

NEPAL

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VIRGINIA EDWARDS
Secretary to USAID Mission
Kathmandu (1955-1957)

Ms. Edwards was born and raised in Virginia and graduated from a Business School in Richmond VA. After passing the Civil Service Examination she worked with the State Department of Health in Richmond before moving to Washington, D.C., where she worked with Naval Intelligence. In 1951 she joined the Department of State and worked in both Washington and abroad as secretary to AID and Marshall Plan Office Directors. Her foreign assignments took her to Ankara (twice), Kathmandu, Tel Aviv and Recife. She retired in 1964 and continued working in various organizations. Ms. Edwards was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Well, let’s talk about ‘54, where did you go?

EDWARDS: Oh, then I came home. That was the end of that tour and then I stayed in Washington for probably for much, you know we had backups and they’d send us wherever they

needed us to. Then along came Mr. Paul Rose from Kathmandu and he needed a secretary because his secretary with all that groaning you might say. She had gone onto higher and better things and he needed a secretary and he wanted to know if I would come. So, I went with him to Nepal, Kathmandu and I was there from '55 to '57.

Q: What was Nepal like at that stage?

EDWARDS: I've got a poem you can read.

Q: Well, this is a written thing.

EDWARDS: I know it.

Q: It's spoken.

EDWARDS: I know it, but the thing about it was that, well, people asked me, did you feel so terribly cut off from the rest of the world and I said, "no, you felt that you were on top of the world" and you always felt that way. There were great ridges all around so we could go for hikes on weekends if we like, you know, go to the first ridge, even spend the night up there if we liked. We spend time over at the Prime Minister's house; we stayed once up there. Then everybody around the compound had parties, everybody had parties. They had plenty of food. We had a connection with the Great Eastern Store down there in Calcutta and they would fly the planes down there and get everything we wanted including all the food we'd like to have, the English cream for our coffee and all sorts of things. You could have bottles of Scotch; they'd fly that up to us. We had everything that you possibly needed there. Locally, you could buy things, but we really didn't eat much from the local markets. Not much. The people around the compound were so friendly they had gardens. They'd grow strawberries; we'd get all the strawberries we wanted. They'd grow something else and everybody would give everything to everybody. Always had good things to eat.

Q: What type of work was the AID mission doing in Nepal?

EDWARDS: Well, I was working for the Mission Director in those days. That was different from working for Agriculture. I was working here and we had these various departments and I worked for the director who supervised all of these persons. State highway, public administration. Herman Holiday, you remember him? You may not know him, but he was a great ball player, well he was on community development and health and education and various department of the government. Mr. Paul Rose apparently was the one who worked for the mission to find out what they needed and that was what we brought technicians over to do.

Q: Did you all fit in? The embassy was quite small, wasn't it?

EDWARDS: Oh, yes, we were it. They had no embassy until long after I left and Mr. Paul Rose had to be everything. He had to relate to the king, to the Prime Minister, all the ministers around and everybody thought there was nobody like Paul Rose and they wouldn't make a decision without getting his opinion. If we had parties on the compound you'd find the king. I've got

some pictures right up there, the king and queen at the party and a lot of the ministers. B.B. Pande. One night Ms. Rose asked me, she was so inclusive, to come and have dinner with them. He had brought back some peacock from Rapti Valley, and the thing about it was that it was a sacred bird in Nepal, you do not eat them. They had cooked it as chicken, but it was peacock.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Well, you were there then '50 to?

EDWARDS: '55 to '57.

Q: '57. Were there any problems in the country when you were there?

EDWARDS: No, this is the thing about it. They were always such gentle, gentle people. I can't imagine all of this stuff they've been going through. Except, may I tell you that, we may have heard a little rumble, but didn't recognize it. I remember we had this lovely boy and he was working in the program office. He was one of the two who said they were program officer, we think they were doing intelligence work. We know they also did program work. He would go, was sent over to Mr. Paul Rose's office and he would go downtown and feel around things there and come back and report to Mr. Paul Rose that he had seen some Chinese down there and they were going to do something about money. He was reporting anything he thought that would mean anything to Mr. Rose. We saw nothing, nothing at all, never anything.

We could go up to the old, what do you call monastery or something way up on the hill, where they have a lot of the llamas up there. Way up, you have to climb about 100 steps to get there. They were up there and they were praying. Down here they had another llama and another monastery, but they didn't seem to taking over. The people around there were either the Buddhists, Hindu anyway. We had a lot of Hindus there in the government. Gautama Buddha was born in Lumbini, that is part of Nepal. We didn't find anything that was frightening at all and if we had any strange people who came to the valley they had usually come to hike. We'd have these wonderful people from France or whoever, mostly Switzerland I think, hiking into the Himalayas. There was a wonderful Royal Hotel right down there. We lived in Rabi Bhawan, a palace, too. We later had to expand our office across to another palace, the Shawti Bhawan. I've forgotten how I got into this. The Royal Hotel. They would come and stay and we would have a chance to go over there and meet them all and we'd have a great time meeting these people. I have presents one of them gave me. In fact they came to my house on Christmas one time, two of the Swiss who had stopped from going on a mountain trek because the weather wasn't good. They were caught there at Christmas time and they came to my house. I had had some nice food things sent to me from home and we had this great day and then the electricity went out and they spent the time getting all reconnected and when they left there they said they had never had a better Christmas.

**NOEL MARSH
USAID Officer
Kathmandu (1959-1964)**

Noel Marsh was born in San Francisco in 1931. He received his bachelor's and master's degree at the University of California in 1958. His career in USAID included positions in Nepal, Brazil, Colombia, and Liberia. Mr. Marsh was interviewed by Yin Marsh in 1999.

Q: What were your first impressions?

MARSH: I was very eager to start and fascinated to be able to begin my career in such a romantic and physically beautiful setting. It was a wonderful time to be in Nepal. The Mission had only just opened up within the year. It was very new, and I was there right in the beginning of the whole program. For me it was a new adventure which proved to be filled with many challenges and great feelings of achievement.

Q: What kind of duties did you assume when you arrived in Kathmandu?

MARSH: That's kind of an interesting story. When I flew into Calcutta, I missed the connecting plane to Kathmandu. In those days there were only one or two planes flying each week, the proverbial DC-3. I stayed at the Grand Hotel in Calcutta for a week and met a young consular officer who introduced me to some of his friends, and I ended up having a wonderful time and got to know and like the City during that one week unexpected stay. I, of course, arrived at Post a week late and was met at the airport by my boss, the program officer. On the way in from the airport he told me that my delayed arrival was unfortunate because that only gave us four days to overlap before he took off on home leave. It was a two person program office, so my first couple of months were sort of a "baptism of fire."

Q: How did you survive that?

MARSH: In hindsight I think quite well. It was a small Mission, and everyone was quite helpful and understanding but by necessity I had to become a fast learner. I do recall on the second or third day after I was there, someone came in from Washington to give a briefing. She used a lot of acronyms, and also assumed a certain knowledge on the part of the audience about the system in general. After the briefing, everybody was very complimentary and said how informative and clear the briefing had been. I felt a little chagrined since I had hardly understood a word she said. But, in a couple of months in the thick of things I learned a lot on the job. It was a quick initiation into the AID system.

Q: What were some of your early experiences?

MARSH: One of my most interesting experiences involved helping bring about a fixed exchange rate between the Nepalese and Indian rupee. This was one of the times when I needed to draw heavily on my training in economics, suddenly all the theories became reality. It was a truly exhilarating experience and at the time I remember that I could not believe that all this was actually happening and that I was somehow right in the middle of it. It was an exciting and interesting time. I saw all of the things I had studied about actually unfolding before me. It was fascinating episode in my career, and probably more importantly, it worked. Fortunately, the Mission had a program economist on staff, an economics professor from Vanderbilt, Bill

Thweat, and he provided the sound underpinnings that gave the Nepalese officials the confidence and courage to undertake this bold move. I was able to work closely with Bill Thweat and the Governor of the Central Bank, with whom I had become good friends by this time. We all worked closely together to develop and plan all of the steps necessary to get the right environment and select the right time for this event to happen. The USAID Mission was able to facilitate the process and help in a variety of ways. One particular action that I recall very well because I thought that it really enhanced the chances for success and again gave the Government the additional confidence it needed to pull this off. The USAID program included a large multi-year road construction project; the usual practice was to disburse these funds on an annual basis as the money was needed. But at this time, as part of the exchange rate stabilization strategy, the Mission was able to arrange with Washington to forward fund the total "life-of-project" amount so at the appointed time we were able to deposit this large amount of hard currency into the Government's account. This had the effect of increasing the Central Bank's foreign currency reserves to a level that gave them the additional financial strength they needed to declare a fixed exchange rate. On the day we made the deposit, the Central Bank closed. The next day they declared a fixed exchange rate, and it held. If I might at this point be permitted another anecdotal digression, during the course of working closely with the young Governor of the Central Bank, we became very good friends. As is the custom in Nepal, it is quite acceptable for males to hold hands. At some point, someone observed me holding hands with the Governor of the Bank and reported this as suspicious behavior. I was taken to task and was able to explain it and allay any fears that I had suddenly become a security risk.

Q: What were the consequences and advantages of having a fixed exchange rate?

MARSH: There were many advantages of having a stable exchange rate, not the least of which gave the USAID Mission access to the U.S. controlled Indian rupees which were generated by the vast food program in India. Under the terms of this PL-480 program there was a small percentage of funds set aside and generated for U.S. usage. What they had in mind was support of embassies, local housing etc. We, however, were able to successfully argue that local costs of the U.S. program for Nepal constituted a legitimate use of these U.S. owned Indian rupees. We carefully worked out a program with the Nepalese government to use, and I recall the amount very vividly, 1.8 million dollars worth of Indian rupees to support specific projects within the program. This proposal was approved, and it really changed the whole character of the program in Nepal, as it turned out, much more than any of us envisioned.

Q: In what way did this influx of Indian rupees change the program?

MARSH: As I mentioned earlier, we planned to implement a program of 1.8 million dollars worth of rupees, but we were in for a big surprise. In the 1960, or, perhaps it was 1961, I can't quite remember, King Mahendra visited the U.S. on an official visit. While he was having a meeting with President Eisenhower, the President asked him if there was any particular thing the U.S. could do to help his country develop. He expressed enthusiasm about their recently acquired ability to use Indian rupees and said he would really appreciate getting some more. The next thing we knew at the Mission was a cable from AID/Washington saying that we had been allotted 15 million dollars worth of PL-480 rupees, but that they must be obligated fully by June 30 of that year. This gave us about two months to accomplish this task. This was without a doubt

the most frantic and wild experience of my entire AID career. We literally went over every line item in the government's development budget to find out what we could legitimately cover. Then we began to develop project agreements for every one of these line items or series of line items that we felt would make a reasonable development program. We wrote so many program agreements in that short period of time that I'm sure we must have broken some record or other. On June 30 however, all 15 million dollars had been obligated through signed project agreements. I must admit, however, that during the next couple of years, much of our time was spent trying to negotiate ourselves out of some of the mistakes we made in that wild obligation frenzy.

Q: Do you recall any one in particular?

MARSH: Yes there is one I think I'll never forget; in fact, it became sort of a standing joke between us and the Ministry of Planning. In our haste to tie up the funds we had somehow overlooked a line item which said "Elephant Herd Maintenance." It was quite a sizable amount, but somehow no one focused on it at the time and it slipped through unnoticed. After the dust settled down and we began to review the documentation, we came across this item. To our horror we found out that these weren't even working elephants. They were, in fact, primarily used for hunting tiger and rhino. When we told the Secretary of Planning it would be disastrous for us to use U.S. resources for these purposes, Congress would just not understand and would get very upset, he fully understood what we were saying. He agreed that they would not draw down on this line item, but we would find ways to reprogram these funds to other legitimate uses as we went through the program, and in turn they would find other sources of funds to feed the elephants. In the early days I spent in Nepal this kind of understanding and the "give and take" typified our relationship with the Government. These events that I have been relating all occurred within the first year of my arrival. In this relatively short period of time I witnessed many changes and lots of things happened both to the government of Nepal and the USAID program itself.

Q: When you arrived in Nepal, did they have a democratically elected government?

MARSH: Yes, they had the Congress Party which was very closely associated with the Congress Party of India. It was democratically elected; the Prime Minister was B.P. Koirala. It was fairly socialistic and very development-minded. In fact, the events surrounding the fixed exchange rate and all of the things I have mentioned in that period did occur during the Congress regime. It was shortly after that the King staged a bloodless coup and took over the government. I remember that day quite vividly. The staff of USAID was quite small and although I was a junior officer, I would be occasionally asked to attend the country team meeting. On this particular day, I was at the country team meeting and we had been discussing about the rumors of the impending coup, and it was the general consensus that this probably would not occur until after Queen Elizabeth's visit to Nepal where the King was going to be her host. As we were concluding the report, we looked out the window and saw that the embassy was being surrounded by Nepalese soldiers, and lo and behold, the coup had taken place. When the new regime took over, there was obviously a period of adjustment and getting to know the new people we were working with. Fortunately for me at least, the new Secretary of Planning was a young graduate student from Claremont College in California. His name was Bekh Thapa. I think he was 26 years old at the

time and we were approximately the same age and quickly bonded. Over time we became very close friends which professionally was very helpful and socially delightful. We are still close friends. Bekh later became Minister of Planning, Minister of Finance, Governor of the Central Bank, and later ambassador to the United States, and is currently Nepalese ambassador to India. Our close friendship and age proximity allowed us to do many things that were informal that would be helpful to both sides in planning and developing the program. It was a wonderful relationship and one I cherished. When the new Program Officer, Victor Morgan, arrived, he also became part of this very close knit friendship which was enormously helpful in developing the program in Nepal and added greatly to quality and fulfillment of the assignment.

Q: How long was your assignment in Nepal?

MARSH: I was in Nepal for four and a half years. I arrived in Kathmandu in December, 1959, and was single at the time. Toward the end of my second tour I married, Mung Hsueh, who owned and operated the Imperial Hotel in Kathmandu. In June, 1964, my wife and her two children from a previous marriage left Nepal. At this time we didn't have an onward assignment. After home leave in the United States we were assigned to Brazil and later to Colombia. In 1966 my wife was unfortunately diagnosed with leukemia and died a few years later after we returned to the States. As for the tour in Nepal, I really look back on it with very fond memories and feel that it was a very maturing point in my life, both professionally and personally.

Q: Was the program in your opinion effective during the time you served there?

MARSH: Yes, I believe it was. There is no doubt in my mind our presence in Nepal was very important and made a big difference. The government, in my opinion had two primary goals. One was to maintain its independence from India, and the second was to catapult itself into the 20th century. Nepal had been isolated for so long, and they were now determined to modernize. I think they would have done so without our help. I believe that the program which provided a lot of training, advice, and support enabled them to bring about these changes in a more rational way and with less pain for their population. That is not to say that we did not make a lot of mistakes in the program. We did. For one thing, I think we were not sufficiently sensitive to environmental concerns in those days. In hindsight, I think it was probably a mistake to try to increase government revenue by having them operate a sawmill. While this didn't create the deforestation crisis, it certainly must have added to the problem. Our attempts at reforestation never really received government political support and were not very effective. But, by and large, I think our emphasis on training and institutional development backed up with the substantial local currency resources, did pay off.

Q: Weren't you concerned about the Nepalese ability to sustain this level of development?

MARSH: Yes we were, and this was even before the agency became enamored with the buzzword "sustainability". But, we were very mindful that the Nepalese needed to prepare themselves to ultimately pick up recurring costs of their development programs and were painfully aware of the limitations of their resources. We did make some attempts to increase their revenue. For instance, we did have a tax collection improvement project. We had a number of public service, public administration improvement projects to increase the efficiency of government and cut

costs. These were effective, but as we all know institutional development is a very slow process. I feel that the fact we were able to have these substantial budget support programs was essential. Because Nepal was starting so far back on the development spectrum, they had a lot of catching up to do, and I think this sizable amount of money that we were able to use as budget support really enabled them to get a jump start on development.

Q: You certainly sound very up beat about the program. Were there any particular factors you can identify that might explain these achievements?

MARSH: In my view, a lot of it had to do with the fact that USAID in those days had a lot fewer congressional restrictions. The field had more freedom and ability to act and respond in a timely fashion to needs and situations as they arose. Certainly that made life a lot easier and in my view a lot more exciting. The agency was much more action oriented in those days also, and they were willing to take risks. Many decisions could be made in the field, and the planning and action response time was much less than it is today. The fact that the field had so much authority, and it was really a substantial delegation of authority. We could move money between projects. The Mission could start new projects with specific dollar limits for the life of project funding. That simply gave us much more flexibility and a much greater ability to move, to take advantage of certain circumstances, and to try to fix things that went wrong before they became major problems.

One example that comes to mind that I remember very well was we had procured some equipment for a well-drilling project in the southern part of the country in the Tarai area. This drill rig, which was quite large, came complete with a drill operator, all part of the same procurement package. When it arrived in Nepal, it turned out that this was the wrong kind of rig for the particular kind of soil conditions in the Tarai. So, after some thought we decided to transfer the equipment to a new project we created in the field and move the rig up to the Kathmandu Valley which actually had a water supply shortage because most of the runoff was in the other direction. There was a good deal of ground water available but an insufficient number of wells for the main population centers in the valley. The operator of the drilling rig agreed to drive it up the narrow, winding, steep road, which was Nepal's only land link with the outside world. This was no mean feat; afterwards, he told us he wore out three sets of leather gloves just pulling that rig around the numerous bends and curves for which the "Rajpath " was renowned. Anyway, this impressive piece of equipment finally arrive in the Valley. The Mission set up the project with the Government agency responsible for local water supply and a new project was born. Granting in the equipment and operator and allocating small amounts of local currency kept the total costs within the allowable limits, which I think was \$100,000 over the life of the project. Within days water began to flow. There was one unexpected problem that arose. When the water initially came out of the ground, it had a gas like odor. We had the water tested and were assured it was not harmful and indeed the smell would dissipate after a short time. However, the rumor spread that the smell indicated the water had evil spirits in it. These rumors were further encouraged by some of our detractors who did not wish the project to succeed. So we had a problem.

