So it took four days to get dental care. That was actually faster than if you did it by air. I broke another tooth amazingly a couple of months later. It was the only time in my life I've ever broken any teeth; I don't know what happened. That time there was also another member. A member of the embassy's Budget and Fiscal office had a dental problem so again there were two of us who needed to go. Because the drive was boring, I would say, and the roads were bad, we decided to fly.

When you fly it takes five days instead of four. That's because we could only go down on Air Mali on a Saturday, a Russian turbo prop aircraft flown by Cuban pilots, and they made one run a week to Bouaké. We went down on Saturday but the first opportunity to return was the following Wednesday on an Air Ivoire flight. That's another story I can tell you about, air travel in West Africa, if we have time for that.

In any case, on this occasion—it was November—my friend and I went down to Abidjan by train after we had gotten our dental care. I wanted to consult with the USICA office in Abidjan. It was before Thanksgiving, so we brought a frozen turkey at the embassy commissary in Abidjan and some other things. I bought chocolate chips and brownie mix and things like that that were totally not available in Mali. We carried those back to Bamako when we finally flew back. That wasn't without some problems. Our plane had a mechanical problem, and we spent 10 hours waiting in the airport with the turkey thawing all that time, but we did manage to get home and have a turkey for Thanksgiving.

That same month, November of 1980, I had my first and only encounter with amoebic dysentery which we got at the Marine ball which was at the finest hotel at Bamako, the L'Amitié. The finest...there wasn't much competition. I got amoebic dysentery and had to go through the course of treatment. It was okay, but it's not something I'd like to do again. It's another example of the health hazards of Bamako.

On another occasion, my youngest son who was three or four at the time, was excited to be going over to the DCM's house to play croquet, I think it was. He started running toward the front door.

He tripped on a rug and fell head first into the glass door that was our front door and had a very jagged, messy cut on his forehead. Our only recourse was to call the nurse. We met her at the health unit, and she cleaned it. She didn't stitch it because she thought maybe it didn't require stitches. She taped it as close together as she could. My little boy, scared by the blood, was asking his mother, "Am I going to die?" There was a lot of blood. Anyway, she patched him up but to this day he has a scar there. Just another example of another issue our family had to face.

I think a benefit of our time in Mali was that my kids—who as I noted were nine, eight, and three when we arrived and, therefore, twelve, eleven and six when we left—got a real appreciation for what poverty is. They saw it all around them. The first Christmas there we threw our Christmas wrapping paper away in the garbage and later that day our kids discovered that our gate guard was very carefully removing each piece of wrapping paper from the garbage, spreading it out on the ground and trying to remove as many wrinkles as he could. He was going to take it home or take it to the market and try and sell it.

Our kids saw leprosy for the first and probably only time in our career. When we would go to the supermarket, there was a little gauntlet of Malian ladies who were always there near the door with little plastic bowls. Most of them were missing their fingers. They would hold up the plastic bowls and expect you to put coins in, which we did, of course. Our kids began to accept this as a daily occurrence. You walked past the lepers and gave them a coin.

Years later in Virginia, my youngest son came home from school one day. I think he was probably in fourth or fifth grade. I remember at dinner he said to us, "Dad, no one in my class has ever seen a leper. My teacher hasn't even even seen a leper." To me that just showed me that Foreign Service kids really have experiences and opportunities to learn things that the average American child doesn't. I think that certainly was an eye-opener to them about what the rest of the world is like.

As we neared the end of our time there, I received my orders for Muscat. We had brought a Peugeot 504, used, on the local market, from another American. We decided to take that car with us to Muscat. We contacted our embassy in Lomé, and they said yes, indeed, if we wanted to get it there they would be happy to arrange the shipment to Muscat. We decided to use that as an opportunity to drive, to go through Burkina Faso and down through Togo to Lomé, to make an adventure out of it. In May of 1983 we did that.

I remember crossing the border into Burkina Faso. We did all the formalities and got in the car and started driving away. Almost instantaneously it seemed a Guinea hen ran across the road in front of us and I hit it straight on. No way I could miss it. As soon as I hit it the red warning light on the dashboard came on. My wife got the car manual out of the glove compartment. She looked it up and it said, "If this light comes on, go immediately to your nearest Peugeot dealer for service." Here we are! I was very careful the rest of the way into Bobo-Dioulasso where we spent the night. The brakes seemed to work okay; it was the brake light that came on. I went to a local mechanic that I found on the street. He took the wheels off and took his air hose and blew a lot of dirt and dust away. He said, "I don't see anything wrong. The hydraulic lines are solid, there are no leaks." When he put the wheels back on after cleaning out all the dust and dirt, the light went off, we proceeded on our way. Just another little incident that you run into.

We spent a couple of days in Lomé. My good friend Charlie Twining at that time was chargé in Cotonou, Benin, so we arranged to go over and visit him and see something of Benin. He had arranged for us to pick up visas at the border check point, and when we arrived there they were ready, and there was no problem. It was very quick to get through the border check point. As we drove away from the check point out on to the highway, there was a huge banner over the road in front of us. It said, "Mort aux Traîtres", "Death to Traitors" in other words. It was only in French. It's sort of like, "Welcome to Virginia." "Death to traitors" if you enter Benin. My wife said to me, "Are you sure we really want to make this trip?" but we did. We carried on, and we had an interesting day or two in Cotonou. Cotonou had not long before been the object of a little invasion of Portuguese mercenaries, and there may have been some South Africans in the group, too. You could still see bullet holes in some of the ministries where there had been some fighting, so the Beninois were very sensitive. The government was a rigidly leftist government at that time, not very popular, so they felt insecure.

We flew back to Bamako after leaving the car with the embassy. We actually departed Bamako on the 10th of June 1983. I had exchanged telegrams with the DCM in Muscat who's actually the same fellow I had succeeded on the Saudi desk some years earlier, and he explained to me why I needed to be there for the 4th of July National Day reception. It would be so useful for to meet all of his friends and contacts. This meant leaving Bamako a couple of months earlier than scheduled, but Parker Borg said, "Okay, of course, we can get through the summer. Muscat needs you, so by all means go ahead."