Q: What do you mean by detractors?

MARSH: At that time, we seemed to be in a public relations competition with the Chinese program and there was pretty good indication that they were helping spread these rumors. Anyway, as long as the people felt this water contained evil spirits we were unable to hook up these new wells as part of the drinking water system. So, we finally came up with a simple solution. We arranged to invite a holy man (preselected) to the inaugural ceremony and his job was to rid the evil spirits from the water before it was hooked up to the main system. Everyone was happy and what could have been a protracted and serious issue was nipped in the bud at a very low cost. Another story that I enjoy recounting, to illustrate the advantages of the amount of field autonomy prevailing at this time, concerned a cable operated ferry boat. Again this was a Mission initiated project to link two trading communities along the Narani river together by providing a cable operated ferry to cross at this particular juncture of the river. The villagers had asked for funds and the Government wanted to respond favorably since the benefits were very intuitively demonstrable, and the costs were really very minimal, but there was no hydrological data available on the river flow upon which to base the design. It would have been, I might add, very costly and difficult to get this data. The costs and logistics would have made the project unfeasible. However, on its merits the project sounded pretty good. We had an engineer on our staff who went down and spent a couple of days looking at what little data there was, making some assumptions and best guesses and designed a system. It was built locally and there was great joy and jubilation when it started operating. In the following year, however, the monsoon rains were unusually heavy and the ferry broke off its moorings and was washed away and beached a few miles down the river. As soon as the rain subsided, the villagers, and I think probably with the help of the government, dispatched two elephants down to retrieve this ferry and pull it back, and it was soon back in operation. I think possibly these elephants were from the herd we used to support, but I'm not sure. I do remember enjoying writing this cable to Washington explaining what had happened. I bring up these stories just to illustrate the amount of flexibility we had in those days. How, without engaging in a lengthy dialogue and justification to AID/W, the Nepal Mission could be innovative and be responsive to small projects with immediate short term payoff, while at the same time employing most of its energy and efforts to longer term problems such as health, education, agriculture and other key sectors of the economy.

In this interview I decided that I would dwell on some of these behind the scenes events that are seldom recorded. Many of these things helped shape the program and certainly had an influence on the pace of implementation. The operating freedom the Missions had in those days also had its downside. The highest price the agency paid was in the area of Congressional accountability. What we told Congress about the project at the time of the Congressional Presentation often bore little resemblance to what the final outcome was. We all knew this couldn't go on forever, but while it lasted, it was wonderful. The morale of the Kathmandu Mission was very high. There was a high sense of purpose and a feeling that we really were bringing about change. Much of the time I spent in Nepal was during the Kennedy era, and that certainly was, in my view, the golden age of the agency. There was a very prevailing "can do" attitude both in the field and in Washington. Two-thirds of the staff were overseas, one third in Washington. There was a high level of commitment, idealism, and everything was a recipe for motivated effective development. We worked sometimes around the clock, but there were very few complaints because we had a lot of gratification and a feeling of accomplishment. Also at this time, and I think this made a big difference, Nepal had been isolated for so long; they had just come out of isolation. The

Nepalese government was new; they hadn't become jaded. They were very receptive to new ideas, very willing to talk about things openly and candidly .By nature they are wonderful friendly people and this certainly had a lot to do with this highly constructive work environment. It was a great experience to work there. I got to know people from all levels of the community. One of my close friends was an ex-Ghurka sergeant who was just a wonderful fellow working in the USAID GSA. Another person I became very close to was the Third Prince of Nepal; the Secretary of Planning was a close friend of mine, as was the Governor of the Central Bank, and the list goes on. It was just a wonderful place to work . I think during the time I was there, we very much set the stage for future development. AID has continued its relationship with Nepal for many years. Obviously, as things changed, the ground rules changed, the government became more sophisticated and perhaps a little less open in its dealings. Changing time and different situation requiring different approaches and different sets of solutions. but, during the 60s I think the ground had been laid for what is happening now and what will continue to happen in Nepal for quite some time.

DENNIS KUX
Nepal Desk Officer
Washington DC (1962-1964)

Ambassador Dennis Kux was born in England in 1931 and emigrated to New York, New York in 1933. He graduated from Lafayette College in Pennsylvania in 1952 with a degree in history. He entered the U.S. Army in 1952, working as a prisoner of war interrogator. Ambassador Kux's Foreign Service career included positions in Germany, Pakistan, Turkey, and the Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern on January 13, 1995.

Q: Now we are in 1962. You have been assigned to Washington as Desk Officer for Nepal and the Assistant Desk Officer for India. Could you tell me what your responsibilities were? You were the sole Desk Officer for Nepal.

KUX: I was the support officer in Washington for our Embassy in Nepal. Basically, I was supposed to know and to be involved in anything that happened in the U. S. Government regarding Nepal--anything that had foreign policy ramifications. It was an "across the board" responsibility, including the "care and feeding" of the Nepalese Embassy in Washington. There was a steady flow of correspondence with the Ambassador and DCM of our Embassy in Nepal. The Ambassador wrote to the Office Director, Turner Cameron, but I drafted the replies for his signature. At the time Nepal was of interest because the Chinese Communists and the Indians were jousting for influence. Let me put it this way. Nepal, which the Indians consider part of their defense zone, was trying to gain a little breathing space by expanding its relations with China. As the Chinese had bad relations with the Indians at the time--this was right before the Sino-Indian War--the Indians were very nervous and we in turn became very nervous.

At a certain point the India Desk Officer left, and I think that there was something like a year's gap until his replacement came. In effect, I became the India Desk Officer, as well as the Nepal

Desk Officer. That was at a very interesting time. J. Kenneth Galbraith was the Ambassador, and he would come sauntering through the Department from time to time. He was always handled by David Schneider, the Officer-in-Charge, and Carol Laise, the Deputy Office Director.

Other things happened in 1963. We decided--and this was a policy decision by President Kennedy--to provide a small amount of military equipment to Nepal. The Nepalese had been after us to provide such equipment because they wanted to offset the Indians. They felt a little bit uncomfortable about the idea of the Chinese providing them with military equipment because that would "drive the Indians up the wall." Our Embassy in Kathmandu favored providing the military equipment. I was for it. We obtained agreement within the State Department that the U. S. should do this. Carol Laise, the SOA Deputy Director, was not happy about it even though we were talking about non-lethal equipment--small amounts of communications gear. However, it was symbolically important. Carol Laise wanted us to tell the Indians about it first, before we proceeded. The Nepalese did not want us to do that, and I did not want to do that--because the Indians would say, "No." The whole point was to have a policy vis-a-vis Nepal that was separate and apart from Indian desires. We--the Embassy and the desk--finally won out on that.

We were interested in providing this military equipment because we were worried that the Nepalese felt so isolated. Nepal is a land-locked country. They were --and still are--dependent on the Indians who intervened in Nepalese internal politics. We were concerned that the Nepalese would turn to the Chinese, who were then very active and had a historical claim to Nepal, going back to the 17th or 18th century, as a tributary state. It was in the U. S. interest to prevent the expansion of Communist Chinese influence and to ease the pressure on India which Nepal might apply. During the Sino-Indian War, Nepal had been very loyal to India, although it had been given the opportunity to "kick" India, the way the Pakistanis did.

The policy to provide military assistance to Nepal was a presidential decision. This was an issue which was not of major importance, but it involved India, and there were two sides to the question; so the bureaucracy didn't like to make a decision. The issue was finally joined by a visit to the United States of Nepal's Prime Minister, a man named Tulsi Giri. The King of Nepal at the time, King Mahendra, was very shrewd. He had two "teams" which he moved in and out of power. He had a pro-India team and he had a pro-China team. Nepal at the time was a monarchy, and the King actually ruled. They had a democratic government for a year in 1960, but the King dismissed the democratic government and resumed direct rule.

Prime Minister Giri was regarded as pro-Chinese. Some people within the U. S. Government were leery about him, but he came to the United States and made his case to the President. After Kennedy saw Giri, he decided to go ahead with the small military assistance program. Even before Giri made his visit, we had prepared a memorandum to the President recommending approval of military assistance, but no decision had been made by our superiors on this issue. Phil Talbot, the NEA Assistant Secretary, was at the meeting between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Giri. I wasn't at the meeting. I escorted Prime Minister Giri to the Oval Office and then sat outside in the Cabinet office while Giri saw President Kennedy. I recall that Talbot came out of the meeting and said, "Well, you got your program. The President liked Giri and liked the way you made your case. He said, "Let's go for it." That was the way the decision was made.

After the decision, there was a lot of work for the desk officer in getting the program going. It was not a big one--about \$2.0 million, but you had to work with the Pentagon to get it moving--getting approvals and so forth. There was a lot of work to do on the economic aid program. That was not a large amount, but it was important for Nepal. The Nepal desk officer in AID and I were constantly moving papers forward, getting approval, and fighting to keep whatever it was that we were trying to do. I considered both assistance programs to be political tools to achieve our objectives in Nepal. The desk's role was not to fuss over the details of the programs but to see that the programs were actually implemented.

One aid project involved a "rope way." At the time the communications between India and Nepal were very poor. The project involved building something like a ski lift to carry goods from the plains over the mountains and into the Kathmandu Valley, the most important part of Nepal where the capital was. This was a fairly expensive project. My recollection is that AID didn't like it. The Embassy in Kathmandu liked it because it was tangible, and there was more political "payoff" in a program like that, rather than education, or malaria control, and other things that AID tended to like. So there was friction about the projects to be carried out under the economic assistance program. The State Department liked visibility and a "payoff." AID was less concerned with that.

I did not have the opportunity to visit Nepal. That was very strange, because I would often be asked about it during meetings and the Office Director and the Deputy Office Director would interject, "Yes, we were there." However, the desk officer had not been there which rather annoyed me as the desk officer.

One other dispute that we had concerning Nepal involved a police program. This was an aid program run by people, some of whom had been with CIA. The traditional AID people didn't like this at all. The Nepal desk was always pushing for the "Public Safety Program." Most of the people running it had a public safety or police background. As I said, some of them had been with CIA, but it was AID funded.

The other thing that I remember was the introduction of a Peace Corps program in Nepal. Peace Corps representatives breezed into our office in 1962--just after I got there--and they said, "We are going to Nepal." The Embassy and the Nepal desk, reflecting Embassy views, said, "Oh, we love the Peace Corps, but, really, Nepal is too sensitive a place. There are too many, potential problems there," and so forth. The Peace Corps people said, "Thank you very much. Get out of our way."

They proceeded to install themselves in Nepal and did very well, and have been doing very well since then. In six months or a year they had a Peace Corps contingent going into Nepal, and it has been one of the real Peace Corps successes. It has been a major success for the United States in Nepal. We on the desk were wrong. We were being the timid State Department. The Peace Corps was right.

HARRY G. BARNES, JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kathmandu (1963-1967)

Ambassador Barnes was born in Minnesota and raised in Minnesota and New York. He was educated at Amherst College and Columbia University. After service in the US Army in World War II, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted in 1950 to Bombay, India. His other foreign posts include Prague, Moscow, Kathmandu and Bucharest. He served as United States Ambassador to Romania (1974-1977; India (1981-1985) and Chile (1985-1996) in addition to having several senior level assignments at the State Department in Washington. Ambassador Barnes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: In the summer of '63 where did you go?

BARNES: I went to Kathmandu. I probably said it in earlier discussions that I'd come into the Foreign Service with an academic background, partially completed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Going back to the War College, the most useful application of some of that sense of the military that I was mentioned I was able to use a number of years later when I was in Chile and when there was a military dictatorship, so that exposure hung on, it was available to me for some period of time.

Although I had the Eastern European interest, and wanted to continue that, you will recall my first post was actually Bombay and that was because of an interest in that part of the world and in the developing world more broadly. At some point during that time in Bombay my wife and I had met a couple Nepalese, who were in exile at that point and told us if they ever got back to Nepal, we ought to come visit them, very tempting at that point to happen to get back fairly soon after that period of change. Because it was still very much, not quite the Korean hermit kingdom, but very limited links with the outside, partly British policy to a certain extent and Indian policy. So in looking around for an assignment after the War College, I happened to hear that the DCMship in Kathmandu was opening up (DCM: Deputy Chief of Mission, the second ranking officer in an embassy). My personnel counselor, I don't remember the exact date if that is important, said, "Well, the ambassador to Kathmandu is going to be in town next week and I'll alert him to your interest. Why don't you arrange to see him and see whether he will be interested in you as a candidate?"

It was Henry Stebbins who subsequently went on to be ambassador to Uganda [Editor's Note: Ambassador Stebbins served in Kathmandu from November 1959 to June 1966.]. I'm still not quite sure to this day why he thought I would make a good DCM. Somebody once speculated to me that my predecessor was a much more senior, much older individual than I, I was 37, something like that. And maybe Ambassador Stebbins wanted a change. Whether he operated on too little knowledge or too much knowledge or what; he said, "OK." I told him I wanted to get some Nepali language training before I came to Kathmandu and use the period between the completion of the War College and when I had to report to Kathmandu, there was a period of

two months or so. He agreed to that.

I started looking around and found out the only place that summer where Nepali was available was the Peace Corps training program. The Peace Corps just got started in those years and this was a training program for the second group of volunteers being held at the University of Oregon, Eugene.

It turned out to be somewhat more complicated than I had anticipated getting into the program. A very rough analogy of the relationship between Foreign Service officers and the military... I was saying there was some difficulty getting into the program simply because the people in the Peace Corps were suspicious of people in government and particularly people in the State Department.

After talking to a variety of people they appeared to be convinced that I wasn't dangerous or subversive, so I was allowed to take part in the program and did everything except the last two weeks or so, which was the outward bound experience in Colorado, because by that time I needed to be in Kathmandu.

The great advantage had been very roughly comparable to what I learned at the War College, the advantage was the Peace Corps training assignment is that I ended up with about twenty five some good friends, who were being assigned pretty much all over the country and when they arrived in Kathmandu, we were already there and they were in Kathmandu for a week or so, so we had the chance to see them before they went out to their post. My wife had the chance to meet them and they, her as well. We told them that when they came back to Kathmandu, the ones who weren't assigned to Kathmandu, that they were to feel they could stay with us or come by, whatever they wanted. We, for our part, made a lot of trips to visit Peace Corps volunteers because it was the first, I'm sorry the second group of volunteers in the country and it was important to have a sense of how they were managing. Since communications at that point were limited to the southern part of the country and only in certain parts of the southern part of the country were passable roads, if you wanted to get to remote, say district towns where there were the sorts of places they volunteered for assignment, you had to walk, although occasionally, it was a place that had a landing strip, you could hitch a ride with AID's plane or AID's helicopter. We not only saw the volunteers in Kathmandu but visited all twenty some outside of Kathmandu. That gave me a dimension to a way of understanding what was happening in the country that would have been almost impossible otherwise.

Q: How did the Peace Corps seem to cooperate during that time?

BARNES: A lot of enthusiasm and to some extent therefore some frustrations of trying to figure out what the right role for a volunteer was. The training program was designed for a developmental approach, that is, the volunteers would help in organizing, in planning activities that would be relevant to the needs of the community where they were. They were not expected to be agronomists or hydrologists but to know enough about a variety of things so they knew where help could be sought if it could be sought.

I give them all a really very, very high mark for their imagination and for their persistence and their ability to help people, help Nepalese, think through some of their problems even though

the backgrounds were obviously quite different. It says something for, shall I say, native or may be naive American enthusiasm and commitment.

The experience was sufficiently rewarding so that after some months the Ambassador and Mrs. Stebbins decided they would like to have a chance to see the volunteers, not only in Kathmandu but out in the field. They were both considerably older, as I mentioned, and so when they traveled they traveled by helicopter, got dropped off and got picked up to be brought back. But that in a sense double mission of the American Ambassador showing the flag as it were, because he had taken advantage to try to learn something about the community as well as what the volunteers were doing. The learning the Stebbins' experienced about what the Peace Corps volunteers could do, what some of the limitations were, was very valuable.

Q: Did any of them that you know come into the Foreign Service?

BARNES: Yes. I don't know if you have come across the name, Peter Burleigh who is now retired, I guess about two years or so ago, and served as Ambassador to Sri Lanka [Editor's Note: Peter Albert Burleigh was Ambassador to Sri Lanka from January 1996 to August 1997] and at one point was a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs covering the Persian Gulf and then, I forgot what the title was, was the second ambassador ranking at the U.N. Of the five or so he was the deputy to the principle, deputy principle representative to the U.N. He was one of that group of volunteers.

Q: You were Nepal from September '63 to July 1967. What was the political situation in Nepal while you were there?

BARNES: I mentioned earlier that Nepal was somewhat like a reclusive kingdom. That changed in 1960 when the monarchy was restored. I'm sorry, my chronology is off. The first change was 1950 when the monarchy was restored to some position of power. It had been a hereditary family of prime ministers. They were put aside and the king who had been in effect a figure head assumed a significant amount of power, a fair amount of Indian backing for that which was soon after India had won independence and parties were set up and elections held. The principle party called a Nepali Congress Party had a majority in the parliament but in 1959 the king, which was actually the son of the king who was restored, but the then fairly new king named Mahendra, decided to dispense with parliamentary democracy and to institute the royal rule. He devised his own system of local democracy called Panchiat; punch in Nepali means five and was a traditional form of local management, self government. It was to be a uniquely Nepali contribution to democracy. Hence, the Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) whom I was talking about earlier, when they came to Nepal were often known as Panchiat development personnel. PCVs sought to help Panchiat, local Panchiat with their problems.

The king exercised, what should I say, an authoritarian but not sort of totalitarian rule with the exception that he kept the Nepali Congress leaders in jail for a long, long time and he wasn't interested in elections other than ones that could be sufficiently controlled. It was not a thing that was overly oppressive.

The focus of U.S. relations with Nepal at that time stage was in part influenced by our difficult

relations with the fairly new Communist Chinese government founded, of course, in the '50s. Nepal had a long border with China. There were a number, I don't remember the exact number, thousands anyway of Tibetan refugees. The border actually was the Tibetan-Nepal or China-Nepal border. There were Tibetan communities in a number of places in Nepal. Naturally, a fair amount of language similarity between what the Nepalese call Voces and Tibetan language, culturalized with Buddhism constantly being the predominant religion in the northern area along the border. Hinduism was the official religion in the rest of Nepal proper. So to some extent our interest in a stable Nepal, and to the extent king's rule had some elements of instability, produced some concerns on our part. This was the period when Nepal had to do with worries about potential Chinese interference.

Q: Had the Chinese invaded Tibet?

BARNES: Yes, and there had been an uprising in, had taken over in 1950 and there was an uprising in 1959 which brought a lot of refugees.

Q: And then of course on top of this, you had the 1960 Sino-Indian War.

BARNES: 1962, yes.

Q: We had helped the Indians at that point.

BARNES: That's right, yes. So we got there in effect almost a year after the Sino-Indian War.

Q: What were we doing with Nepal? Keeping a watching brief or...?

BARNES: That was one dimension. The second dimension was essentially an aid dimension primarily in the areas of agriculture, some local government tutelage. I mentioned the Punctiat. The AID (Agency for International Development) had a Punctiat development program and Peace Corps activities which were somewhat coordinated with AID's activities in trying to develop a system of local government that the Peace Corps folks could impact on what the village council couldn't do: working somewhat more broadly in terms of agricultural development, forestry development, some hydrological questions.

We had an interest as well in there being better relations between India and Nepal. The Nepalese, not surprising as a small country and with a completely open border with India, were nervous about Indian, you might say, pretensions. I think probably just the very fact that such a big country on their border made them somewhat nervous. In part that was because the southern strip of the country, an area called the Tari, sort of flatland, were regarded by people who were in large measure Hindi speaking or whatever the comparable Indian language was on the border. So, we in the Embassy in Kathmandu had to be clear that we were committed to Nepal's development, including eventual democratic development, as Nepal, we were not surrogates for India. On the other hand, in terms of our relations with India, we didn't want it to appear that we were trying to encourage or tolerate any sort of an anti Indian attitude toward India on the part of the Nepalese, so it was to some extent a cajoling, some extent attentive listening, to some extent a systems driven type relationship.

Q: How was India represented there? Was it a high commissioner?

BARNES: No, because Nepal was not a member of the British Commonwealth, so the high commission was an embassy. In fact the largest embassy in Nepal, not surprisingly.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Indian Embassy?

BARNES: On the whole, fairly easy, in part because I had had that previous experience in India, at least could relate somewhat to Indian interests and Indian concerns. I relied on the Indian Embassy also for information, quite simply by virtue of their size and varied sources of information. Again, like that open border. They tended to be well informed and in fact, in many respects better informed than we would be, so we could learn.

Given their recent experience, a border war with China, we tended to see pretty much eye to eye on the dangers posed by China, although I think probably Indians worried more about what they considered Nepalese naiveté. We thought probably the Nepalese were probably smarter than Indians sometimes gave them credit for.

Q: The Nepalese, did they have relations with China? Of course, at that time, we just weren't talking to China.

BARNES: Yes. We did not have contacts at that point, so our instructions were we weren't supposed to speak to the Chinese. The diplomatic corps in Kathmandu at that point was, I think, all of seven missions and so at diplomatic corps events it was hard to avoid the Chinese. The other missions were the Soviets, British, French, Germans, Pakistanis, and Indians, plus ourselves.

Q: Almost all of them had tense relations with one or the other.

BARNES: Well, of course, this was the Cold War still, so the Germans, the British, the French and ourselves were the Western group if you like. The Pakistanis and we...well, part of that time there was the Indo-Pakistan war of '65. But we had had, of course, the experience of, as you mentioned earlier, of providing assistance to the Indians in the border war but in '65 we were somewhat more neutral between India and Pakistan.

Q: Were the Chinese messing around there then? I mean, agents trying to subvert or that sort of thing?

BARNES: There were at the time, although not legal, two communist parties in Nepal, one of which was associated with the Soviets and the other associated with China. Of course, it was still a period of the so called Sino-Soviet split and the assumption was that the pro Chinese group got support, financial and otherwise from the Chinese, as the pro-Moscow group got support from Moscow, but nothing dramatic that I remember on either side.

The Chinese obviously had an interest in publicly showing that they were very supportive of

Nepalese independence and sovereignty and so on, vis-a-vis, India. The Soviets had improved their relations at that stage with India and so they weren't particularly acting an anti-Indian mode, vis-a-vis the Nepalese.

Q: What was your impression of the Nepalese government and how it was operating?

BARNES: Well, it would change periodically as the king decided it wasn't performing according to his wishes. So there was a certain amount of revolving door, people going out and people coming back. The king operated sometimes directly with the prime minister, sometimes somewhat more indirectly through members of the palace staff who gave instructions to, be it the prime minister, or be it to the ministers, depending on where the palace's interests were. So parenthetically, one of the jobs I had was trying to get to know some of the people on the palace staff, as well as the people in government, a sort of rough analogy would be try to access some people in the NSC here.

Then, if my memory is right, two individuals served twice as prime minister during the time I was there, rotating, as it were. The degree of confidence, if I go by my recollections of what people in AID, be they specialists in public administration or in agriculture both said, "On the whole, we're pretty well impressed, pretty favorably impressed with their working level contacts," particularly in areas where there was a technical skill involved, people who perhaps had been trained in India, most likely, might have been trained somewhere else conceivably, in Europe or even in the U.S. So those working relationships were good and productive.

Ministerial level, more, should I say, varied in part had to do with the qualifications of the ministers themselves who would not necessarily be all that competent in the area to which they had been assigned by the king. The minister of agriculture would not necessarily been an expert in plant breeding or technical areas.

Secondly, the real limitations under which the new ministers had to operate because of the palace oversight or the palace interference. So I guess I would have to say it was a mixed picture, but on balance, again I go back to that Punctiat situation between the ministers and their staff and technical specialists. A good number of people who knew what they were doing, who knew what they were up against in the situation of limited resources, could be and often were imaginative in how to accomplish results.

Q: Did you find yourself involved in the care and feeding of mountain climbers?

BARNES: Less so than if I had gotten there a couple of months earlier when the first American expedition led by Jim Whittaker climbed Everest. That was in May of 1963. In a vicarious way because one of the Americans who made it to the summit, named Willi Unsoeld, subsequently became the director of the Peace Corps group in Nepal, so I saw a lot of him. There weren't that many in the first years after the Everest ascent, there weren't that many American expeditions. So to a limited extent developed a certain vicarious understanding of what it is like to be a mountain climber, if only because of all the trekking we did to see Peace Corps Volunteers but that was never to great heights. Willi led a group of us, about 1965, '66, up toward the base of Everest. That's the highest I got.

Q: Was Nepal a member of the United Nations and were we working with them on votes and all?

BARNES: Yes, but nothing stands out particularly in terms of issues. They tended to go along with the nonaligned movement and that we knew and that we understood. They did not want to appear to be, what to say, too close to the U.S. lest they compromise their nonaligned status. But on the other hand the U.S. presented the advantage of being neither Indian nor China and therefore they could do things with us particularly in the development area. I would have said for example, the local government program, Punctiat program could have been seen as too politically sensitive, but they didn't see it that way. At least they saw an advantage in of a U.S. presence in helping them out.

The one thing I remember that related to your question has to do with, at some point during the Vietnam War and I can't tell you for sure whether it was '65, '66 probably, the Pratinidhi Sabha, the House of Representatives, adopted a resolution critical of U.S. activities in Vietnam. I remember going to complain to somebody in the Foreign Ministry at that point arguing they should have the courtesy to tell us they were considering something like that, that they didn't agree with our Vietnamese policy. I emphasized, I was chargé at the time, emphasized the fact that if they had to adopt the resolution without even telling us about it, why did they have to adopt it on the Fourth of July. I'm not sure my protest had much of an impact.

Q: This was during the sort of the great hippie movement and so many Americans and European kids were traveling all over and many were heading towards the sort of the subcontinent, both for drugs and for meditation and other experience. That must have affected you, didn't it?

BARNES: To some extent, although my recollection is that that became somewhat more pronounced toward the end of our tour. I tend to think it was more in terms of looking for uplifting or enlightening experiences than the drug side.

Q: I was wondering if you had problems with if an American got into trouble or not and how you might handle the issue.

BARNES: I don't recall that as being the major component of our work. Occasionally things happened and what you tried to do, first of all, since they would likely be held in a facility which in terms of, shall I say, comfort might be Spartan. So one of your first things to do was try to visit with the consular officer, visit the person who had been detained and try to clarify the basis on which they had been detained and what the chances were of being able to get them out of the country and back to the U.S., rather than have them land somewhere else. On the whole, the Nepalese were fairly cooperative. These sorts of consular problems were not desirable and were unhelpful, but they did not dominate our work load.

Q: Were there any major political developments in the '63 to '67 period?

BARNES: Not major. There continued to be hope that somehow the king might agree to more in the way of relaxation of some of the restraints or constraints but, no.

Q: Now you served as DCM for two ambassadors, right?

BARNES: My tour originally had been for three years so I should have left in '66, but then Ambassador Stebbins was transferred to Uganda in June of that year. There was an interregnum of about six months. The new ambassador was Carol Laise, who by that time had married Ellsworth Bunker and he, by that time was ambassador to Vietnam. I may have misspoken about the timing. If I am very precise, at the time that she was named as ambassador, she had not yet married Ellsworth Bunker. That's another story. So for the last six months I was there I had a new ambassador and many responsibilities that come with that. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Laise presented her credential in Katmandu on December 5, 1966 and departed post June 5, 1973. Afterwards, she took up duties as the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs on September 20, 1973. She married Ambassador Bunker on January 3, 1967.]

Did you ever know Carol?

Q: Yes, I did. I interviewed her some time ago but it was a relatively short interview. How did she operate?

BARNES: She was a person with very definite ideas, not bashful about expressing them; interested in a lot and wanting to learn, felt that she might be able to have some impact on the king. Speaking now as the DCM, that was always a challenge, for the most part it was an effort worth making. Henry Stebbins, which again was good from my stand point, gave me a lot of responsibility as the new DCM, which I very much appreciated and it could have been more cautious.

Carol also expected a lot of me, in part because I had been there a couple of years although she, from her own assignments in the area knew a lot about India in particular, but also knew something about Nepal. She was the sort of person with whom one could disagree but it was important to know why you disagreed and then make the case for what your views were.

To go back to the marriage, which is relevant here, she arrived in December of '66. Betsy and I meet her at the airport and went back to the Residence with her and then Betsy excused herself. Carol asked me to stay on and talk over a few things that had happened while she was en route and in Delhi. After we finished that I got up to leave and she said, "Sit down. I have a bombshell to drop." What went through my head was she was going to tell me no, she doesn't want me to be her DCM or something like that.

She said, "I'm going to get married. I want you to find a minister and from what I have heard, I don't want such and such a minister" who would have been the obvious possibility, a local. "Secondly, I want you to organize a reception for my husband-to-be, Ellsworth Bunker, and you can do that in honor of Ellsworth Bunker, the former U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, because when I served with him in Delhi he was accredited Kathmandu as well. And then thirdly, organize a wedding trip, a honeymoon trip." And then she added to this, "Don't tell anybody."

Fortunately we were expecting around Christmas time, the end of December a visit from Betsy's parents and Betsy's father happened to be a Presbyterian minister so that was solved quite easily.

The wedding reception, she had already given a clue on how to do that so we could take care of that. The honeymoon we decided that the two of them would go to a place called Tiger Tops, located in a border area toward India which produces tigers sometimes, lets you ride around on elephants looking for them. We would tie that in with a visit to some Peace Corps Volunteers in the area. And it all worked quite well.

Q: While Carol Laise was Ambassador, did you see her, you know, influencing the king and also what would we try to influence the king about?

BARNES: I think two things: I did see her try trying to influence the king, also trying to influence the ministers for what that was worth, listening to a lot of people you get some sense of what trends might be. Two things; one, while recognizing Nepal's nonaligned status, trying to persuade the king and the government not to take gratuitous slaps at the U.S. and that's of course, a fairly fine line. How do you be nonaligned and say nice things about the United States, or not say too many critical things about the United States?

The second, which was tougher, was to try to exercise some, display some understanding of the king's situation, take him up to a point on his word if he was really interested in a future democracy in Nepal and try to nudge him, push him in ways that might translate that generalized vision of Punctiat democracy into something that was somewhat more recognizably democratic and not just simply with a Punctiat label. I would guess from her standpoint she would have thought that on the first count she was able to have some influence there. The relationship was not a troubled relationship most of the time.

I suppose the third dimension was to get some attention periodically in Washington to Nepal, because attention more generally was being paid, depending on what year you were talking about to India, Pakistan, or both.

In terms of the democracy side of it, probably she would have had to say that it was marginal, whether it was marginally useful, it's hard to judge at this point. Not an uncommon dilemma of the United States.

R. GRANT SMITH
Consular/Economic Officer
Kathmandu (1964-1965)

R. Grant Smith was born on Long Island in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1960. He later earned a master's degree from Columbia University. He joined the Foreign Service in 1963 and held positions in Pakistan, Nepal, and India. In 1995 he began his ambassadorship in Tajikistan. Ambassador Smith was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Can you describe the embassy, the ambassador and the embassy at that point?

SMITH: In Kathmandu, of course it was a very small embassy. Henry Stebbins was the ambassador, and Harry Barnes was the DCM. I always consider that I was fortunate to serve in a-

Q: Two professionals... Later, anyway, this became often the plaything of some wealthy contributor who liked to hike or climb mountains or shoot animals or something.

SMITH: Stebbins was the first ambassador and was there for I don't remember how many years. I think it was four or five years. And Carol Laise was the second, who was also there for a considerable period of time. But we had very a professional ambassador, and a very hard-charging young DCM who spoke the language, had studied Nepali with the Peace Corps, and was a real example to everybody on the linguistic side, and was determined that people not spend too much time in Kathmandu. He insisted that everybody go out and trek. At one point, I was sent off on a trek with our admin officer, who although he was a hunter, he hadn't been off on any treks in the hills. We went off to eastern Nepal and trekked there for a ways, did some political work.

Q: What was your impression of the situation, economic and political, in Nepal at this point, '64-65?

SMITH: Well, I was doing consular work and economic work, so I saw much more of the economic side, and I certainly became very knowledgeable about the problems of small countries which are economically linked to larger ones, as Nepal is to India, and the complexities of trade, exchange rate, and development in that case. They were just beginning to think about developing Nepal's hydroelectric potential at that time. Nepal has enormous hydroelectric potential. I remember some years later an Indian telling me that one project alone was larger than the entire installed electric generating capacity in north India. That project still hasn't been built, largely for political reasons.

Q: Did the Nepalese know about the United States, I mean the ones you were dealing with? They're kind of far away.

SMITH: They knew about the United States. The level of education and knowledge was much less than of course in India, where you had and have that very well-educated international - then Anglicized - group. That group was much smaller in Nepal, a very, very thin veneer, so if you got below that level, you really did need Nepali, and you wouldn't have anybody who knew much about the United States. We did have a substantial Peace Corps contingent there, and for the size of the country it was then one of the larger ones, I believe - 40, 50, 60 Peace Corps volunteers spread around the country really had an impact, and several of them subsequently joined the Foreign Service.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

SMITH: I was the consular officer. There was very little to do in the way of visas. There were some American citizen services problems, but it was before the influx of tourists because at that time only DC-3s flew in, and you just can't get that many tourists in a DC-3. So we had few

tourists, but I didn't have any large numbers. It was before the hippies. I didn't have any large numbers, and as it turned out when I was there, there were no mountaineering accidents or major catastrophes like that.

Q: Because also there was always the mountaineering, but it also became a sort of haven for what we call the hippies, people coming after narcotics and-

SMITH: Yes, my successor had those problems.

Q: Were there many contacts with the Nepalese government at your level?

SMITH: Yes, there were contacts. I can't remember feeling that we developed personal relations with too many, although with some. Some people in the Foreign Ministry I can remember developing relations with, some younger people in town, whom I later saw in other capacities.

Q: Did you have any impression of the effectiveness of our aid program?

SMITH: The AID mission in Kathmandu was very large. It actually institutionally was [more like an] the embassy. The embassy came in after the AID program and in many ways we were piggybacking on their infrastructure. They were very involved [on] a lot of different levels, doing a lot of agricultural development, rural development, things like that. I don't remember at the time having strong impressions of impact of those programs - with the exception of some of the work that was done on road building, which was obviously very visible and important in tying the country together. And that became more after I left, in fact. But I don't remember having impressions of the impact of the developmental activities.

Q: Was Communist China much of a presence there?

SMITH: Very definitely, and much more so than you would say that the Soviet menace was felt in Pakistan, the Chinese presence was felt in Nepal. They started building the highway from Kathmandu to Tibet while we were there, and with large numbers of Chinese workers. We saw the examples of the kind of aid which China gives, building things - a brick factory, as I recall, a leather factory. I don't remember whether they built a stadium or not.