We had a short curtailed week or so vacation in Europe. I, in fact, had asked Washington to bring me back to Washington for consultation. I knew that John Countryman, the ambassador, was going to go on home leave for six weeks, one week after I arrived. I had been out of the Arab world for eight years and I said, "There are a lot of important issues, especially political-military issues in the Persian Gulf, and it would be good for me to have a week's consultation in Washington before suddenly becoming chargé after a few days in the country."

The reply was classic Washington. They said, "We don't really have the travel funds available right now. You should proceed directly to Muscat, and we'll see if we can do this later." I have to add I even had proposed to Washington that only I come to Washington. I wasn't asking that they fly my family. I said, "My wife and children will stay in Europe while I come to Washington for five days consultation." Washington said, "No, we don't have the money for that." I thought it was a very poor way to run a railroad: send the guy to become chargé when he had been out of the area for so many years. That's Washington.

When we arrived in Muscat on the second of July, I found that the DCM had gone and there was no National Day reception! They did a national day in February in the Gulf because the temperatures in July just aren't appropriate for a large outdoor reception. Also, as many local people and diplomats who can, leave the country for the summer months, so a large segment of our target audience is not around in July

Q: when I was in Dhahran we did it on Washington's birthday.

CECIL: That's exactly what we did in Kuwait, and I felt that my friend had betrayed me, certainly misled me. He wasn't even there. He got me there on schedule, and I guess that was his main concern at the time. I still remember that to this day, and I think he was unfair with us.

That pretty much covers the things I remember. I don't know if there are points that you'd like me to retrieve from the depths, or if that's enough.

Q: Did events in South Africa play any role? It was pretty far away.

CECIL: I'd have to plead failing memory, I guess. I don't recall it as being a major issue. I can't remember.

Q: That's probably the answer!

CECIL: I do remember another little vignette that maybe is worth putting on the record, a little historical vignette. I mentioned Soumana Sako, the leader of the group with the American PhD. Soumana Sako sometime in maybe the very late '80s or possibly 1990-91, became Minister of Finance. He was a very straight-laced person, very much against corruption, and as Minister of Finance he took a tough line with the other members of the cabinet. He made his opposition known to any attempts by the other ministries to pad their budgets or use their position in any way for their own betterment. This made him unpopular with President Traore and other members of Traore's circle.

We went back to see Soumana in December of '92. The reason for that is I was in Abidjan then as DCM. My kids came to Abidjan for Christmas, and we all decided we would like to drive up to Bamako and see our old house and see what Bamako was like years later, nine years after we left. The ambassador and DCM managed to find Soumana Sako for me, and I went to see him.

He told me that one time after an especially acrimonious cabinet meeting he had been walking in some parking lot somewhere on the way to his car. I think, perhaps, there was some kind of a public function that followed the cabinet meeting. A man came up to him in a civilian "boubou" we'll call it. A man came up to him that he didn't know and said, "I just want you to know that many of us are with you." That's all he said. Then the man went away. Soumana Sako turned to someone he was walking with and said, "Who is that?" The friend said, "That's Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré. He's a very important military officer." It was Touré who carried out the coup some short time later against Traore.

Touré then appointed—or his group appointed—Sako as prime minister. He served as prime minister from the ninth of April 1991 until the ninth of June 1992. Touré, of course, presided over what we would call a transitional presidency, and he arranged for free and fair elections. He was not interested in using the coup to place himself in power. Because he presided over a peaceful transition of power to civilian leadership, some years later he did run for the presidency, was elected, and now has been re-elected. I think he is still in office in his second term.

I found that parking lot conversation very interesting because it showed that at that time there was already a group of dissatisfied military talking about overthrowing Moussa Traore, and they actually did do it somewhat later.

ROBERT PRINGLE
Ambassador
Mali (1987-1990)

Ambassador Robert Pringle was born in New York City in 1936 and was raised in Washington, DC. He graduated from Harvard University and served in the U.S. Army before joining the Foreign Service in 1967. His overseas assignments include the Philippines, Burkina Faso, Papua New Guinea and South Africa. Ambassador Pringle was interviewed by Kenneth L. Brown in 2015.

Q: How did the appointment to Mali come about?

PRINGLE: There is no doubt that it was due to Chet Crocker, whom I admired and got along with. The unusual delay in my confirmation hearing occurred because Senator Paul Simon, then Chair of the Africa Subcommittee, was running for President. As a result, he was hardly ever in Washington, and was way behind on his confirmation hearings.

I should mention that I got a personal call from President Reagan in Port Moresby congratulating me. He did that with all his ambassadors-designate. At first we had no idea when he might call. His habit was to save up a number of nominees and call them in seriatim, with the help of the miracle-working White House switchboard. But I finally calculated that because he had scheduled a long foreign trip, I had a couple of weeks to spend some farewell time on a dive boat in some of the most glorious underwater scenery anywhere.

This worked well. Back in Port Moresby, when the big call finally came, the first thing the President said was "Well, it must be in the middle of the night where you are?" Indeed it was. But I thought the call, which had no serious substance to it, was a nice touch. After that we went home to the Washington area.

The unanticipated delay in my confirmation didn't matter much to us. Barbara and I were staying in a hotel in Foggy Bottom, paid for by Uncle Sam, seeing a lot of our daughter who was a boarding student at the Madeira School. But my colleague, David Shinn, who was going to be Ambassador to Burkina Faso, was in a terrible fix. Because he had been on a domestic assignment when he was nominated, the government would not pay his per diem, although he had already rented out his house.

Finally he asked Brock Adams, his own Senator from Oregon and also on the Africa Subcommittee, if he would mind holding a confirmation hearing for the backlog of Africa nominees. He did not, Paul Simon was glad to have him do it, and in almost no time we were confirmed and on our respective ways.

Q: When did you arrive in Bamako?

PRINGLE: It was late in 1987, soon after Thanksgiving. I can remember the first party we attended, shivering in a cold breeze blowing off the Niger River. It didn't get really hot until June.