Q: What about Tibetan refugees or events in Tibet? Was that sort of spilling over into where you were?

SMITH: The big influx from Tibet had occurred earlier. There certainly were Tibetan refugees, and there were Tibetans. There were Tibetan refugee camps, and there were Tibetan articles available in Nepal. I didn't personally have a strong sense of what was going on in Tibet that I didn't already have from my acquaintance with India. But going back to your earlier question about the Chinese, of course that was a period when we, the United States, were very concerned about Chinese influence, which led, while I was there, to the "deal" with India, that we would provide India some assistance - as I recall, some equipment - so that they could help build a portion of the east-west highway and preempt the Chinese down in Tarai from building roads down in the southern part of Nepal, which is plains and geographically much more connected

with India. So there's a sense of cooperation with India vis-à-vis the Chinese and Nepal.

Q: How about the presence of the Indians? Were they pretty much calling the shots?

SMITH: They were very influential. This was another post-colonial society, although the colonists in this case were more like the Indians. The British had left at Independence, and what had been the British embassy became the Indian embassy, and just as if you had read recently about how in Tibet the only way you could send a letter was to send it to the British embassy. In Nepal, when we were there, the best way to send a letter was through the Indian post office at the Indian embassy. The Indians had been very involved, were very involved in Nepal, had been very involved in the restoration of the monarchy there. The Indian embassy - I think it was then a third or second secretary who actually sat in the Nepalese cabinet meetings when the monarchy was restored, to give you an idea of Indian influence - that individual was then director for Nepal in the Indian Foreign Ministry back in New Delhi.

Q: What was the impression you were getting from the ambassador, DCM, about the king and the royal family and the government at the top level?

SMITH: Supportive. I'm not sure of the exact sequence of events, but of course the current king, who was then the crown prince, went to Harvard for a period. We certainly had a hand in arranging that. So there was an interest in modernizing the monarchy. At the same time we had relations with the democratic elements, the Nepal Congress elements, relations of whom were there in Kathmandu and others were outside of Nepal.

Q: Were we comfortable with the situation there, or were we hoping to have a more democratic form of government at that point?

SMITH: I think I can say yes.

Q: For both.

SMITH: For both.

Q: What was social life like there?

SMITH: There was quite a small international community, but there were some younger Nepalese who participated in the social life of that international community, who were students or airline pilots or filmmakers - I remember those three in particular.

Q: Were you all intermingling fairly well with them?

SMITH: With them, yes, but as I say, I never established the kind of relations... I established them to some extent, but not to the extent that I later did in other places with younger Foreign Service officers or government officials and academics that I was later able to. It was a little bit harder in Nepal.

Q: The war was beginning to heat up in Vietnam. Did that have any reverberations in Nepal, or was that just too far away?

SMITH: Not much at that time. Some. I think we were certainly aware of it. I don't remember diplomatically exactly what we were doing about it. Of course, the embassy there later became much more involved with the shuttle flights, Bunker-Laise.

VICTOR L. TOMSETH
Peace Corps Volunteer
Dharan, Nepal (1964-1965)

Victor L. Tomseth was born in Oregon in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in 1963 and his master's degree from the University of Michigan in 1966. After joining the Peace Corp and going to Nepal he joined the Foreign Service. During his career he had positions in Thailand, Iran, Sri Lanka, and was ambassador to Laos. Ambassador Tomseth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: When did you go to Nepal?

TOMSETH: We got there in May of 1964.

Q: And when did you leave Nepal?

TOMSETH: Christmas Eve 1965.

Q: How did Nepal strike you when you arrived in May of 1964?

TOMSETH: The trip out was an experience in itself. This was on the old PanAm One around the world. It stopped everywhere. We left in Hawaii and stopped in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Rangoon, and wound up in Calcutta. The thing I remember most about that was, everywhere we stopped at that place, it got hotter and more and more humid. Finally, in Calcutta, at about three or four o'clock in the morning, it must have been close to 100 degrees. The humidity was at least that high. We hung around there until the sun came up because the airfield in Kathmandu had no capability of landing by other than a visual approach.

We had only seen airports en route, but when we got into Kathmandu, it was like going literally into a different world in terms of anything I had ever seen. We were there for a couple of days and then sort of scattered. About 10 of us were going to the eastern part of Nepal to various places, so we were flown down to a town called Rotniger, which is right on the Indian border. We got on a little truck. There was a road that went about 25 miles into Nepal to Dharan, which is where I wound up being. I was literally just sort of dumped off there and the others were told to start walking to these villages that they were going to. The Peace Corps echoes of the time was that it should be slapdash, you should just throw people out there and let them sink or swim.

The Peace Corps doesn't operate in its training program or selection process or anything they do like that anymore, much to the better, as far as I am concerned. I think the organization is far more professional these days than it was 35 years ago. So, there we were in this little town that was hotter than Hell. We had a bit of language, but we were barely functional and sort of had to figure this out. There were three of us there together. One fellow taught in college and another guy high school. We had each other to rely upon, but it was really sort of "figure it out for yourselves." It was kind of a tough first couple of months. I complicated it by getting bacillary dysentery, really getting very sick right at the outset. But we all survived and figured out what it was we thought we were going to do.

Q: It does sound like people were just sort of thrown in on their own. Had somebody had this village or town and said, "You guys are going to be teaching here or there?"

TOMSETH: Well, we were told where we were going and given the names of people that we should go find. At that particular point, it was the school break, so we had about two or three weeks before we really had to start teaching, which wasn't bad in one sense. It allowed us to focus on acclimatizing ourselves to this place without having to worry about doing a job. We went and looked up these people that we were supposed to report to. They were expecting us. We had a place to live. The school actually provided a little house that all three of us lived in.

Q: What about language?

TOMSETH: We had had this training in Washington and Hawaii, so all of us to one degree or another could function a bit. I suppose of the three of us, I was the more fluent, but I was hardly at a level that I really felt comfortable. This was true of people in the two groups that got there before us, our group, and ones that came after. Some people took that basis and built on it. Others didn't. They just in a linguistic sense retreated into a cocoon and did what they had to do, but nothing more than that. I subsequently saw that in spades in the Foreign Service, too. But some people became very good. I was moderately skilled with the language by the time I left, but I learned something other than that, which was how to study. I applied that in subsequent language training in the Foreign Service, so I did better the second time around than the first time.

Q: What about the language training that you were doing with the students? How did that work?

TOMSETH: The school situation was a great disappointment. Growing up I had heard about Asian students and their diligence and tremendous desire to learn. Dharan was the largest town in that area. It was a boys' high school. The students there tended to be the children of upper caste people in that town and from the surrounding area. They weren't the least bit interested in studying. Their caste determined what they were going to be in life, not their education. Discipline was bad. The classes were terribly crowded. There were at least 50 children in each class. Attendance was spotty. The school year, the number of hours that were actually scheduled in the year, was very minimal. So, just teaching in the school was not a very satisfying experience. What the other fellow and I wound up doing was finding a few students who were interested in actually learning something and tutoring them outside of regular school hours. You got your satisfaction as a teacher from what you could do for the small number of students who

had some interest in education. The school system, too, contributed to the phenomenon that was so disappointing. A lot of the teachers in the school were actually Indians and they were paid so little that they couldn't possibly survive on their salary. So, they were not interested in doing anything in class. They made their money giving what they called "tushin," after "tuition," after classes that the students' families paid them for. But it wasn't teaching for knowledge. It was teaching to prepare for the examination.

Q: What sort of examination were they moving towards?

TOMSETH: This was sort of a copy of the British system passed through an Indian sieve, if you will, and about 50 years out of date. Whether you moved on to the next class, whether you went from high school into a college, depended on that examination. There was tremendous cheating with a lot of collusion on the part of the teachers and the school. It was all sort of rote memory. It was "What quotation from Blake am I going to have to know for the test? Who is Blake? I don't care." But you knew there was going to be some line that you would have to have for the test.

Q: Had the Peace Corps people before you prepared you for this?

TOMSETH: No. The information that we had gotten in the training was largely from these Nepalese language teachers. They themselves had bought the myth of this burning desire of Asian students to learn.

Q: My background is essentially that of a consular officer. I've watched cultural clashes when your consular officer is up against people who want to get a visa and don't give a damn how they get it. Did you find this of your other colleagues and with yourself, learning to roll with the punches or getting annoyed? How did this work?

TOMSETH: In the school, I think, my colleague and I both made our peace with the system, but the initial reaction to student apathy and corruption in the faculty was outrage and "What can we do to change this" and "By God, we're going to run our classes differently." But over time, we both realized that the system was certainly stronger than we were individually or even collectively. We went through the motions in the school. We showed up every day and taught our classes as seriously as we could, but realized that hardly anyone was paying attention and what they were really interested in was getting their "tuition" from these Indian faculty members so they could pass the exam. When we proctored the exams, if the cheating was blatant, we would confiscate the notes and things like that. But in the end, we didn't worry about it too much and focused on those few students who seemed to have a genuine desire to actually get an education.

Q: How about with the school authorities and then the government authorities that you ran across? I would think the Indians, for example, would be kind of annoyed at you since you were breaking their race war, so to speak.

TOMSETH: Well, they were. We didn't realize that at the very beginning, but yes, the attitude that we brought to it was very threatening. Their reaction to it was negative. After we had gotten things figured out and learned to roll with the flow, we actually established some fairly good

friendships with some of these people. They weren't bad people. They were trying to live.

Q: In the town where you were, what did they do?

TOMSETH: It was a trading town. Right a little bit up out of the Try, the malarial jungle area that runs along the foot of the Himalayas, although there is not much of them left (It has all been cut down for firewood or lumber.), at that time, there was still a 15-20 mile belt. Dharan sat just above that on a big alluvial fan coming out of the first ridge of the Himalayan foothills. There was a road from the border up to the town, so a lot of Indian goods came out by truck to that town, were unloaded, and put on the backs of porters to pack into the eastern third of Nepal. So the ethnic mix there was very interesting. You had some of these hill people, who were the porters. You had some upper caste Nepalis who ran businesses. There were these Gangetic Plain very low caste farm people who would come up to trade their goods. There was a group that was actually originally from Rajasthan in western India, Mahwaris, who were traders. They were all over India and even further abroad. There are more Mahwaris in this country. They were very shrewd traders.

Q: Did the central government run at all where you were?

TOMSETH: Oh, yes. Dharan was not the capital of the district. That was a little town that as the crow flies was not that far away, but it took you the better part of a day to get there. This was the district headquarters. So, we didn't have district officials there, but there were other kinds of officials.

Q: Were there still reverberations from the China-India war?

TOMSETH: Not felt so much in that part of Nepal. But at that time, the Indians in the late 1950s had built a road up from the Indian border to Kathmandu. At that time, the Chinese were working on a road from the Tibetan border down to Kathmandu. We heard a lot from our Indian colleagues in the school about what a terrible security threat it was going to be when this road was completed because the Chinese could come pouring down the road from Tibet right into the plains of India. It had only been two years since the war.

Q: How were Americans received? How were you all received?

TOMSETH: Oh, very positively. Most Nepalis... Literacy at that point was probably under five percent on a national basis, so the vast majority of people had no idea where the United States was. But again, in the school, our faculty colleagues and even students had a general idea. The town had no electricity, but there were two movie theaters that had generators there to operate on. Most of the fair was Indian films, but there would be things from time to time that gave people a glimpse of what the United States was. There had been a Peace Corps volunteer in this town from the first group, so at the high school, they already knew an American.

Q: What was social life during this time?

TOMSETH: Well, I learned to play chess. Again, some of the faculty members at the school

were very avid and pretty good chess players, so we spent a lot of time drinking tea and playing chess with our teaching colleagues and some other people that we got to know in the town. Just out of boredom I would go to these Hindi movies to the point where I (Nepali and Hindi are fairly closely related.) in fairly short order could follow. It helps that there is only one plot in Bombay. It doesn't matter what movie you're watching. You know what the plot is.

Q: Did you have any contact with your colleagues who had been told to hike up into the...

TOMSETH: I was going to say, that was the other thing. There was a lot of visiting. Because anybody in the eastern third of Nepal to get anywhere else had to come through Dharan, we saw a lot of people coming and going. The nearest location where we could go visit somebody was about a day and a half walk, so that wasn't bad.

Q: Were you living the high sophisticated life compared to them?

TOMSETH: In some senses. In Dharan, because it was a market town, meat was available every day. In some of these villages in the hills, they might not see meat more than every three to six weeks. Some people when they saw how these animals lived and foraged for food actually became vegetarians. You can tell me all you want about how that is processed in the body. I know what it was before it was ingested.

Q: You left there at the end of 1965. What about the students that you tutored? How were they coming along?

TOMSETH: Fairly well. In that time, there were a couple of them who had finished high school and had passed the exam to go on to college. They had a national university system with colleges scattered around the country. A couple of them had entered college in Dharan itself. There were other students at the school, thanks to the tutoring on how to pass the exam, that did, too. But I didn't really find out how well some of the students did until I went back to Nepal. When I left, I said, "I'll wait 10 years. If it's any less than that, I won't be able to tell if anything has moved." Some of these students, including ones we had had, but students that other Peace Corps volunteers had taught as well, had risen to middle echelons of the Nepali government and were actually making an impact on policy. That was very encouraging.

The discouraging thing was that it was hard to see how policy was really going to have an effective impact on some of the development issues that they confronted: deforestation, environmental degradation, and population growth. This was the early 1980s when I went back. Then I was back several times over the next 16 years. It was heartening to see these people who cared and actually had some ability, but disheartening to understand the magnitude of the problems that they were trying to deal with.

Q: Nepal had a king, a royal family. How were they looked upon out in the hinterlands?

TOMSETH: When I was there, just a couple of years before that, there had been a Westminster-style parliamentary government in place. The king had done away with that and had instituted a system of direct rule. That corner of southeastern Nepal was a real communist

hotbed, so there was a lot of unhappiness with the political system that the king had instituted in that area of the country, at least among the educated elite. That system continued until just a few years ago when they again came back to the Westminster-style parliamentary system that had existed from the early 1950s until the early 1960s. But for most people, the vast majority of the population, they might know that there was something called the king, but it didn't really impact on their lives in any meaningful way. What they were grappling with was just basic subsistence. There was an AID guy there who had come up from New Delhi in 1959 when the embassy was opened up and the AID mission was established. He had been there about five years when I got there. Maybe he was a little jaded. I remember one time he wagged his finger in front of my face and said, "Young man, what you have to understand is that in the 1950s, Nepal rushed headlong into the 13th century." That was about right. In most areas of Nepal, it was really very basic subsistence agriculture in a very poor environment for agriculture.

Q: Did you feel at that time where you were that the Indian rift ran strong? Were the Indians running things?

TOMSETH: Not running things, but they had a great deal of influence. This school I taught in was a very good example. There simply were very few Nepalis who had sufficient education to teach in a high school. The only way to have a high school was to recruit these people from India to teach. You saw that in other ministries as well. It wasn't just education. There were a lot of Indians who had been brought in, often in fairly senior positions, simply because there were no Nepalis qualified to hold those positions. Again, when I went back after those 17 years, a lot of that had changed. Some of the Indians, like our old headmaster, had become Nepali citizens. But in part through a Peace Corps contribution, there had been a generation of people who had been given a reasonably decent education so that there were many more people who were qualified to do these basic kinds of things that have to be done in a developing society.

RICHARD PODOL
Chief of Public Administration Division, USAID
Kathmandu (1965-1967)

Richard Podol was born in Chicago in 1928. He attended the University of Iowa, where he received his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. He became involved in the Foreign Service in 1954. Mr. Podol has worked in India, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Zaire, and Uganda. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in September 1996.

Q: And then what happened?

PODOL: I went to Nepal as Chief of Public Administration Division there, with a second function as an advisor on manpower development to the Minister of Planning and helped write the five year plan on manpower. That was my first contact with the Russians. They had a Russian advisor there also.

Q: This was the time when people were writing manpower development plans. What was your view of that experience?

PODOL: It was extremely modest, as it had to be. Nepal in the sixties was not ready for development as we understand it. On one side, the King and his cohorts, his extended family, controlled the economy. Any business, they were into it and had to be into it, which had a very negative impact. On the other hand, Nepal wasn't a nation. It was a series of isolated mountain valleys and the loyalty of people were to their own clan or tribe, not to Kathmandu, not to the capital, not to the King. An example of the situation: I remember once going on a so-called "field trip," which was 15 miles down the road, to another town, from the capital, Kathmandu. My counterpart needed an interpreter - 15 miles away - because we weren't talking to the educated. We were talking to the village women about family planning. He needed an interpreter. That shows you the nature of the country. We used to say that in Nepal, you have two choices: you either fly for 30 minutes or you walk for 30 days and that was reality. Government civil servants would be gone. They'd be out in the field and nobody would ever hear from them for six months at a time because there were no communication systems.

Q: What were you trying to do in that position, in that context?

PODOL: Very modest. All you could really do are some of what we might call very basic things. You built some roads, you tried to set up primary education, and basic health. In public administration, again, it was a question of some basic training in methods and organization.

Q: Very basic training?

PODOL: Yes.

Q: Was this government-wide?

PODOL: Yes. The Minister of Planning had been a U.S. participant. He wrote the King's economic speeches.

Q: Do you remember his name?

PODOL: Bekh Thapa. He's been Ambassador to the U.S. and he's still around. He'd write the speeches in English and then he'd translate them, because he didn't have a vocabulary in his language that he could use to write them out. So, he had to write them in English and then look for terms that he could translate into the local language. I also did a study on government decentralization for the Home Ministry.

Q: What were your conclusions in that study? They had a fairly decentralized situation anyway, in some respects.

PODOL: I'll tell you what one found. You had elected local councils and you had local administrators appointed by the capital. Often, the head of the local council would move into the local administrator's office, put his desk next to him and try to dictate local administration. The

big problem, you had local administration, as opposed to local government, with power. You had a number of departmental officials, all appointed out of the center, on roads, health, agriculture, what have you. This local administrator was supposed to coordinate their efforts and give them direction. It doesn't work.

Q: This system was in place, though, when you were there?

PODOL: This was the system in place. The loyalty of each of these individuals was not to this appointed administrator, but back to the department in the capital. So, you had nothing but problems trying to get these people to work together.

Q: What was your plan? What were you trying to bring about or change?

PODOL: I found that you could point out the problems and discuss them, but, again, the nature of the beast was that you could do very little about it. You couldn't change the way that people operated. They didn't want to lose control from the center, and the promotions came from the center. You just could not do much about it at all in the given circumstances.

Q: So you worked on decentralization issues. You worked on organizational management training. And they did manpower planning? What was that?

PODOL: Very simple, because there was no data. You couldn't predict the needs five years down the line because you didn't know what they had now and they had no idea where they were going. So, you could do just very basic, very simplistic, general things.

Q: This was identifying numbers of people required in agriculture, health-?

PODOL: Right, and therefore setting up programs to recruit and train them. But they didn't have a database that you could work with, so numbers were not too meaningful.

Q: But you had some soft targets, I guess, for who to train?

PODOL: Yes, we did the best we could. AID had a major training program sending Nepalese to the Indian universities for training, for basic, Bachelor level degree training.

Q: Were you involved with the Mission structure very much at that time?

PODOL: With AID, yes, and with the Embassy. Since I worked in government, the entire government of Nepal was in one, huge building, called "Singadurbar." So, everybody was there in one building and I had entree to it and worked in different departments. So, the people in the Embassy, the Political Officer, would come to me and say, "What's going on?" I had much better contacts than they did, in personnel changes that were taking place, certain policies that were taking place. To give an idea of what you're putting up with, they took me down in the basement one day, the people I worked with, and showed me a huge metal box. When I say "huge," it must have been seven or eight feet high, maybe 15 feet long, and square. They said, "In days gone by, this was the Treasury. Whenever the Treasury got any money, we'd put it all in this box."

Whenever the King needed any money, somebody would go and take out what money was needed to pay salaries and so on. That was the financial system of the country not too many years before we got there, to give an idea of where they were.

Q: Do you have any examples of the structure at that time? Everything was hand written, I suppose? Filing system?

PODOL: The filing system: you'd didn't have filing cabinets. That didn't exist. You put things on shelves. You'd have a bundle of papers, and you'd tie them up with a ribbon. In some offices in the field, they'd hang them from the ceiling because they didn't have space for them. How you found anything-

Q: How did an action take place? A decision was made and how was it implemented? How did the system work?

PODOL: You issued orders and you assumed they would be carried out. Let me give you a couple examples of the problems working there. We had an advisor with the equivalent of the General Accounting Office. His job was to train the accountants for the field offices. His time was up and I went to see the head of the General Accounting Office and said, "He's done his job. He's going home and he won't be replaced." The man said, "No, you can't do that to me. You've got to give me an advisor." I said, "He's done his job. Why?" He said, "Because my Minister will not pay any attention to what I tell him, but your advisor, if he goes to the Minister and says, 'You've got a problem. You've got to do something,' he'll be listened to." This was the first time I came to realize that there was a role for the foreigner that one hadn't appreciated before, at least in Nepal.

Q: Did you find yourself in that situation?

PODOL: Yes, which meant you had to be very careful of what you said and did, because it could have an impact beyond what you might appreciate. A part of it's the caste system. Nepal is a Hindu Kingdom. The northern third of it is Buddhist and isolated, but the southern two thirds are Hindu. It's a Hindu Kingdom and caste is extremely important. You didn't give much weight to somebody who was below you in the caste system. A small example: one of my very closest friends - I mean, social as well as work-wise - was a senior official in a Ministry. I went into his office one day to talk to him. He's sitting in his chair about 1½' from the window behind him and I'm sitting across the desk and we're chatting. The sun had burst through the clouds and it was bothersome. He had a shade right behind him, within arms reach, but he wouldn't touch it. He called in his administrative assistant and told him to lower the curtain, which he could have done by reaching back in five seconds. But that's the mentality you're dealing with. You have to learn to work with it.

Q: How did you find working with the Nepalese?

PODOL: The Nepalese are extremely different from the Indians, which we'll get to. The Nepalese were very low key, very nice people. So, they were easy to sit down and talk to. But their ability to get anything done was extremely limited because they had no resources. If you

can't reach your field people to talk to them or communicate in any way with your field people, how can you run a government? How can you do anything? The government was limited pretty much to the valley, the Kathmandu Valley and the southern strip, which was called the "Terai," which was level land. It had very little influence in the mountains.

Q: And communication even in the Terai was very limited?

PODOL: Yes. We had built, under the AID program, some roads, and that was not too bad there.

Q: Were you aware of the larger purposes of having a foreign assistance program in Nepal, of why you were there?

PODOL: Partially. Some of it was highly classified and was kept from me. For example, we had a "police program," which was theoretically part of the Public Administration Division. But the one American in that program reported right to the Mission Director.

Q: Who was the Mission Director?

PODOL: Joe Toner. What you have to understand was going on in Nepal, this was the time of a lot of conflict in Tibet. Tibetans were up in arms against the Chinese in the mid-60s. I was about to say "we," but I don't know who the "we" is, but somebody was running guns to the rebels, the Tibetan rebels and the channels of supply were through Nepal. Once, I came across a mule train, loaded with weapons and ammunition in the hills going north. I think they were flying in supplies, too. So, that was part of our reason for being in Nepal, I think, though I'm speculating because I have no real proof of this. Secondly, we were worried about Chinese penetration. The Chinese were in Nepal. Some of them were talkative about their aims, because they were headed toward India. They just had built a road from Tibet, down to Kathmandu - the first road leading south. The bridges they built were heavy enough to hold tanks. One wondered why they needed bridges capable of holding tanks. So, this was the other concern: Chinese penetration into Nepal.

Q: The flavor of working within an environment like that- You were largely based within the government situation there?

PODOL: Yes, but I also had to run a division. We had three or four projects. I had people working for me on those projects. One was with the Census Bureau and another with Accounting. So, I had to manage also. So, I had a dual role.

Q: Were they introducing equipment at that time?

PODOL: I think there were some things basic- But nothing electrical. We didn't have power that you could- In fact, in the government offices in the winter, when the sun did not come out so frequently, people would have to move out on the balconies to work. They didn't have enough light in their offices, natural light. It was very primitive.

Q: Pretty basic living? How did you find living there?

PODOL: You should ask my wife that. The bulk of our food was imported from India, or if we had some from the States in our shipment. The electricity bounced up and down. You had to have regulators. We had a kerosene stove and refrigerator, which caused problems, and kerosene heaters. All water, including water for dishes, had to be boiled before using. If you put it in American terms, AID terms, living was pretty primitive. You didn't really suffer, but it was primitive by American standards. You just had to make do with what you had. Again, in a Hindu society, where jobs are very rigidly determined, you had to have a household full of people- This one did one task, this one did another task, and that was the way they had to function. So, it caused problems. But on, when the clouds lifted and you could see the Himalayan Range - what a beautiful sight. And flying along the mountains was something special.

Q: You were there how many years?

PODOL: Two years.

Q: Did you have any sense of the effect, or the impact, or the results of your work?

PODOL: Not really. Only that there was again, as in Turkey, a younger generation more in tune to change and development, who was interested in trying to do something, but had very few tools with which to work.

Q: You sent a lot of people for training abroad?

PODOL: Mass training was in India. We'd send them to the States. Once, I did a chart on participant training for the Embassy. We were all surprised. Their Civil Service was structured along British lines. You had Officers and then you had workers. So, you had about four levels, Officer level. And we were all surprised by the number of Officers that had been U.S. trained.

Q: Were we the major assistance program there at that time?

PODOL: India. Remember, India dominated the country and wanted to continue dominating. Another reason the Nepalese wanted us in there was to fend off the Indians, to give an alternative. India dominated Nepal, politically dominated Nepal, and tried to dictate policy. They had a large aid program.

Q: Did you have to deal with Indians at all?

PODOL: I didn't, no.

Q: They weren't involved in your public administration work much?

PODOL: No. The Indian Ambassador liked to dictate, sit in Cabinet meetings and things like that. But the U.S. influence was great. The Deputy Mission Director and the DCM used to have meetings with the Prime Minister in the evening in the Prime Minister's home - just the three of them. They'd sit down and talk, which was an indication of U.S. influence at that time.

Eventually, the Crown Prince, who's now King, went to school at Harvard for a year, to Britain for a year, so he got exposure to the West.

Q: Did you travel around the country much?

PODOL: Yes, but, as I mentioned, it wasn't easy. We had our own airline in AID: we had a helicopter and we had a short takeoff and landing aircraft. Using those, I saw most of the country. Sometimes, we went out by four-wheel drive vehicle, which took a lot longer. Slept on the ground or slept in the schoolhouse or whatever.

Q: You did a lot of walking through the countryside?

PODOL: I didn't, no. Some people did; I didn't. I didn't climb the mountains either.

Q: But you dealt with the village administrator groups and management groups?

PODOL: Yes.

Q: What kind of sense did you have of them and their commitment to their work? Was there any real development interest?

PODOL: Most of the civil servants were interested in trying to do something. But, again, they were working with very few resources. Nepal held its first elections for local government when I was there, called the "Panchayat." I was part of the process of studying how the elections were working out for the Home Ministry, with the local government. The first time the elections were held, the real power people in the villages poo-poo'd it, said, "This isn't going to be worth anything." So, people who were elected were popular people. When they found out then that these local councils had some power, the next set of elections, the people who had the muscle took the offices.

Q: The original people elected were fairly popular?

PODOL: Yes. These were real, democratic elections and the popular people won, but then the people who really had the economic or social power then took over in the second round.

Q: Who were those people?

PODOL: They would be landowners, or high castes.

Q: But you were involved in helping to set up this election process?

PODOL: Not set it up, but observe it, study it, report on it.

Q: Did you visit a number of the areas and watch the process?

PODOL: Yes.

Q: *And you found it fairly democratic?*

PODOL: Yes.

Q: *And well managed?*

PODOL: Yes. No such thing as violence or anything like that.

Q: *Or corruption or fraud?*

PODOL: No. There wasn't anything that seemed to be gained by it, so there was no corruption.

Q: *It was just a game?*

PODOL: Yes.

Q: *They had fairly good administration for getting it organized and set up?*

PODOL: Yes.

Q: *This was their first election, in 1960-?*

PODOL: It could be 1966, around that period. That was their first experience with local elections.

Q: *And this was in all parts of the country?*

PODOL: Yes.

Q: *Do you have any sense of what happened since then, if it's continued?*

PODOL: Yes. What continues is the classic fight between centralized authority and local authority, their power, which we seem to have in our own country. They've been going through that for 30 years now.

Q: *How would you characterize the development type organization? What were they trying to do?*

PODOL: The name of the game to get central government resources, money, because they could build a few roads or a health clinic or a school. It was that basic. That's really all you had.

Q: *And these were AID projects in many respects?*

PODOL: Right. We had one project where we were working with the government printing plant, printing textbooks, compiling and printing textbooks.

Q: *Anything more on your Nepal experience?*

PODOL: I think that's about it. It sure gave one a sense of timing, the importance of timing in getting anything done.

Q: *What do you mean by that?*

PODOL: Well, that in a country like Nepal, you had to settle for the very minimum amount of change or implementation in your time, because of the nature of the situation. When you got to another country that was far more advanced, you could get a lot more things done in the same period of time.

Q: *In the sense of how long it took to get things accomplished?*

PODOL: The country wasn't ready for development. It didn't have the manpower base. It didn't have the physical infrastructure. It had neither and there was the question of what kind of change those in power would tolerate.

Q: *What I presume was one of your efforts was to start the process of building that base?*

PODOL: That's what we were doing.

HENRY E. MATTOX
Development Officer, USAID
Kathmandu (1966-1967)

Dr. Henry E. Mattox began his Foreign Service career in 1966 as an Economic/Commercial officer in Nepal. His career also included positions in the Azores, Brazil, Haiti, the United Kingdom, Egypt, and France. Dr. Mattox was interviewed by William N. Dale in 1993.

Q: *When you were in Kathmandu, I gather from what you've said, we had an AID program of a kind.*

MATTOX: A very large AID program. The AID program had been there longer than the embassy. It was the senior service in other words. It had the largest compound, the largest building, by far the largest budget, the largest staff, and so on.

Q: *Was it entirely of a developmental nature?*

MATTOX: Yes. We had nothing like the case in Latin American countries. The Servicio approach in Latin America was funding for certain bureaus within the local government--funding from American aid to directly support the activities of a given governmental organization. We

didn't do that in Nepal. We used Indian rupees converted into Nepalese rupees from the surplus holdings in Delhi essentially to buy import materials for development purposes for the Nepalese government. The only dollar expenditures were those of the American technicians who were assigned there. Yes, it was almost 100% development.

Q: Do you feel that it was successful? That it made a lasting difference?

MATTOX: Despite the fact that I was there for four years, I can't really answer that because it takes a much longer time. I know one program was very unsuccessful. No, I won't say a disaster. The family planning was unsuccessful, but it was unsuccessful in connection with the unsuccessful nature of the family planning program in India, a much larger program.

One program was successful, as far as I could tell, the Peace Corps. Not strictly AID, of course. There were some AID educational programs indirectly related to development that were, I think, fairly successful.

Turning Nepal into a garden spot, and the industrial center of the Himalayas, no. None of that happened. I have not been in touch in more recent years so I don't know what's going on there. I suspect not a great deal. I suspect there's nothing a great deal different from what it was when I was there 20 years ago.

Q: I believe you were there when Carol Laise was the ambassador. Did she take a great interest in the developmental work of the AID program?

MATTOX: Yes, she did. Incidentally, she went by the title Madam Ambassador. She did not like ambassador, and as you know, she was married to Ambassador Bunker over in Vietnam. She took an interest in AID matters, but she did not involve herself directly in those things because she was a former political officer. And political officers almost by definition are not all that interested in economic questions. She had me appointed....I was Second Secretary of Embassy and Economic/Commercial officer. But she had me appointed as special assistant to the AID director also, with an office over in the AID compound. So I had two offices. I could hide in either one, it didn't matter.

I was supposed to keep tabs on what the AID program was doing and keep her informed, which I tried to do. It was relatively easy for me to do that because I had very good working relations with the two AID directors who were there during my long tenure. One was Jack Benz, and the other...unfortunately I hadn't thought that I'd have to know his name, so therefore I can't think of it...oh, Carter Ide. They were both very good officers. I lived next door to them, and I had offices near theirs at the AID compound, so we got along famously.

She was interested in such questions, but only in some broad sense.

Q: I suppose she spent a good deal of time traveling back and forth to Vietnam at that period.

MATTOX: Well, not nearly as much as I'm sure she would have liked to have done because Ambassador Bunker...a remarkable man, incidentally, really a remarkable man...Ambassador

Bunker would get over to visit in Kathmandu about once a month, or once in six weeks. And then they would reverse the procedure the following month, or the following six week period. The visiting back and forth was justified as R&R, which he needed of course, and the use of a military flight was justified, I guess, on the basis that when the flight came over from Vietnam, it would bring American Foreign Service people to spend a little decompression time in Kathmandu. I went once with her and it was justified on the basis that I was going on a study mission, which I did. Studying some of the economic development programs that we were conducting in South Vietnam, especially in the Delta region.

She was fairly busy even though it was a quiet post. And God knows, he was busy.

CAROL CLENDENING LAISE
Ambassador
Nepal (1966-1973)

Carol Clendening Laise was born in Virginia in 1917. She received a bachelor's degree from American University in 1938. She worked for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and joined the Foreign Service in 1955. Her career included positions in India and Nepal. Ms. Laise was interviewed on April 17, 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Now we move to 1966 when you were appointed ambassador to Nepal. How did this come about?

LAISE: The White House took the initiative because Lyndon Johnson wanted to increase the number of women ambassadors and no nonsense about it. Since that was in my area, it was thought that it would be a good place to send me.

Q: What were our interests in Nepal at the time?

LAISE: It was mainly contributing to their economic development in a way that would enhance regional stability, being a buffer state between India and China. We have since seen that, if a buffer state fails to play that role, you can get into a lot of trouble in Afghanistan and a lot of trouble it creates in terms of instability in the area. The feeling was that it was important for Nepal to maintain its independence and reduce the possibility of a conflict between India and China in Nepal.

Q: When did you arrive in Nepal?

LAISE: Early December 1966.

Q: How did you find the embassy there?

LAISE: It was first class. My deputy was Harry Barnes, who later became ambassador to India, Chile, and Romania. We had a very strong AID mission with some very able there as well and extensive Peace Corps [activity].

Q: How was our Peace Corps and AID program? What were they doing and how effective were they?

LAISE: I felt that our AID program was well run. It had good leadership. Because we were using block Indian rupees largely, it meant that we could be responsive to local needs rather than often having to follow the dictates of domestic interests in the United States which might not be appropriate. It was really related to the local needs and, I think, did a great deal to expand the educational system of Nepal, to develop its agricultural programs. Nepal in those days was feeding itself. It was mainly in the field of agriculture and health. We eliminated malaria working with the WHO and the government. I think we did sound and sensible programs in the AID field because you were starting from scratch. There was one school in Kathmandu in 1950, no universities, and no vocational education. Disease was rampant and family welfare just didn't exist. I think we have had quite sensible programs of AID.