Q: What were you preoccupied with there in terms of U.S.-Malian issues?

PRINGLE: A word about the country first. Mali had been the biggest piece of France's old megacolon, French West Africa. Its population was roughly seven million people when I was there, double that today. It is just under twice the size of Texas and divided by one of Africa's greatest rivers, the Niger. For most of its length the area north of the river is almost entirely desert, and almost no one lives there (not counting some important towns on the river itself). But Bamako is far enough south so that its rainfall is approximately equal to that of Washington DC and by the time you reach the Guinea-Ivorian border the climate is semi-tropical. These geographic facts have dictated almost everything important about Mali.

Mali was a great country in the past because the Niger River was part of the main trade route between Africa and Europe, until the Atlantic Slave Trade caused it to shift to the coast. Timbuktu is where the old route left the river and turned north, because that was the shortest distance to the Mediterranean.

The trade made Mali cosmopolitan. It was, over time, the center of three multiethnic empires, an almost unique thing in Africa. Multiethnicity led to a heritage of tolerance among different groups. The "great empires," as the Malians call them, generated an awareness of history. Malians are sophisticated, charming, great diplomats, and (as this implies) they can be duplicitous when it serves their interests.

Right after independence Mali broke temporarily from the French. Under a left-wing aristocrat, Modibo Keita, it developed a strong relationship with the USSR. Keita's pseudo-communist authoritarianism offended most Malians, and the military took over in 1968.

Q: Who was president when you arrived?

PRINGLE: By the time I arrived in late 1987 Mali could be described as an old fashioned, relatively well-behaved military dictatorship. Moussa Traoré, its president, came from peasant stock, with no significant family, but he married a lady with a wealthy family and brains. They had a compact: she and her large family made money, while he kept the state on an even keel, coup-proof if you will, so they could do so. That worked until 1990.

Technically Mali was non-aligned. The Russians were still there with a ragtag military mission, members of which seemed to be living in something close to poverty. Most of the aid was coming from the West, including us. Our policy was built around economic aid and Peace Corps. The time was past when we got involved with dams or other big infrastructure. However, we were of course important members of the World Bank and the IMF and gave significant support

to their critically important work. Our project aid was focused mainly on "food security," including livestock and related activities. "Food security" meant equipping Mali and its Sahelian neighbors -- "Sahel" is an Arabic word meaning "below the desert"-- to prepare for and survive catastrophic droughts like those of the early 1980s. As of 2015 there have no recurrences of such catastrophic drought, which certainly does not mean there will not be.

Q: But our relationship with the Malians was pretty good at that point?

PRINGLE: It was good. It got a little worse towards the end. Before that, there was a high point, a full-fledged State Visit by the Malian president to the United States. Have you ever experienced one of those?

Q: No, but I was involved in that one because Chet Crocker was out of town and I was a Deputy Assistant Secretary and acting Assistant Secretary. So I got included in a small cocktail gathering they had right before the dinner, up in the Yellow Room. Cyd Charisse, the dancer, was one of the guests. Were there any results from that visit? Traoré must have been pleased to get the attention.

PRINGLE: He certainly was, he had a ball, as did Mme. Traoré. He was not exactly invited on his own merits. To explain, Reagan was coming to the end of his second term and someone noticed he had invited only one African for a State visit, Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, during his eight years in office. Maybe another one would be a good idea? That poised a dilemma because all the others were either hopelessly corrupt or not really friends. So someone had the bright idea of asking the head of the OAU, who happened to be Moussa Traoré, who seemed at least harmless. It is normal to invite Ambassadors and their wives to participate in State Visits -- not for lower categories of visits - to make sure that the honored guests have at least one familiar face in the crowd at all times.

Before Traoré arrived I had to attend the requisite briefing for Reagan in the Oval Office, so we could tell him what Moussa would say when they met. Fortunately we knew that he was arriving by way of Senegal, in a battered rental jet, and while there the Senegalese President, Abdou Diouf, had asked him to ask Reagan if he could send back to Senegal a USAID plane being used to spray insecticide on a plague of locusts, which was then ravaging West Africa. And we knew that Moussa had agreed to do so.

When we this laid this on the table Reagan reacted immediately. "Oh heavens!" he said, "I remember, I remember when the locusts descended on Salt Lake City and the Mormons prayed and they got seagulls to come! They ate the locusts! And what he needs is some seagulls!" And I'm sitting there speechless. But Colin Powell, the National Security Adviser at the time, and ever the good soldier says, "No Mr. President, this really won't work. Seagulls will not cut it."

Of course we were all on tenterhooks to find out what would happen at the meeting, and sure enough Reagan recommended seagulls, although in the end we were able to get the spray plane sent back to Senegal. I think that Traoré, who was not as dull as he often seemed, probably appreciated and understood the seagull story. And I began to realize how Reagan had succeeded, more through charm than brains, although to be sure he was a bit dotty by this time.

The state dinner was annoying in one respect: we had sent in a list of suggestions for the guest list, people who knew and cared about Mali. Not one of them was invited. All the invitees were either friends of POTUS and FLOTUS, or Republican notables who perhaps had not been included in other recent State Dinners. The dancer and movie star Cyd Charisse got top billing in the news coverage. Barbara and I did not meet her.

There were enormous floral decorations on each table that made it impossible to see, much less talk to anyone across the table, and in any case not nearly enough French-speaking guests to talk with the Malians.

Later in the visit Traoré went to Ohio to get an honorary degree from Central State University, in Dayton. And Ohio's Governor Celeste, a former Peace Corps Director, gave another dinner for the Traorés that showed how it should be done.

Fortunately we were able to work many of our neglected suggestions for guests into a splendid State Department lunch. Notable among them was Dr. Pascal James Imperato, a distinguished public health expert. He had worked in Mali for USAID on smallpox eradication and written copiously about a wide range of Malian topics, from traditional methods of managing cattle migrations to all almost every aspect of Mali's art and history. He was also the author of the invaluable *Historical Dictionary of Mali*. He richly deserved recognition.

Q: I remember Reagan was somewhat amused by the bulk that Traoré presented in this boubou that he wore to the state dinner.

PRINGLE: No doubt.

Q: Because he sidled over to me at the small Yellow Room gathering and said, "This guy looks like a fullback for the Chicago Bears."

PRINGLE: He was a big man, even without the *boubou*.

At the end of the visit, they took off from Columbus to go home. This happened by chance to be on Columbus Day. As the delegation arrived at the hotel, there was a great parade going down the street, high school bands, old cars, the whole bit. The Malians concluded it must be at least partly in their honor, which was almost certainly not the case. President and Mrs. Traoré watched from their hotel window, and most of their staff descended to the curbside to watch. They all flew back to Mali in their rented airplane that evening.

So ended a memorable trip. When we got home I thought "Washington has had enough of us for six months! Now is the time to take that fabled trip down the Niger on a river boat!"

And so we did: 813 miles by river on the good ship *Tombouctou*, in just under one week. The voyage can only be made when the river in flood, after the summer rains have ceased, converting the huge "inner delta" of this Great Brown God from land that can be farmed and driven across into a lake.

Factoid: when the water retreats, tons of fish are trapped and caught. In a good year when the flood is robust, fish could comprise as much as five percent of landlocked Mali's exports. (This is in the past tense because the river isn't flooding as high as it used to, due to more use of water upstream.)

It was like traveling on a Missouri River steamboat in 1840. In the first few days we kept running aground on sandbars because the river is never dredged. The serendipitous result was that we arrived in Timbuktu on the night of the Prophet's Birthday, the only time when the entire town is lighted up, for all-night Koran readings, and the normally sequestered women appear in public.

All this and much more was the subject of a long report, with another version designed for the Embassy newsletter and those interested in how to make the voyage.

Q: It wasn't too long after that visit, was it, that Moussa Traoré was overthrown?

PRINGLE: Actually he was overthrown more than two years later, in March 1991.

Q: It wasn't on your watch?

PRINGLE: No, but pro-democracy agitation was well underway before I left.

Q: Well, you had a visit by Maureen Reagan when you were there.

PRINGLE: Oh yes.

Q: She was on her way to the 25th anniversary of the OAU and I was in the delegation.

PRINGLE: Indeed! I had forgotten that. We had a very helpful Secret Service advance group that told us, "This is how she is and this is how you should handle her." Man, was that ever useful. I mean it was *enormously* useful.

Q: I wish I'd had that advice, because I was the Maureen watcher on that trip. But I remember that she dedicated a Peace Corps training center, and they named it after her.

PRINGLE: There was more to it. At the dedication the bright young *commandant de cercle* (district officer), without talking about this with anyone beforehand, said, "And ladies and gentleman, I think this training center should be named after Maureen Reagan." Well, of course the volunteers were all hotly anti-Reagan, so we'd been trying to duck any such idea. But the Malians went ahead and named it after her.

The volunteers had the last laugh. As you were approaching by road there was a sign reading "Maureen Reagan Peace Corps Training Center," with type in two sizes: the "Maureen Reagan" was on top in letters so small you couldn't read it. In addition, one of the first things the

volunteers learned in their Bambara language classes was *nyegen*, meaning toilet. The boys' and girls' facilities were immediately labeled "Nancy" and "Ronald" respectively.

Q: So she was happy as a clam.

PRINGLE: She was fine with us. She was interested in Africa and it showed.

Q: She didn't like Loret Miller Ruppe who was head of Peace Corps at the time, and she was just gloating over the fact that when Ruppe heard that this center would be named after her, she was just going to have a fit.

PRINGLE: Oh really?

Q: I'm trying to remember whether during her visit Maureen presented any jellybeans. Usually she would present a bowl of jellybeans to the people she would call on.

PRINGLE: I know she did. We received a jar full, which I put on the desk of my secretary, Marilyn Mattke. One day it got knocked off by accident, and she was mortified, but I have to say we did not miss it.

Q: My experience with Maureen was that she would have her talking points, half a dozen of them. And then when she hit the end of her talking points she didn't have anything to say. And then she would usually turn to the ambassador or whoever was going to pick up the slack -- I don't know if you recall that meeting or not -- but it was kind of a hurried affair.

PRINGLE: I don't remember the meeting, so it must have been OK. It was still early in a multi-country trip and she was still in good spirits.

Q: Interesting. On another subject, how did you deal with your staff? What was your management approach as an ambassador?

PRINGLE: It was a small embassy, not that different from Burkina, and the same basic rules applied. As usual, there was a close link between effective management and the nature of the country and the size and characteristics of the post.

Mali's former role as a Soviet regional base of sorts was crumbling, although they still had a few MIGs that would barely fly, plus some heavy armor good only for parades. With no significant Cold War threat to worry about we had no political agenda at all, although that would change as Mali's democracy movement move got underway, and I will get to that later.

Our policy was to help Mali develop economically, in the belief, which I thought then and still think was valid, that the elimination of poverty through increasing rural income, was the *sine qua non* of everything else that we and they might hope for: democracy, regional development, human rights, the works.

The Ambassador had to be genuinely interested in the development agenda. He had to know his USAID staff and Peace Corps volunteers, including local staff; understand what they were doing, and perhaps most of all, visit them in the field. This mandate to travel around an amazing and varied country was what made the job so fulfilling, as I had been told by one of my predecessors, Parker Borg, who also gave me good advice on how to do it.

One valuable bit of advice from Parker was to avoid staying in "hotels" except in a very few places, which meant going prepared to camp out, literally. Barbara's Girl Scout background was invaluable. You had to do this carefully to avoid offending local officials, on whom you did definitely have to call when in their districts.

In really hot areas you wanted a place where you could sleep on the roof because it usually cooled off nicely at night. Often that meant on the roof of a Peace Corps Volunteer's house, a stopping place which seemed logical to the Malians. Using the tent we brought along, on the other hand, meant stopping far from the district capital. The most awful place we ever stayed was the old Air France office in Gao, cavernous and dirty with no windows or doors that would open and, needless to say, no air conditioning. And of course we were always on malaria medication.