The Peace Corps contributed enormously to it because it's the country in which the Peace Corps had an appropriate role. It is a very rugged country that doesn't have a lot of effective administrative controls extending throughout the country. The Peace Corps was willing to go out and live in these very deprived conditions and really got very attached to the people and to the efforts that were being made to assist them. They really did, it seemed to me, make a contribution. For example, I remember talking to some of the roads people. Some of the projects my husband approved when he was also ambassador to Nepal ten years before I got there were dedicated when I was there. In other words the foot bridges over some of the rivers that would enable communication and transportation during the monsoon period, on foot admittedly. The rivers would become so high during the monsoons that, unless you had bridges, you couldn't get across. It was thought at the time in the late 1950s that we could appropriately provide bridges to improve communication and transportation and, ultimately, the administrative system in Nepal.

I asked when I dedicated several of these why it had taken so long. Of course, from an AID point of view, they were sitting down in a field painted over to prevent rusting. This was an example of a horrible waste. Well it wasn't a horrible waste. It just took time to organize the administrative underpinnings and the means of getting those things in place. First of all, they didn't have any statistics to determine--there were a limited number of bridges--where the need the greatest. There wasn't enough political structure for even political pressure to make a determination of that sort. So they had to improve their administrative structure to find out where most appropriately they could be used. Then the means of organizing local labor to help install these things. You couldn't take everybody up in Kathmandu to do it. That's where the Peace Corps came in. They were the local catalysts for helping organize local labor to contribute local labor that was needed to install these things.

My perception, at any rate, is that the Peace Corps has had a real role to perform in Nepal where it has not necessarily in some other countries.

Q: This is my impression, too. What type of government did you have to deal with in Nepal in the capital of Kathmandu when you were there?

LAISE: The same as it is today. The king rules. In the days when I was there he preferred to retreat behind the scene and exercise his power more indirectly as far as the public was concerned and tried to thrust the government into the front spot to take charge and also to deal with us and the other countries as well as the AID donors, etc. Basically, the father of the present king was much more preferred to strengthen his government so that, while he was the ultimate arbiter which was well known, he didn't seek to be front actor.

Q: Who was the king you dealt with?

LAISE: Mahendra. He died while I was there and the present king came into power, but he wasn't crowned until three years later. I had already left but I went back on the delegation. This king, more impatient, wanted to do things and he had a lot of young technocrats around him. He didn't have the patience to work behind the scenes. He got more directly involved ruling.

Q: How effective did you find the government?

LAISE: We invested a lot of money during the period of our AID mission and program there as we did in India, in community development and in trying to enlarge the participation in the government. This was based on the theory that people get involved in their own fate and future. They enlist their cooperation which you have to if you are going to provide the initiative for getting things done. We had a lot of rural development projects aimed at this, but they eventually dwindled in effectiveness, although in theory the monarch wants to decentralize and push the responsibilities down to where the people are. If they still want to keep control and prevent things from getting out of hand as they see it politically, and they pull in the reigns all the time, then people won't stick their necks out and simply will not be independent. They'll wait for the directives to come down from higher authority before they'll do anything.

Q: Did you have any feeling that the king was trying to use the United States as a counterbalance between China and India?

LAISE: There's no question that the king and, indeed, the government of Nepal attachés importance to the United States presence there as a balancing factor in their struggle to keep going and to be able to deal with the counter pressures of India and China.

Q: Did you get involve in any sort of Chinese-Indian pressure problems when you were there?

LAISE: What happened while I was there, the warning that I kept getting from the Nepalese when I went there was, "Don't look at us through Indian eyes." We were perceived to be cooperating with the Indians, as indeed we were. We could have used all our PL 480 rupees in the development process without the Indian cooperation. Our goal at that time was very much to prevent development of Chinese communism in Nepal, and so was India's after India and China split. That tended to put India and ourselves in a position of common interest in Nepal. The

Nepalese saw it that way and they were very much afraid that we were basically willing to be led by India. They wanted us to deal with them as an independent factor.

Then when Nixon went to China in 1971, this simply confirmed in the Nepalese mind that we were more open to understanding their problem, but it certainly confirmed in the Indian mind that we were no longer on the same side, so to speak.

Q: Did you get warning beforehand in order to tell the king that we were on our way?

LAISE: No. It was a shock to everybody. This also was 1971 and one doesn't know how much the tilt to Pakistan had to do with the fact that Pakistan was helping us in this China move. Nobody knew anything about it. I think Nixon or Kissinger--I don't know which one--had just been in India, went to Pakistan, and then he went to China.

I remember saying to the Indian ambassador, "I hope to heaven he told Mrs. Gandhi what was going on before he left."

He said, "I hope so, too."

But he didn't. So it was a real clap of thunder to the Indians. The combination of this plus the Bangladesh war in which we tilted toward Pakistan--

Q: What did we actually do or is it just verbal?

LAISE: The thing that was most threatening as far as the Indians were concerned was sending the aircraft carrier Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal. That was the symbol of how far we were prepared to go to take on India. Actually, my understanding is that we really weren't thinking of India so much as getting a message to the Soviets over the Indian head. Of course, the Indians saw it as entirely aimed at them.

Q: We sent an aircraft carrier in at the time of a war, where the Indian would perceive this and yet it was somebody's bright idea in Washington that This would be a good way of giving a show of force to the Soviets. This is when geopolitics goes mad. It sounds like an academic exercise that they play at the Pentagon. [Laughter] Did you ever hear from anybody aside from your old bureau saying, "My God, you can't do this"?

LAISE: I think there were real problems back here in dealing with this situation. Sure, the bureau spoke up. I know that, but Kissinger wouldn't have it. He tended to rely on raw data from the CIA rather than assessments of people who had served there over a period of time.

Q: Again this is just pointing this out as one of the problems within the diplomatic or foreign affairs context. Sometimes raw data which comes from the CIA sounds so much more attractive and you feel that maybe this has a greater validity than people who are sitting there, essentially reading the newspapers, talking to the people, etc. Their balance of the overt side sometimes is overwhelmed by the covert side, particularly operators who are back in Washington. They feel they have their control on something that nobody else knows about. It's dangerous.

LAISE: I think it is because the raw data basically needs to be put in context. In this case I think it was not. The source was considered very good and, therefore, Indian attentions were regarded as of great concern here in Washington. That's why they acted.

Q: Now did the Nepalese feel about both the Bangladesh war and the American tilt towards Pakistan?

LAISE: Nepal is in the same position as every other small country surrounding India. Their basic concern is India. As you know, right now the Indians are almost strangling them with being unwilling to let goods go through to Nepal. The Nepalese are now without salt, without POL, without some of the necessities of life because the only way anything gets into Nepal--a landlocked country--is through India. India is using that to its advantage to get some political concessions--I don't know what, and neither do the Nepalese, I gather. The point is that the Nepalese tend to be very cautious in their relationship with the Indians but very sympathetic with their other neighbors because all of them feel the Indians increasingly flexing their muscles.

Q: I wonder if we could talk a bit about the relations between Nepal and China while you were there in 1966 to 1973.

LAISE: My impression during that period of time is that the China-Nepal relations were cordial. China conducted itself largely on a government to government basis. They had an AID program and bought a lot of good will by building roads in Nepal. They built a road from the Tibetan border to Kathmandu and then they built a road from Kathmandu to Koch Bihar and it was very much a turn-key project. They actually came in and did it. The Nepalese themselves are not very much involved. Of course, this created strains between India and Nepal. India wanted to make sure that the Chinese were not operating anywhere near the Indian border and they always sought to make sure that the Chinese contribution to Nepal was the least sensitive politically as possible. Nepal was constantly very conscious of this tension and sought to benefit from the Chinese relationship, using it as a point of pressure and leverage on India but recognizing the limitations. I believe, from the intelligence we had as well as what the Nepalese were telling us, that the Chinese were counseling the Nepalese to maintain good relations with India and not to consider that, if they got into trouble with India, China was going to rescue them in any way. You can imagine, Tibet is much more of a problem for China than Nepal, and they certainly were not wanting to provoke something in Nepal which would cause them to have to extend their operations through Tibet to Nepal. Of course, Nepal was not at the stage of development where the Chinese were investing very much in the Chinese wing of the Communist Party.

Q: During the period that you were there, we went through some major changes in our attitude towards China. We were thinking of China as being an expansionist country--all communist countries by definition were expansionists and were preying on their neighbors. This was a keystone of our whole policy until the opening of the door to China again. Before the Nixon visit to China, what were we telling the Nepalese about China and relations with China?

LAISE: Our stance was pretty clearly lined out in several of Henry Kissinger's or the President's report to Congress on the state of the world. Our interest, and certainly the posture that I took in

Nepal, was in regional stability in that area and, therefore, the self-reliance and the orderly development of Nepal we considered to be in our interests because it was a way of sustaining balance in the region. I made it very clear that our interests in Nepal were identical with Nepal's own interests, that is, to maintain its independence and contribution to regional stability. We were the major non-aligned country in Nepal. [Laughter]

Q: Did the members of the Nepalese government or the king come to you from time to time to chat about this?

LAISE: Their great concern from the beginning of my period of time was that their concern that we would see Nepal through Indian eyes and not see it as Henry Kissinger put it in the reports to the Congress as an important strategic geopolitical area for maintaining balance in that area between China and India.

Q: Nepal seemed to play a fairly active role in international politics in its relations. It seemed to want to extend itself beyond being just a small mountainous kingdom. Did you have this feeling?

LAISE: We encouraged them that their role could be a constructive role in the international scene. They rely very heavily on the United Nations as the guarantor of their independence, and they wanted to make sure everybody in the U. N. knew where Nepal was and what its problems were so that if anything should happen from India or China, they could count on support in the United Nations. So they played an active role in the United Nations. They contributed troops to peacekeeping forces. We encouraged them in that. As you know, the Gurkhas are world famous as fighters and so that was a constructive role for them to play. We encouraged them in doing so.

Q: You must have been involved with securing votes from the Nepalese in the United Nations voting process on issues which often had no immediate concern to Nepal. How did you find this work?

LAISE: Generally, Nepal understood and were helpful to the extent that they could be helpful. They were members of the non-aligned group but they were not all that vocal, and very often on important votes they did support our position. The one area, of course, where they did not--but that was not surprising--was our continued drive to prevent the People's Republic of China from being represented in the U. N. Always they took a balanced point of view and it wasn't balanced against us. It wasn't necessarily balanced for us, but basically they have been cooperative in the U. N.

Q: Did you find the powers that be in the Department of State were appreciative of Nepal's role and were not pushing you to get them to do more things than you felt was prudent?

LAISE: No. As a matter of fact, I think our relationship was a remarkably harmonious one between a big power and a small power. When I remember the state visit of the King of Nepal here in 1967 and President Johnson, I understand from people in the White House, enjoyed the visit. First of all, it was a beautiful time of the year, the first of November, and he is one of the few people who came to visit the President who didn't ask him for anything. [Laughter] He was inclined to be very considerate. I think it's true throughout Washington, whether in the Executive

Branch or the Legislative Branch, there is a natural sympathy for Nepal because of the feeling of having to live as a neighbor dominated by India. Their problems are understandable and one basically has a natural sympathy for their situation.

Q: Did the United Kingdom have a special relationship. Even in today's paper there's a mention of the use of the Gurkhas, etc. as troops. Did you find that the British ambassador was a particularly powerful person in Nepal or not?

LAISE: When I was there it seemed to me the most important presence that they cultivated and attached significance to was the American presence. It was manifested in the form of economic assistance, but Nepal chose to interpret that as having a political importance as well. England did have a special relationship in the sense that not only the past so much but the fact that--after all, let's remember that Nepal is one of only two countries in Asia that was not occupied by a foreign power, Nepal and Thailand. The British had a political representative there but they never occupied Nepal. So Nepal was always considered to be an independent and free country and not having been occupied by a foreign power. The British had great admiration for the fighting quality of the Gurkhas, and to this day they sustain a Gurkha regiment. In principle it was agreed, while I was there, that the regiment would be phased out because a self-respecting country doesn't like to consider itself providing mercenaries for a foreign power. So it was agreed in principle that this would be phased out, but the British way of dealing of this problem is so experienced and diplomatic that in fact what happened--because really the Nepalese didn't want to lose the hard currency represented by this--was that the phase-out would be gradual. Well it's never happened although in principle it was agreed that it would. It serves the purpose of both countries to continue it. In the case of Britain, with all their troubles in Northern Ireland which makes a heavy call on their other troops, they use the Gurkhas where they can use them and need them. In the case of the Nepalese, it's hard currency that they need, so it's a mutually convenient arrangement.

Q: Also, the Gurkhas are a very powerful propaganda tool for the Nepalese because Nepal is really known because of the history and fame of its troops. Otherwise, it would be another Bhutan or something like that. [Laughter]

LAISE: They have helped establish the fame of Nepal and that's perfectly true. The other thing is that the British have handled it very well. When I was there, they continued to return to the country. They didn't become expatriates. The British handled the whole operation extremely well. The British royalty continue to be a model for the way in which the Nepalese royalty conduct themselves and so there is a special tie because of the two royal families. It's a tie of importance in many respects because the British know how to handle royalty so they have the respect of the Nepalese. I don't think their power position is the equivalent of ours in the larger game, but they exercise a very, very useful role.

Q: How did the war in Vietnam play in Nepal? We're talking about the period of 1966 to 1973, and for a good part of this time your husband, Ambassador Bunker, was in Vietnam. How did the Nepalese government and king view our war there?

LAISE: I have the impression that they were very worried when Ambassador Bunker went to Vietnam and they were fearful that we would exert pressure on them to play a role in Vietnam. As you can imagine, American generals would have been delighted to have had Gurkhas down in Vietnam. At no time was any suggestion ever made of this and there was no pressure exerted on the Nepalese government either from Washington or by us in this regard. Therefore, the Nepalese reciprocated by equal restraint and they never made any adverse comment about our involvement in Vietnam. Indeed, when the Tet offensive occurred in 1968, they were terribly concerned on a personal basis about Ambassador Bunker. So they showed very great personal concern for him. To the extent there was any discussion with anyone who understood the larger problems, I think that I can be correct in saying that they were sad to see us bogged down there because they considered our role extremely important in Asia. I'm not sure that they agreed with our method of achieving our goals, but they were sympathetic to our goals. As I say, they exercised restraint in never being critical.

Q: You weren't called upon to put any particular pressure on them.

LAISE: No, not at all.

Q: During the period of the "flower children," were you involved with dealing with them coming to Nepal and living a different life, particularly getting involved with drugs, hashish, and things of this nature?

LAISE: When I went there, Kathmandu is the place to be on the hippie trail. There certainly were a lot there, but I didn't get terribly involved. The consular section on the whole could handle it because, essentially, it was once analyzed as we were thinking about this, to get to Kathmandu Americans have to cross an ocean whichever way you look at it. It meant that they had some financial backing or support somewhere at home, unlike the Europeans who could drive to Kathmandu and arrive penniless and be very much of a problem for their embassies. In our situation, usually you could work it out with families and things like that. It was not for us as large a problem as it was for some of the European embassies.

Q: Was the problem spread around throughout enough of the other nations so that the Nepalese didn't look upon the Americans as being a particularly dissolute group of people, or did they look upon this as being an occidental problem?

LAISE: I think it was fairly international. The same was true when it came to stealing and being involved in illegal smuggling of art objects out of Nepal. I'm glad to say the American Embassy was never involved. It was much more of the French--

Q: What was this? You mean other embassies' personnel themselves were involved?

LAISE: They may or may not have been embassy personnel but citizens of those countries. The finger was much more pointed at them than at us because there are great art treasures in the Kathmandu Valley. It's an open-air museum. Things like this [pointing to some statues] are very much in demand. We're a great suction point, and no doubt a lot of this has ended up in America

but it came through Europe. In Kathmandu itself it was the Europeans who were much more suspect than the Americans.

Q: There was a visit there by the then Vice President Spiro Agnew in 1970. How did that go? This must have been the highest level person to ever go there.

LAISE: It was indeed. It went very well. The Nepalese were delighted to have such a high-level visitor from the United States. It had a lot of interesting developments in connection with it. As you can imagine, the security arrangements for a vice presidential visit are about the same as for a presidential visit. So we had an advance team that came out well before Christmas and spent Christmas with us. They wanted to change everything around to suit the public relations requirements here in the United States, but the reception at the airport area was not one where you got the best light for pictures. They wanted to change the area for the reception. They also wanted to make a sweep of the palace and all the palace environments before the Vice President went there for a meeting with the king. In each case, the Nepalese were very skillful in evading their demands. [Laughter] It got very contentious there at the end when the Nepalese were refusing to let our security people go in to the palace quarters.

I kept trying to assure them that they were going to get in before the Vice President went, but they were doing a lot of remodeling and fixing things up. They were going to wait until that was finished. They were going to show us their last problems in remodeling as a matter of pride. The impatience of our security people was just very, very obvious to the point of threatening that they would go in with guns fore and aft if they didn't get a chance to sweep the place.

The king's military advisor had assured me that they would get in at the right time and they did get in at the right time. The Nepalese very calmly did things their own way, and all this fuss and feathers that our people put up in quite a stew was ignored. Eventually, it all worked itself out.

I was fairly confident because I readily detected on the part of the king, who was then King Mahendra, the father of the present king, that since he was staging a wedding for his son shortly thereafter, the methodology that we were using to provide security to plan the thing, the detail with which we had planned--he was fascinated with it--he basically looked upon this as a dry run for what he was going to have to put on a few months later in the way of a wedding to provide security for visiting heads of state and other royal families and to educate his people in how to do these things. They were thoroughly cooperative. It wasn't that they were being uncooperative with us. It was just that their timetable and their pride in doing things right meant that they weren't going to expose themselves to criticism from us by a premature view of what they were doing.