There were other little tricks of the trade. Take Peace Corps Volunteers out to dinner in the nearest town, if one was available. Always go equipped with a generous supply of home-made chocolate chip cookies in case it was not. Our cook could produce them in bulk.

The only major problem I had with our USAID mission was that its Washington leadership had decided to rebel against the new State Department system for allocating embassy expenses among the different agencies at post. USAID Washington was convinced that they were getting terribly cheated by embassies around the world, and that Mali was a particularly egregious case. And it was a fairly arcane business. Our Mission Director, Gene Chiavaroli, who was a USAID nationalist, supported his headquarters ardently. But Washington instructed me to nail State's flag to the mast and resist! (So much for Ambassadorial direction of the mission.)

I did not think we had been sent Mali to fight with each other about administrative costs, and the whole thing was driving me nuts. And then we got a new USAID Mission Director, Dennis Brennan. He was upper crust Irish by birth, hence could not join the Foreign Service. But he had all the instincts of a diplomat, and was also an old friend from Jakarta. He agreed with me, and suddenly my biggest problem evaporated.

Later we got a new accounting officer, Joe Hilt, the same person who had been teaching the course on mission administration and financing at FSI for ambassadors-to-be, as well as another for their spouses which Barbara took. And he concluded that we (State) had indeed been significantly overcharging AID!

Q: What about morale - was it similar to Ouaga?

PRINGLE: It was, although the small-post ambience was not quite as pronounced. The Marine House was still a hub of social activity, especially after it moved to a splendid location on the river. The softball team was still very important, although again not quite so much so as in

Ouaga. There was a good embassy club mainly for tennis, but quite far away, on the other side of the river.

The French had located Bamako well, between the Niger and a high escarpment where the presidential palace was located, looking out over the great river. The river itself was full of big Nile Perch to catch and birds to watch, but it also had bilharzia parasites so was not recommended for swimming.

There was an old canal running downstream to an irrigation project built by the French in the 1920's, great for hiking and birding. There were many more things to do and see for the venturesome -- the Dogon Country, the ancient city of Jenné, spectacular rock formations around Hombori, reminiscent of Monument Valley; the wonderful old river port at Mopti and of course Timbuktu, although that was a two-day drive, leaving aside the seasonal, week-long trip by boat. You crossed the river beyond Ségou and then followed a sandy *piste* northeast, being careful to stay between a scraggly telephone line and the river. There was no regular air service but a pretty good hotel when you got there.

Our chancery was weird, originally a bank built by the Israelis in the springtime of their relationship with Africa. It had lots of thick walls and narrow passages and was surrounded by crowded streets with no setback. My office looked down on a Lebanese café; I could practically touch it. We were not yet worried about terrorists and in any case we knew that the daughter of the café owner had married an American FSO.

I almost forgot the elephants. There was a herd of elephants, about 500 of them, the northernmost elephants in Africa, that migrated between Burkina Faso and the Niger River in Mali. They were relatively large -- just like the desert elephants of Namibia - but had very short tusks, maybe from using them constantly to dig for water. That may have saved them from ivory poachers, but it was also important that the Tuareg regarded them as sacred, harbingers of good fortune.

I found out about them from Noumou Diakité, a remarkable man, veterinarian by training, who, as a World Bank cattle project director, had used his tank truck to take water to the elephants during the great drought of the early eighties. (He also administered shots to the Peace Corps volunteers posted around Mopti.) They were hardly unknown -- there is a chapter on them in *Elephants of Africa* by Paul Bosman and Anthony Hall-Martin, a South African book published in 1986. But none of the foreigners in Bamako had heard of them, and most believed there was no big game left in the country, except for one lone giraffe survivor said to be wandering around somewhere near the Niger border.

Diakité took us several times, once including our daughter, to see them from his project "headquarters" in Hombori - an old warehouse we called the Hombori Hilton. You simply drove out, asked the locals where the elephants were, and looked at droppings for age, to tell how far away they might be. These elephants were the opposite of those in more touristed places in Africa. They were not afraid of people on foot - they lived among herders all the time - but spooked at the sound of a vehicle engine. So you had to dismount and walk toward them, carefully and downwind.

Q: How did you arrange the relationship with your DCM? Who was your DCM?

PRINGLE: My DCM was John Lewis. John is a very bright guy and we got along well with him personally, but he was a bit irascible. He had a way of getting in disputes with other senior people in the mission. And I found myself often making peace between John and them. And I thought, "This is backwards."

Q: Yes, exactly.

PRINGLE: I honestly think that it was a problem - and I don't want to exaggerate it -that was part of being black and sensitive to being slighted. I probably should have counseled him more vigorously than I did. He had a corridor reputation based somewhat on his irritability, and I think it held him back in the Service.

Q: But he was your DCM the whole time?

PRINGLE: He was there then I arrived. Toward the end of my tour, he was replaced by John Boardman, who is equally bright and did a great job during my time with him, although he had had little experience in Africa.

Going back to the importance of economic development, we had one special opportunity where we were able to help, and that concerned the revival of Mali's gold industry. Ancient Mali had been renowned for its gold. A famous fourteenth century emperor, Kankan Moussa, had, while enroute to Mecca, taken enough gold to Cairo in his camel bags to destabilize Mediterranean gold prices for a time.

Despite evidence that this episode did occur, the idea of Mali as a gold power was still being generally dismissed as myth. That was because no one could figure out where it came from, partly because the Malians had tried successfully to keep the source a secret. When we arrived there was only some village-level artisanal mining going on, with calabashes, not pans, plus one "modern" Soviet mine, which our intelligence told us, quite incorrectly, was robbing the Malians blind. Later it turned out just to be a badly designed mine, and we saw how unbelievably crude it was when we visited it, although we enjoyed a great Siberian New Year's breakfast with the miners, who were loving the Malian climate.

Enter two modern players. The first was a senior geologist for Utah International, an American company working in the region. The second was UNDP, the United Nations Development Program.