I've been in other state visits like this, and to me it was remarkably lacking in friction with the host government considering the way our security people act.

Q: I think this is one of the elements that is often forgotten about in state visits. There can be a great deal of underlying tension because of both the impatience and the arrogance of our security people.

LAISE: The demands of our security people.

Q: Often the embassy gets caught in between and tries to balance both sides out with not always the greatest success. Although there are a lot of smiling faces on those of the dignitaries, underlying that there are an awful lot of hard feelings by people with whom you are going to be left to work with.

LAISE: That is correct. I remember a visit of President Carter to India. Of course, the Indians are very proud and very competent. The notion that the Americans were going to dictate to the Indians how they had to protect their President in the president of India's own house was an absolute insult, and as you say, total arrogance.

A friend of mine who was a lady-in-waiting just wanted to go to the bathroom. She wasn't even allowed to go to the bathroom. She finally just told the security fellow to shove off. "This is my president's house, not yours." [Laughter]

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add to the Nepal period of your career?

LAISE: I could talk for hours about things in Nepal that bear upon the way we sought to further our interests and the problems we ran into. There is the whole question of the validity of our economic development which was a question from the time I first went there. When I went up on the Hill for confirmation, a book had just come out on foreign aid in Nepal written by a candidate for a Ph.D. in the London School of Economics. Senator Fulbright used that as a basis for questioning me about whether aid in Nepal wasn't basically wasted and why were we doing what we were doing, etc. There still is a lot of criticism today of the amount of foreign aid going into Nepal and propping up a regime which is not being as attentive to some of the economic and political reforms that are desirable. Indeed, the World Bank has got a structural agreement with them to try to induce some reforms as a requirement for further assistance from the bank and its consortium of foreign donors. So there is the whole issue of economic development in a small country like this.

The second thing is the management of our own relationships in a climate where there is the rivalry between the Indians and the Chinese and the suspicion on the part of both concerning our role. This happened when I was there and is happening right now. India decided to use its trade and transit arrangements with Nepal in the renegotiation of them as a leverage to get Nepal to make political concessions to India that India felt were essential to its security. Nepal absolutely resisted. Our role in a thing like this is limited but important.

Q: Let's talk about the role of the United States as you performed it and saw it at the time in the India-Nepalese relationship.

LAISE: The evolution of our relationship in Nepal in relationship to India has been very interesting. Certainly, we alienated India in going into a military pact with Pakistan. Over the years our relationship with India since 1952 has matured and developed for a period of time into a more trusting relationship. We gave a vast amount of economic assistance to India and out of this grew a working relationship which was very effective. I think we contributed mightily to the

economic development and the [green revolution] of India, even though on all the issues of political importance to India we always seemed to be a different side.

Nevertheless, in relationship to Nepal in the period when Ellsworth was ambassador to India and when I was actually in the embassy in India, the relationship was such that we negotiated with the Indian government an arrangement whereby we would use blocked currencies generated from PL 480 rupees for an economic program in Nepal. In effect, this meant that since the major balance of payments problem for Nepal was Indian rupees, most of their imports came from India. Our rupee aid program was a way of helping them meet that balance of payments problem. It was done because Nepal was part of the common market of India. India welcomed our assistance in keeping Nepal looking south instead of north to China. So there was that degree of cooperation between us in Nepal that was not always evident in larger issues.

When we made the opening to China in 1971, the Indians saw that as changing sides, so to speak. They became much more concerned about our role in Nepal. As you know, they signed a friendship treaty with Russia growing out of that whole 1971 period. The Indo-Pak war, the so-called American tilt towards Pakistan, and the opening to China, all of these events caused a shift in the perception in Nepal of the great power relationships. It was seen that India and the Soviet Union were in collusion and that we and the Chinese were more friendly. I kept sustaining the position in Nepal that we were the only non-aligned country and, therefore, our interests totally coincided with Nepal's interest in Nepal.

It wasn't easy to persuade the Indians of that or, of course, the Soviets, but it meant that it was very important in how we carried out our work there so that our actions coincided with our words and that we were not pro anybody. We were pro Nepal and pro U. S.

That was the way I sought to sustain our position and the clarity of our position in Nepal. I always made it a point to make it clear both to the Nepalese--I was not speaking out of two sides of my mouth. I spoke this way to the Nepalese and I spoke the same way to the Indian ambassador. All the time I was there the Indian ambassador was people that I knew. I sought to make it perfectly clear that our interests in Nepal were not contrary to the Indian interests either and that they were kept informed as to what we were doing. After all, India has a major interest in Nepal that involves Indian security. They have a right to be concerned. We are very far away and Nepal is not that important in terms of our national interest, and it makes no sense whatsoever for us to conduct a policy that doesn't take account of India's interests as well.

Q: Did you find yourself keeping the Indian ambassador pretty much informed of what you were doing?

LAISE: Yes. I made it a policy because I genuinely believed that what we were doing was as much in the Indian interest as it was in Nepal and the U. S.

Q: How about with our AID program? Were we careful to make sure that the Indians knew what we were doing [since] we were using their money?

LAISE: That was the other thing that I had to do during my period of time which was to prepare the Nepalese. I didn't appreciate it until later how much they felt that our having a rupee aid program contributed to our looking at Nepal through Indian eyes. Politically, they seemed to attach more importance to having a dollar aid program. What they didn't know was how much more difficult it was for them to meet the terms of a dollar aid program than it was for a rupee program. [Laughter]

Q: You're talking about not only the paperwork but also the preparation and the reporting.

LAISE: I'm talking about the requirements for it where we would have congressmen and senators coming there concerned about our balance of payments. If they saw we were spending rupees which they felt was a dwindling asset of ours anyway for agriculture, education and health in Nepal, they thought, "Great. That's a fine way to use money that would otherwise lose value. It isn't a drain on our dollar resources and it is more power." They were less inclined to press for aid programs to meet political requirements of the U. S. than in where we were spending rupees.

In the case of a switch over to a dollar program, they were competing with other countries around the world. They weren't competing with anyone for the rupee program so they were having an international competition for funds. The projects had to stand up to certain political and domestic requirements of the U. S. and have it more closely monitored from the standpoint of our standards and not necessarily whether it related to the local situation quite so much. In that regard, there was less money available and higher standards [were] demanded of performance. They were not used to this. The important thing was to try to educate them to realize that, when they switched from a rupee program which we had to do in the wake of the developments between us and India and we ceased our rupee program altogether in Nepal--preparing the Nepalese for the difference in requirements was also a part of my task.

Q: How did you find the AID personnel who were sent out to you? Was the staff about the right size? Did it tend to get too big? Did it understand the situation?

LAISE: The AID program in Nepal had pre-dated even the embassy being in Nepal. I think there were certain times when, prior to my arrival there, it was probably fairly large. I think judgment is hard to arrive at because there was no administrative infrastructure in Nepal whatsoever for governments. We were trying to help them erect some of the infrastructure of modern government and, particularly, to develop a school system, to enlarge their agricultural capabilities, and to deal with malaria and their health problems. It probably did take a lot of outside assistance to get the whole thing started and the numbers were fairly large. By the time I was there, I think on the whole we had good AID leadership.

Q: Turning back to the more political side, you were saying that there was the Nepalese-Indian-United States connection. Did you have problems with the Department of State? So often instructions are sent out for political reasons to our ambassadors on a blanket thing--go out, tell them to do this or that--not just for United Nations votes but for other things. Then comes the battle that each individual ambassador experiences and realizes that this just doesn't play here and this is counterproductive. Did you have any battles that you can think of on this nature?

LAISE: I can't think of any that I had. The classic one was with my predecessor who got the annual instruction about going to the highest authority to solicit their vote in the U. N. for excluding the communist Chinese from the United Nations vote. This is recorded in Ken Galbraith's ambassador's journal. He got the same instruction. I think it did say, "Unless, in your discretion, it's counterproductive." He was trying to figure out what to do about it when the message from Kathmandu to Washington repeated to Delhi came in which our ambassador said, "The only person that would understand this instruction has gone to Calcutta to have his teeth fixed and I, therefore, have decided not to make the representation." [Laughter]

Q: Oh, of course. Could you tell us how the Nepalese reacted to having a woman ambassador?

LAISE: (Pause) Interestingly enough, the only time I got that question was in the United States. So I had much less of a mention of this in Kathmandu. I guess my perception, or assessment of the Nepalese reaction adds up to the fact that so long as the representative of the United States is competent, understands their problems, and is able to interpret it with results from Washington, they will give a cordial reception to that representative regardless of sex. I think the key factor is that they respect authority, and the United States is very important to them. And so long as the United States representative is one who is a person having the qualifications I mentioned, I think the question of sex doesn't enter in.

Q: Do you recall anything special about your first day? Were there any anecdotes or anything unexpected that happened?

LAISE: Well, it was . . . (Chuckles) Yes, there were unusual aspects. First of all, I was flown in on the attaché's plane, military plane. In those days, our attachés in Delhi were also accredited to Kathmandu, and in those days also, the attaché had an airplane at his disposal, one of the attachés. Therefore, I was flown up to Nepal in an American military plane. It was, I believe, a DC3. We got over the field and started to land, and then had to pull out of our descent and circle again because there were cows or sheep on the runway and they had to clear them off so that we could get in. So then we came in. I was met at the airport by somebody from the protocol office and by the then-chargé, who was Harry Barnes, and escorted to the residence. I suppose the most significant factor about that day was my having to tell Harry Barnes that I planned to be married within a month, in Kathmandu at the residence, to Ellsworth Bunker. I had to get his advice on how to organize it there in a way that it would not become public knowledge until the day of the event.

Q: That must have been a slight bombshell for Harry Barnes.

LAISE: Well, he says it was, but he likes a challenge and he rose to the challenge very well.

Q: How soon did you present your credentials?

LAISE: Within two days. In fact, I stayed in India until very near the time when I would present my credentials, simply in order not to be in limbo in Kathmandu. So I presented my credentials on December 5, 1966.

Q: Could you tell us something about the ceremony?

LAISE: Well, you know that I was only the second resident ambassador to Kathmandu. My predecessor and all of the other former ambassadors who were accredited from India had presented their credentials in quite a colorful and elaborate ceremony, being in horse-drawn carriages, taken to the city palace, with a morning coat, and a good deal of formality. By the time I had arrived in Kathmandu, however, the drill for presenting credentials had changed somewhat. The ceremonies at the city palace had ceased, the palace of the king had been dismantled and was being reconstructed in the form of a much more modern palace, so that the king was both living and working in what amounted to bungalows on the royal grounds. Therefore, appropriately, the ceremony was very simple.

One was expected to be in somewhat formal attire, though I do not believe that men wore morning coats then, although I can't remember entirely. But in any event, it was not altogether relevant for my situation, and I really had to create my own outfit because there was no precedent there nor very much to go by anywhere else. So I followed a tradition which has always stood me in good stead in any function in Kathmandu; it was to wear what you would wear under similar circumstance in the British court. In this case, it seemed appropriate to wear the kind of outfit that one would wear to a British garden party. So I wore a sort of beige and gold brocade dress and coat and hat to match. I took with me the country team, that was the custom, to meet and, I think, bow and shake hands with His Majesty, to have a few minutes of conversation, to present the withdrawal of the credentials of my predecessor and to present my own credentials. It was all a matter of some degree of formality. Then I presented to His Majesty each member of the country team, after which we withdrew and the ceremony was over, and it was very brief.

I did, at that time, indicate to His Majesty that I was bearing a letter from President Johnson, in response to a letter His Majesty had sent, and I would welcome the opportunity of an audience to have a substantive discussion at his earliest convenience. It turned out that His Majesty chose to grant that audience on Christmas day. I presented the letter explaining the background of the letter. It related to some extent to my mission, and it, in effect, constituted an agenda, shall we say, for my tenure there. Then at the end of our conversation on Christmas Day, I informed His Majesty that I would be getting married to Ellsworth Bunker on the 3rd of January. He seemed thunderstruck at the idea, and I do not know to this day what his initial reaction was, but in the event, he seemed very pleased and the Nepalese seemed to take it as a proper acknowledgment of their importance that, in effect, there were two American ambassadors resident in Kathmandu.

Q: What was the state of relations between the United States and Nepal at the time?

LAISE: (Pause) Nepal and the United States generally have enjoyed a cordial relationship. We were one of the early countries to establish a mission in Nepal. You see, prior to establishing a resident mission in Nepal, we did have a very large AID mission. We were giving a considerable amount of aid to Nepal, and helping in its economic development. I think Ambassador Bowles, in his first incarnation in India in 1952, I believe it was, signed the first agreement. I know that when my husband was also accredited in Nepal, a number of important projects were agreed

upon in helping to build the transportation system of Nepal, a certain amount of infrastructure, as well as assistance in the field of health, education, and agriculture; those were the major areas in which we were functioning.

There was a problem in our relationship at the time I arrived, and that was the basis of the exchange of letters between the king and President Johnson. It grew out of the fact, I believe, of several things. One was, at the time of the Tibetan uprising and the escape of the Dalai Lama, the CIA and the Indian government were cooperating in rendering assistance to the Khamba [tribesmen]. Some of the Khambas took refuge in northern Nepal, an area called Mustang, and were using that as a base of operations against Tibet, and Nepal felt that it threatened their nonaligned position and they were basically very uncomfortable with this. The fallout from that was, I believe, one of the causes of concern between the king and the United States.

The other was the fact that the AID mission had been there for some time as the major U.S. presence and was relatively unsupervised. I think there was a perception on the part of the ruling Nepalese-trained personnel, and I might say, trained with our assistance and the Indian assistance, that our mission was taking a rather proprietary air about the functions and activities in which they were engaged, and were forgetting to some extent that their role was advisers only. I sensed that the King and the Nepalese bureaucracy were seeking to, as it were, gain control of their own situation. Now I indicate that, I hazard the guess, that these were the two problems, because in the letter that was sent from the King of Nepal to the United States, there were no specifics mentioned. Their complaint was stated only in the most general terms of our interference in their internal affairs. It was therefore my task to assure them that the United States did not wish to interfere in their internal affairs, that our role was primarily that of a partner in their development. Indeed, our objective was to help develop self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and that to assure His Majesty that, should he have any complaints on this score, I was empowered to try to work out a harmonious relationship.

From that point on, I think it's fair to say that the confidence between us grew, and I think the way in which we handled ourselves and related to the Nepalese problems, and their own efforts to stand on their own feet, resulted in what I consider a healthy relationship.

Q: Did you have many problems with destitute Americans stranded in Nepal?

LAISE: No, they didn't present much of a problem for us because, since America has a large ocean on each side, a certain amount of affluence is necessary before a citizen can leave the country. They have to have plane fare. However, the continental embassies have a great many problems because people from Europe could manage to bum or thumb rides and land up there, and totally without any resources at all.

Q: Had the drug problem started then? (LAISE: Yes.) They had. Are Nepalese jails notoriously bad, the way they are in South America?

LAISE: Well, I don't know how they are in South America. I have not been in one, but I know that given the standard of living, they're not very comfortable. But on the other hand, as I

indicated earlier, the hazards are not as great there as they were in Turkey, where the punishment for drug use is so severe, in both Turkey and Afghanistan.

Q: Yes, so that people were not retained in jail?

LAISE: No.

Q: How long was it, Ambassador, before you felt at home, settled in, both in the residence and at work?

LAISE: Well, first of all, I had visited Kathmandu before, in my previous capacity. I was extremely fortunate that the previous ambassador and his wife had built a very comfortable residence. The ambassador's wife had trained a very competent group of staff. And while I had supposed that I might have to have some kind of special help in the form of a housekeeper to run the house, it did not, in fact, turn out to be necessary, because my predecessors had done such a fine job of training the Nepalese staff, that with a minimum of guidance from me, they were thoroughly competent to run the house.

Q: So ambassadors really never get time off, do they? (Both chuckle) Could you tell us something about your relationship with the king? Did you see him often?

LAISE: Well, he was the head of state. Since my predecessors were there, he had grown into the job--I say grown into the job, because the kings of Nepal did not rule Nepal for a hundred years. The ruler, in effect, was the prime minister, who was of another family altogether, and they were the hereditary rulers of Nepal for a hundred years. In 1950-51, that particular Ráná family, who were the traditional prime ministers, were overthrown by an effort on the part of the Nepali Congress Party to move Nepal from an authoritarian form of government toward a constitutional democracy built on a British model. The Nepali Congress Party, with the assistance of the Indians, did bring about restoration of the king of Nepal to the throne. And the king then moved in the direction of a parliamentary democracy, and they actually had an election, a parliamentary election, and the election of a prime minister in the early sixties.

But then the king who then came to the throne (1956 actually was the coronation of the second king to actually rule in recent times) was the one who carried through on the elections. I think he had anticipated that there would be a much greater fragmentation and split in the voting, and he would have the balance of power, when in fact, it did not work out that way, and the prime minister had a fairly solid support.

I think it was the perception of the king of Nepal that this form of government, which he felt was too dependent on support from India, was threatening to his position and would perhaps deny Nepal the total independence that he sought for Nepal. He, in effect, set aside the result of the election and took power directly himself, and instituted subsequently a form of government which he said was more in line with Nepal's traditions of the panchayat system, in which there were direct elections at the village level but indirect elections to the legislature, and the prime minister was appointed by the king.