The Utah International geologist was convinced that there had to be significant gold in the ancient rock plateaus of Mali; it was just a matter of finding it. UNDP, as part of its own agenda, began to investigate places where there might be serious gold, concentrating on sites where there was evidence of ancient mining, and/or modern artisanal mining.

Armed with the UNDP survey, Utah International began to look at some of the old sites more closely. They found one place where ancient miners had gone as far as they could go into earth that had probably been rich in gold, and their testing confirmed that this ore body continued into bedrock. The result was Mali's first successful gold mine, at Syama, to be followed in the next decade by several more. Today Mali is, once again, a major gold producer, although not enough so to have become wealthy.

We were good friends with David Huggins, the Utah International manager, and gave him every support we could. Later, Barbara was able to hold a fresh bar of gold still warm from the furnace.

By this time Utah International had been purchased by a much bigger Australian company. When the Australian Ambassador, based in Senegal, and accredited to dozens of countries, called on me I confessed that everyone in Mali still thought Utah International was American. He laughed and said that was fine with him; no one in Mali had heard of Australia so it was probably better to have them thinking that the Americans owned it, which I guess was a compliment.

Q: How did Barbara take to her job as the first lady of the embassy?

PRINGLE: She was of course well aware that being an ambassadors' spouse was not an average situation, and that Mali was going to be an exceptionally interesting post, and of course she speaks excellent French. She knew that I would be doing a lot of traveling, and she opted not to seek full time work, so she would be free to accompany me. She was after all the camper in the family and we knew that we would be doing quite a bit of real camping out. Closer to home, we acquired a small Suzuki 4x4 so she could negotiate the mud and ruts of Bamako's byways without relying on my absurd official car.

She of course managed the Residence, the bookkeeping for ORE, the servants with all their myriad needs and personal crises, and the organization of entertaining. And she began a major volunteer activity working with AMALDEME, the only facility for neurologically handicapped children in francophone West Africa.

AMALDEME was founded by an extraordinary Malian woman, Kadiatou Sanogo, whose inherited status as a French citizen had provided extensive medical care as well as education to two of her children who were born handicapped. Comfortably well off, she dedicated her life to providing similar help to Malian children. When we arrived, she was just starting to construct a permanent facility, and wanted to include a school. Barbara, trained in special education, aided her with pedagogical advice as well as fund-raising endeavors.

The fund-raising had two aspects: obtaining used furniture, mainly rugs for disabled children to sit on instead of desks, plus real desks for teachers, and hosting various Women's International Club events at the Residence. These events started a social trend in Bamako -- masked balls. The first ball was a gala affair attended by bemused guests in everything from formal wear with fun masks, to what might be regarded as Halloween costumes, plus some Malians who didn't believe that the invitations really meant masks.

The Women's International Club was intriguing. It was popular with all kinds of Malians because it provided a lively alternative to an official but quasi-moribund club for diplomatic spouses chaired by Mme Traoré. To the extent that it was offbeat and informal, it avoided attracting her attention, which might well have killed it.

As had happened at every other post, Barbara's activities, observations and friendships enriched my own. As was often the case in such situations, the US Government was getting two employees for the price of one.

Q: What about the decline of the Soviet Empire? Did it affect you beyond eliminating Mali's role as a Soviet base of sorts?

PRINGLE: It certainly did, and it led to a fascinating new friendship with a totally new type of Soviet Ambassador. His name was Alexandre Trofimov (he always spelled his first name as in French). He was slim and charming, reputedly from the cultural side of the Soviet service. But what really set *le tout Bamako* on its ear was his wife, Tatiana, who was both very pretty and quite the clothes horse. Everyone was used to the dumpy, grumpy Soviet stereotype. Forget that!

The Trofimov's arrival coincided roughly with the advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and I soon discovered, to my amazement, that I could learn more about what was going on in the Soviet Union by asking its Ambassador than by reading State Department cables or the *New York Times*.

In return, they sought our advice about doing hitherto unthinkable things, like exploring the countryside on their own. The first time they tried they got thoroughly lost on their way to see the Dogon Country because their driver spoke only Russian and they didn't have any Malian employees suitable for such a role, much less a car of their own. They became pillars of the diplomatic social scene, and the year after we gave our masked ball, they replicated it (after we had left Bamako unfortunately) apparently on a much grander scale. We have kept up with them over the years since then. The last time we "saw" them they were sweeping by us on screen, in a movie about the final days of the Romanovs, showing the last grand ball ever held in the Winter Palace.

Q: The Malians are of course famous for their art, music and culture generally. Did you get involved with that side of things?

PRINGLE: We certainly did. You could not miss the culture; it impregnated the place, and cultural issues led to what was my most interesting encounter with Moussa Traoré. I noticed early on that my driver, Sekou, was always listening on the car radio to long, chanted recitations of what he told me was oral history. It was my first clue as to the depth and persistence of Mali's heritage.

The next thing was beads, believe it or not. Our Peace Corps Director, Hilary Whittaker, used to make necklaces out of beads she bought in the market place. She did it for therapy; running a program of more than 100 volunteers is like being in charge of a very large boarding school, without being able to see the students. She sold her jewelry to the rest of us for the price of the

beads because she felt that she could not, as a government official, make a profit from such activities. It was sort of like Julius Walker and his "Eggs Plenipotentiary" in Ouagadougou. Anyway, these Malian beads were extremely varied in age and origin, and they led to a lifetime avocation.

We also were greatly attracted by Malian textiles, and collected quite a few of them. And we acquired some wood carvings, but not many, because they had become quite expensive and increasingly scarce, especially antique ones from famous venues such as the Dogon country. Also, after Ouagadougou we couldn't fit any more in our house.

But the big fuss at the time was over ancient terracotta figures being excavated, mostly illegally, from ancient sites around the Niger Delta. They were going for up to seven figures in international art markets. Would-be looters were looking primarily for them, and/or gold, but there didn't seem to be much of that. As "by catch," to use a fisheries term, the diggers "caught" a lot of very attractive but not especially valuable old pottery, as well as glass beads, easily and cheaply purchased in local markets. But once a site is dug up in search of such treasures its value for scholarly excavation is usually ruined.

In March of 1990, just as the political situation in Mali was beginning to heat up, the United States Information Agency (USIA) dispatched a special envoy, Phillip Pillsbury, to persuade the Malians to sign a new treaty sponsored by UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization) which would allow any country to forbid the importation of valuable antiquities if the originating country asked it to do so.

As a junior officer serving in Bamako, Pillsbury had been close to the Traorés and had photographed their wedding. He called on them personally and asked for their support, and it is likely that Mme. Traoré told her husband to cooperate.

When I called to seek Traoré's support for the treaty I noticed, for the first and only time in our official dealings, a spark of interest and sympathy. I had a positive response from him in writing within a few weeks. I would like to think it reflected a typically Malian interest in culture, and not merely the urging of Mme. In any case, Mali became the first African country to sign the agreement. Traoré's successor, Alpha Konaré, a much more highly educated person, is usually but incorrectly given credit for this. I am glad that Traoré survived the political turmoil that lay ahead.

I'd like to add a word on the risk of big-league art collection. After we left Mali it turned out that some of the terracotta statues that collectors and museums had been paying millions of dollars for were fakes. Something called thermo luminescence dating reveals the last time that clay was fired, and the collectors and art dealers had been using it, and thought they were safe. But the fakers had learned how to mix clay from old but worthless pottery into their creations, especially in those parts of a statue that they knew were usually tested, and they fooled the cognoscenti for quite an embarrassing while.

Q: You mentioned that our relations with Mali began to decline in the last part of your time there. Why was that? Did you see Traore's troubles coming?

PRINGLE: The problem was the growth of the democracy movement, which began slowly in the middle of my tour. Because of it, relations did not exactly get worse, but there was a sense of foreboding.

As was the case in many parts of Africa, democratization was powerfully stimulated by the death throws of the Soviet Union. Again, like many other African countries, Mali had a formally Marxist regime based on democratic centralism, with separate party and government structures. When we criticized them for being undemocratic, they would say "You have your kind of your democracy, but we have our own." They argued that it comported with African tradition. The wise monarch gathers his chiefs, they discuss the problem at hand, and a final decision is arrived at by consensus.

Those agitating for change began by arguing for democratization within the Party, which avoided the awkwardness of directly challenging an entrenched military dictator in the grip of his wife's equally entrenched family. This didn't fool Moussa and Mme at all, but they were willing to tolerate it up to a point. The funny thing is that the democracy movement was being quietly nurtured by a polite kind of cabal-cum-study group run by a Roman Catholic priest.

But, bit-by-bit, and very much excited by the Soviet example, it began to get louder and braver. Before long the movement's leader, former education Minister Alpha Konaré, who would be the country's first democratically elected president, was putting out a new pro-democracy newspaper, *Les Echos*.

What were we to do? We were not yet promoting democratization as a matter of policy. Mali was still a model of good civic behavior compared to many countries in Africa. We did, however, have a policy on human rights. I told Moussa, without being instructed, that it was his business how he ran his country, but that if serious violations of human rights took place, it would inevitably have an impact on our policy. In a kind of farewell address on US-Malian relations in August, 1990, when I was about to leave post, I said that at a time when aid funds were increasingly scarce, Congress would inevitably cut aid to countries with bad human rights records. (It was always handy to invoke the threat of an uncontrollable Congress in situations like this.)

But I also said that our own democracy had many undemocratic features, especially as originally created by our founders, and we realized that other countries would have to adjust their own systems to the needs of the time, as we had done. And I noted approvingly that the Malian government had already espoused a policy of decentralization, which was to become a major and perhaps most valuable feature of its future democracy. The pro-democracy storm didn't break until after we left.

Q: Did you see the troubles in Northern Mali coming?

PRINGLE: No to the first part of your question, a qualified yes to the second. I saw nothing wrong with our policy of neglecting Northern Mali, defined as the desert areas largely north of the Niger, because well under one percent of the population lived there. We thought it was better

to focus our resources on areas with some hope of economic progress that would help the entire country. The exception to that was humanitarian aid. The droughts of the early eighties had caused great suffering among the nomadic peoples of the north. We wanted to prevent that from happening again, by stockpiling grain for distribution in the next food emergency and through small-scale projects to help the nomads.

We were aware that Tuareg people had bitterly resisted French conquest -- the future Marshal Joffre made his reputation fighting them -- and had been once again ruthlessly repressed in the early days of Malian independence, but now they seemed to be settling down. They were not exactly orthodox Muslims, being mostly matrilineal. When they did rebel again in 1990, Islam had nothing to do it -- not at first.

Until the end of my tour the desert was at peace, a far cry from what it is now. You could travel from the Mediterranean coast to Mali, along the ancient trade route, and many people, mainly French and German tourists, did so. In that pre-GSP era the main danger was wandering off the track (*piste*) and dying of thirst - and that did happen. The Paris-Dakar auto race also used the route sometimes.

Thanks to the attaché plane, based in Liberia, we had visited a big Tuareg settlement at Tessalit, close to the Algerian border, where the camels and their masters danced for Barbara. People seemed content. Later, in November 1989, we visited the Tuaregs of Menaka, on the Niger River, not far from Mali's border with the country of Niger.

Two of this group's leaders had senior positions in the Malian government and in the Party. There was a very creative USAID-funded program striving to introduce better education, health and agriculture in a way that would not require them to abandon their economically necessary nomadic life-style, trailing their flocks into the interior when the spring rains came, and returning to the river after the grass dried up. There was also a big food storage facility at Menaka and a fleet of trucks to deal with future food emergencies. All this seemed sensible and encouraging.

But in June of 1990, Tuaregs in Niger, who were being resettled from Libya by a UN project, rebelled when they did not receive promised housing. Some of them were from Mali, and they came across the border, attacked the police post in Menaka, the same place we had visited only six months earlier, seized the vehicles being used by the World Vision project we had visited, and began a rebellion which -- without getting into a great deal of more recent history -- has really never ended as of 2015.

Q: Looking back on it, was there anything you could have done differently?

PRINGLE: I should not have accepted so easily our policy of largely ignoring the North. However, I don't think that more economic aid would have done much good. How we missed the boat, in the blinding light of hindsight, was in not even trying to understand the daunting political complexities of the desert world.

The French, of course, have long been mesmerized by the Tuareg, seeing them as the epitome of noble savagery. My very capable French counterpart, Michel Perrin, studied Tuareg politics as a

hobby. He went north of the Niger and hung out with a French scholar who was doing research on them, and did a paper showing the organization of their *kels*, or clans, which he gave to me. We thought it was very amusing.

I should have sensed that it was not to be laughed at. It is the State Department's job to understand such things before they lead to crisis. We should have seen the potential for conflict, and started to build that kind of understanding. We would have been better prepared when EUCOM and others later decided that the Islamic insurgents who had become part of the Northern Problem would become a haven for terrorism and eventually, perhaps, threaten our oil interests in Nigeria.

It wasn't just the Tuareg we needed to understand, of course. It was the entire complex of desert population: Arabs (or Maurs), Peuhl, black Africans resident in the towns along the Niger River, mainly Sonhrai (or Songhay), and the various Algerian dissidents who would become powerful players.

Above all we needed and still need to understand and deal with the nature of the Sahara. It looks neat on the map, divided into bits and pieces belonging to this country and that. But because it is largely uninhabited, it is not governed, and falls easy prey to transient banditry. Deserts resemble oceans more than well-watered land, but whereas we have (sort of) a Law of Sea --even if we don't fully recognize it-- there is no Law of the Desert. What law there is, is usually toothless.

We have seen this in other desert areas, from Somalia to our own Chihuahua. When there is big money to be made by transient crime, or trafficking, lawlessness becomes very hard to dislodge. Desert lawlessness requires cooperative *international* policing, much as piracy does on the high seas. The problem has yet to be solved, and I have done some very informal writing on it.

Q: You mentioned that extremist Islam was not a cause of desert unrest, at least not at first, yet Mali is an overwhelmingly Muslim country. Can you explain that?

PRINGLE: Again, you do have to differentiate between the unpopulated desert north of the Niger and everything else.

It is obvious the minute you set foot in Bamako that the Malians are devout Muslims, but I found that it was hard to find "political Islam" in the sense that I had known it, especially in Indonesia, but also in the southern Philippines. I knew the State Department was interested in the subject, and happily reported what my friend the Iraqi Ambassador told me about Iranian efforts to promote Shiism, which we both saw as a threat. The Saudis at the same time were promoting Wahhabism, as they were doing in Indonesia. All of that told me little about Malian Islam *per se*.

It wasn't until I met an American Scholar, Benjamin Soares, that I understood the importance of certain Islamic Sufi brotherhoods, also very powerful in Senegal. They are the backbone of Malian Islam. No one was fomenting radicalism very successfully in populated Mali, which did not prevent Algerian hotheads from getting involved in desert unrest after the Tuareg-initiated unrest of the 1990's got underway, and until the present.

At its core, Malian Islam was and is moderate and tolerant. For centuries it coexisted with animism at the village level. It was something you needed, like a passport, when you went "abroad." But you still needed the old spirits of earth and water if you wanted the rains to come and your crops to grow. So religions learned to live together. But, having said that, Mali was also swept by waves of "jihadist" reformers in the nineteenth century in reaction to French conquest. ("Jihadist" was the imprecise French term for them, meaning anyone claiming to be fighting for a "purer" form of Islam.)

When the Pope came to visit Mali late in my stay, some Muslim clerics complained about the major hospitality being prepared. Traoré simply had the complainers put in jail for the duration of the Papal visit, which went very well. They ran out of hotel space, so we hosted some Catholic prelates from Burkina Faso in our poolside guesthouse.

The director of the center for handicapped children where Barbara worked, Kadiatou Sanogo, came to the big Papal mass in the football stadium with some of her disabled children and their mothers. We were somewhat surprised to see her, because we knew they were all Muslim. She explained, "Maybe he can help. These children need all the help they can get."

Q: So how did your tour end?

PRINGLE: I had decided to accept a job as Director of the Office of Central African Affairs. AF was justifiably tiring of exiting ambassadors who felt it beneath their dignity to accept anything but another ambassadorship.

A small ambassadorship in Southeast Asia might have been interesting, but it was clearly a bridge too far for me. EA has very few small ambassadorships, and they needed all they had for their own clan -- and by this time I was an unknown quantity as far as they were concerned. In any case, for family reasons, we were ready for another tour in Washington. I knew I would enjoy working for Hank Cohen, and Central Africa turned out to be nothing if not interesting.

Before leaving I was treated to a tour of my major countries-to-be, with Barbara, including Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), and Cameroon. We did not have time for Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, or São Tomé and Príncipe.

Then we went back to Bamako for the necessary round of farewells. We departed for Washington on September 20, 1990.

The Malian political pot continued to bubble, but did not really explode until the spring of 1991, six months after our departure. Increasingly assertive demonstrations finally provoked Moussa Traoré, no doubt goaded by Mariam, to order the Army to fire on demonstrators, which they did on March 22, killing up to 200 people.

Before the dust settled, the proverbial army colonel whom none of us knew, Amadou Toumani Touré, better known as ATT, seized power, saying he would step down when elections were held. Much to the surprise of all us cynics, he did so, and Alpha Konaré, the leader of the

democracy movement, was elected president and served two five-year terms. ATT stayed on the sidelines for a decade, then ran successfully for president twice.

Things fell apart in 2011, when another lethal wave of unhappy Tuaregs arrived from Libya thanks to the US invasion. They defeated the Malian Army, after which a military coup overturned Mali's democracy. The Northern Problem, which had been dormant since a peace-making in 1996, erupted again, more seriously than before. French intervention restored an uncertain peace and the Malians attempted to restart their democracy, but at this writing (2015) the north remains as lawless as ever and the Islamic insurgents have, ominously, become sporadically active even south of the Niger River.

Q: You were in Mali for three years. Then, in 1990, you came back to the department as Director of Central African Affairs.

PRINGLE: Right.

End of reader