There'd been liberalization efforts made through the years in that system, but it's still very much a system where the power lies with the king. Now, I mention all this because it's indicative of the fact that there was a trend prior to my time, a trend away from a constitutional parliamentary democracy toward a more centralization of power in the king. That was accompanied internationally by the king's effort to position Nepal in an entirely neutral position as between their neighbors, India and China, as well as the rest of the world. And in order to preserve that posture of neutrality in spirit as well as in form, the king always balanced his appointments and his engagements to seek to avoid being a captive of any one group.

Therefore, any American ambassador seeking to have a relationship with the king always had to keep that in mind. Therefore, I always observed the formalities. Any problems that we had between us on issues, whether voting at the United Nations or issues of a volatile nature--which were very few, I must say, and related primarily to our economic assistance program--I would first try to sort out with the government. It was only when I could not get satisfaction from the government that I would seek an audience with the king, and I would assure that the king was fully briefed on what the problems were, through his government, before I sought an audience. That was on the formal side.

Of course, there were always many functions of a social nature in which one would encounter Their Majesties. Because every time a donor country or the U.N. or a multilateral agency would complete a project, there was always some kind of a ceremony connected with the inauguration of the project, and very often it would involve--if it were a major project--it would involve the royal family, and all the diplomatic corps were invited. Also we had many visitors, state visitors from countries around the world, and functions were given for them and the diplomatic corps were always invited. So there was a good deal of social interaction of that nature, where one had a chance to visit with the royal family. Then it was also the custom of Their Majesties to accept private engagements that were unpublicized for various functions at various embassies. Through that manner, it was possible to develop more of a personal relationship. And so, let's put it this way, in a long answer to your first question, it was a good relationship developed over a period of time in the context of the way Nepalese do business.

Q: I see. Do they have a national costume that the king wore? Was he in a uniform of some sort?

LAISE: Yes, they have a national dress, which is the traditional Nepalese outfit for men, of a sort of tight pants and a tunic-type blouse, and then they always wear a black Western coat over it, and a Nepali hat.

Q: Could you describe the sort of relationships you developed with other members of the cabinet, or other host government officials and their wives?

LAISE: Kathmandu is a relatively small community of officialdom; there's a relatively small diplomatic corps. I think there were only fourteen missions there when I was there. The basis for developing relations with the host country officials in a country which is situated as Nepal is--and very cognizant of the importance of maintaining its nonalignment and its posture of neutrality--the development of relationship has a degree of formality to it, because it is important that the officialdom be perceived to be nonaligned in their relationships as well as having a

nonaligned policy. The government was quite strict about restraining official relationships because they were aware that the resources available to the diplomats could be very seductive to officials in a country such as Nepal. The United States certainly wanted to contribute to the government's independence and its perception of the importance of their officials not being corrupted by the largess of foreign governments, so we ourselves cooperated with this effort. Therefore, the kind of relationship that we had enjoyed when we had only an AID mission and we were the only major country there besides India, had changed over the years.

But even so, I think it's important to say that since the United States did play such a large role and had a large mission in the economic development effort, there were professional relations between U.S. representatives there in the AID mission and their counterparts throughout the ministries. I, as an ambassador, attended many of the functions that were held to honor trainees in education, in agriculture, and in health. We had visitors constantly from Washington who wanted to meet their counterparts. And all of that was part of the perceived valid relationship between Nepalese and our government. Because we had so much interaction of this nature and could build a social occasion around it, it meant that either I was visiting projects of ours where I would see the operation of our efforts in cooperation with the Nepalese on the job, or in Kathmandu, I would have the occasion to invite these people to the residence or to attend the function at the AID mission. And so, through the fact of our very extensive involvement in the economic development, there was no difficulty in getting acquainted with all the concerned officials, both cabinet officials, cabinet secretaries, and secretaries of the departments.

When you combine all the things that we were doing bilaterally with the fact that there were so many functions celebrating economic development projects of other missions, the UN organizations, there was the necessity always of us, of the United States having to coordinate our efforts with those of the UN organizations, since there was a consortium established under the [World] Bank, of foreign aid to Nepal. Both the UN and the UN agencies were always focusing on coordination of efforts. There was a lot of interaction coming about because of that. So that I guess I would say in summary that the economic development aspect of the embassy's mission was what preoccupied us mostly and afforded the opportunity for interaction with all levels of government.

Q: Is there a business class in Nepal?

LAISE: At the time I was there it was very limited.

Q: Were they working on educational problems, and health, building hospitals with the help of the U.N. and the U.S.? Was that part of the aid to Nepal?

LAISE: I think I indicated to you before that the American assistance was in the field of education, agriculture, and health. We also in prior years gave a lot of infrastructure. We built some roads and contributed some planes and even some auxiliary military assistance, but during my tenure the focus was almost entirely on agriculture, health, and education. What this meant was training. It did mean laboratory schools, special training facilities, curriculum development, teacher training. We assisted the Nepalese in building a number of important institutions, not just

in Kathmandu. In the health field we were working with the WHO in eliminating--I guess we eliminated malaria from Nepal.

In the agriculture field we were seeking to help develop improved methods for increasing crop production. Indeed, the United States was instrumental in working with the Nepalese to assure that. For example, Kathmandu, at one time, was just a one-crop area of rice, and our efforts were instrumental in introducing wheat and improved wheat seeds so that Kathmandu was transformed from a deficit food area to a surplus area for producing food. Now, a great impetus of our efforts was contributing to not only improved seeds and methods of development, but the organizational structure needed to bring it about, the cooperatives and the agricultural credit banks, and all of the infrastructure necessary to increase agricultural productivity; and for women, it included home economics and that sort of thing.

Q: Did you send people to the U.S., or was the training done on the spot?

LAISE: There was training on the spot--certain types of training in the U.S. For quite a number of years our AID project to Nepal [used] our blocked rupees in India, garnered from the PL 480 program to India. A great deal of it was used for training in India. It made a lot more sense because the methodology, the environment, and indeed the whole approach was much more geared to their way of doing things than it would have been in the United States. However, when it came to more advanced training in some of the areas, they did come to the United States.

Q: Would you discuss the role of women at the time you were in Nepal?

LAISE: Well, I indicated to you that when the King dismissed the prime minister and the government, he set about developing a new system, which he called the panchayat system, which he felt was more relevant to tradition in Nepal. He sought to construct a political system that would enlarge the participation of various segments of Nepal's society through a system that he felt would be less divisive than the political party system as we know it. What the panchayat system provided was that there would be representation in the legislatures, both the local and the national legislature, not along party lines but along class lines and group interest lines. I've forgotten now, but there were about five groups; one certainly was the educated group, one was the peasant group, and one was the women's organization. And my recollection is that class organizations were supposed to form a part of the political life of Nepal and be the basis of special representation in the legislatures to assure wide participation and yet to assure the clustering of interest, not on party lines, but along lines [of] self-interest defined according to class.

Of the five class organizations, the women's organization proved to be the most active and successful, because there were a group of women leaders in Kathmandu who came to prominence through this process, who were very, very active and very vocal. I think that there was no question that my appointment to Nepal was seen by them as a help to their effort to get recognition. When His Majesty first came to one of these private dinners that we had for him and the queen a few weeks after our marriage, he spent a fair amount of time explaining and trying to justify the changes he'd made in the constitution, because he was very much criticized, of course,

in the United States and in India for moving from a democratic constitution to a more authoritarian constitution.

He sought to explain to us the changes that he had made, and to show that he had a sense of humor he threw in the story--whether it was real or apocryphal, I don't know--but he said, "You know, one of the changes that my government sought to make was in our national anthem." He said, "You know there is a phrase in our national anthem. It's the equivalent of 'all good men should come to the aid of their country.' It should be 'all good men and women.' He said that it wouldn't fit into the cadence so he changed it to "all good people". But he said, "You know, when I proposed this, my political opponents accused me of doing this under the pressure of the new American ambassador--yielding to pressure from the American ambassador." But he was quite remarkable in the sense of wanting to bring women out more. I know that he played quite a role in trying to involve his wife in charitable things and give leadership to child welfare activities and to the women's organization and so on. So I had the sense that he was taking a considerable amount of pleasure in providing a more active role in the panchayat system for women. They took advantage of it, there's no question.

My residence was right next door to a women's college; I think they call it a college, but it was a school actually. The president of that was a good, extremely able and also a very vocal woman activist and a very loyal aide of the queen. I often went there for functions. I did everything I possibly could, of course, too. Whenever invited, I was glad to participate and do whatever I could to give recognition to what they were doing. It seemed to me that in that period of time there was a very definite emergence of women from the very traditional role.

Q: Prior to this period, women had not been educated?

LAISE: Well, men and women hadn't been.

Q: It was a universal thing?

LAISE: Yes. Well, you see, before the king came to power, and the revolution in '50-51, Nepal for a hundred years had been isolated from the rest of the world and ruled as a private estate of the ruling prime ministers. There was only one school, I guess, in the country; it was there in Kathmandu. The educational system virtually did not exist. For any education, the young men had to leave and go to India prior to that time. So there was virtually very, very little education anywhere in Nepal.

Q: How do the Nepalese treat children?

LAISE: Oh, they're very affectionate; very permissive and affectionate with children.

Q: Is education universal now?

LAISE: Yes, in principle, it's universal. And the facilities have developed remarkably. Now you go out to the countryside and see the schools and the children going to school. The quality of education, of course, still leaves something to be desired. And while an effort has been made to

have free and compulsory schooling at the early years, I think still it's not one hundred percent. One of the major roles that the Peace Corps has played in Nepal, and it's a fairly large Peace Corps--the number I gave to you of Americans in our mission did not include the Peace Corps; the Peace Corps numbered anywhere from a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty above that--their work has been in the field of agriculture and education and teaching English as a second language. They have played a very important role in the educational effort.

Q: Getting back to the mission itself, where did you place the greatest emphasis? You had said it was on aid, but I mean in your overall job--on representation, reporting, or negotiation? Obviously you did all three, but where was most of your time spent?

LAISE: (Pause) It would be very hard for me to divide it up. I don't want to use representation because representation has so much the connotation of entertainment.

Q: I meant it in the sense of presenting your country to the people, making good contacts. I wasn't thinking of it in the narrow sense of socializing, but in the diplomatic sense.

LAISE: Well, I think there's no question that the major part of it was spent in our economic development efforts. That really means being physically present and knowing what was going on, and negotiating, or directing negotiations, either with Washington or with the host country about the shape, the content, and the amount of money that would be devoted to these projects, and then arranging for meetings between our people and the Nepalese as a way of creating an environment in which we could achieve our objectives. But that's so intertwined I would not be able to break it out as to how much was spent on what.

Q: What about actually running the mission? What was the quality of your staff?

LAISE: No one really can function very successfully without the devoted and dependable performance of our local staff, and as far as the American staff is concerned, I think in all elements of our mission we had people who were dedicated and able and interested in their jobs. I suppose the one area where we could have done better was perhaps in the defense attaché side. But that's not surprising in a country where it's not all that important.

Q: Did Washington give you a free hand, and did they give you what you considered adequate policy guidance?

LAISE: I think that Nepal was an ideal situation because during my time most of our funding for our economic program came from blocked rupees, and since that did not require congressional appropriation, this allowed the embassy to adjust programs to the local requirements within certain established guidelines. It was a program we were able to adapt more to the local situation than is often the case with AID programs. I have to say that we were quite content to be in a position of writing our own instructions for the most part, because I don't think Washington generally was that much concerned about Nepal; it was not central to our national interest.

Q: No, our national interest at that time was pretty heavily on Vietnam, which leads me to the next question: Did the Vietnam War have any adverse effects on your embassy as it did in so

many other embassies around the world, where people demonstrated against the American people?

LAISE: No, Kathmandu (and Nepal) was remarkable, in that it was one area where Americans were, and as far as I know, still are, always welcome. There were no efforts on our part to violate Nepal's established position of nonalignment. I think there may have been some apprehension initially, shortly after our marriage Ellsworth went to Vietnam that it might somehow suck them in in ways they did not wish. But that was never at issue, and I think they grew to have confidence in our understanding of their situation. And indeed, it had a reverse effect, in my perception. Since Ellsworth had a U.S. military plane flying back and forth to Kathmandu--it was not a jet, it was an old type plane--and there was room for about thirty-odd people that he could bring up from Vietnam, it became a R&R place for some of our staff in Vietnam, and the Nepalese were more than happy to help them spend their money, and improve their foreign exchange position.

That was on the economic side, and on the more serious side of it, I got the distinct impression that since it was clear that we were trustworthy and we were not going to try to use them in any way in relation to Vietnam, or in a way that would violate their nonalignment, they were rather happy to have the United States Air Force know their geography because, in the wake of developments elsewhere in the world where small countries had been threatened by their neighbors, they were glad to have the United States well informed about the terrain and where they were in the event of need.

Q: I can see why they would, yes. What about the U.S. press? Did they come to Nepal often?

LAISE: We had an American stringer there, who had been there for years, who was a stringer for Reuters, Elizabeth Hawley. We sought to get an American wire service in there, but again, in accordance with their nonaligned posture, I think they decided they preferred to have European wire services. We really didn't have any resident American service represented there, as I recall. We did have visits from time to time from the resident correspondents of the New York Times and other papers in Delhi, or even some of the ones from Hong Kong or wherever who would come to Kathmandu and to report, the Christian Science Monitor, and so on. And of course, they would check in with me.

Q: What about the local press, such as it was?

LAISE: Well, they have quite an extensive vernacular press. There was one major English language daily, the English version of the Nepali version of a major newspaper. We were in constant touch with the local press. USIA has an office there and we had regular sessions with them, briefing sessions, and I had regular sessions with them. The more active, I suppose, was the Indian press representative.

Q: Did they often report on you when you would open schools or whatever you did as you went around the country?

LAISE: Oh yes, they did, yes.

Q: In a very positive way--never critical, I mean?

LAISE: No. No, no. The press is fairly well directed from the government. The Indian press could become mischievous. Our greatest problem always has been to assure that--and I felt it was very important--that the Indian representatives there as well as the Indian press fully understood what we were doing there and that we were not seeking to undermine their interests there; that we were friends and not working at cross-purposes. But, while our position in relation to the Indians was an understood one as far as the Indians were concerned, at the time that we altered our relations with China in 1971, the Indians tended to become much more worried about what we were doing in Nepal. They knew as long as we had the anti-Communist posture of the fifties and the sixties, that we were not a problem to them vis-a-vis China, in Nepal.

Q: When the Nepalese press wrote about you, was it as the ambassador or as a woman?

LAISE: No, as the ambassador.

Q: You didn't get a lot of these frivolous questions?

LAISE: Never. Well, I got it here in the United States, but not in Nepal. It never, never came up.

Q: You must have had a pretty heavy entertainment schedule, didn't you, with going to official things and giving official things?

LAISE: (Pause) Not as heavy as it might sound compared to what you might get in an embassy in a large country. Yes, there was a fair amount of attendance at functions and giving of functions during the course of the year. But, you know, let's keep in mind that this was a very small country and a very small diplomatic corps, and functions are much simpler in those countries.

Q: What sort of entertainment do they prefer? Did you give dinners or was it mainly the reception type?

LAISE: Well, certainly there were many receptions in connection with the ceremonies. I myself am not very enthusiastic about receptions and so my own functions, I sought to make tea, lunch, dinner, or even morning coffees. You see, the Nepalese working day begins at about ten until about five. They usually take their lunch or don't have any lunch. They have traditionally two meals a day, a late breakfast--it doesn't mean they don't get up early. They do get up early and then they have breakfast and go to work and then have an early dinner when they get home after work. So while officials would come to lunch you can understand that, given the fact that that's their work day, tea is a very, very important form of socializing in a country such as Nepal, or India too.

Q: Is that at the usual tea hour, of late afternoon?

LAISE: Yes. Another form of entertainment is very much of a treat given the fact that there were no Western movies there whatsoever. We were on the Army circuit of films. American films were always very popular, so that one of the privileges we had was to use our films as a form of representation.

Q: Yes, it seems to be a successful function in any country. Did you take any particular steps to make certain that your young officers got the proper training?

LAISE: Well, because we had had a large AID mission there, orientation programs in Nepal were established well before I got there for whole families. And it was fairly important in a country such as that to have orientation for both the wives and husbands. The more functional training is more on-the-job training and since it's a small mission, you could use it. That's one of the reasons why I had an open collegial style. It helps in training the young officers. We always rotated the junior officers among the various functions, consular, economic, political, staff aide, and so on.

Q: And you kept close touch with their progress, I suppose. What about efficiency reports, did you write many of them, or just the DCM's? Did you review them?

LAISE: I had to write them on all the country team, then I reviewed them on a great many.

Q: Did you have inspectors come through? How did they treat your mission?

LAISE: Very well. We had both AID and state inspectors.

Q: What's your own opinion of your AID mission? How well did it function? Was it superior, average, inferior, or wouldn't you care to categorize it?

LAISE: (Pause) Well, I'm aware of the differing views that exist about AID missions. I guess I felt that Nepal was the kind of country where our AID and Peace Corps missions had a role. It was not substituting for what people of a country could do for themselves. The fact of the matter is that they did not at that stage have enough trained people to undertake the development tasks that were urgently needed, and needed the injection of a catalyst such as we provided. I'm sure that within the mission, there were varying qualities of people. That's to be expected in any institution. Certainly the leadership during the period of time that I was there, the top leadership, were conceptually competent and gave what seemed to me the kind of quality that was relevant to the problems. I think where we did encounter problems was when we had, somewhere along the line, political appointees.

Q: Were you aware of any rivalries between different sections of the embassy? That is to say, political versus economic, or commercial versus AID, or CIA with political?

LAISE: (Pause) I think on the whole it was a fairly harmonious group. Obviously there was debate and different points of view, which I considered healthy, a differing point of view between those who looked at things in purely economic terms and those who looked at things in developmental terms. There were valid differences of opinion, but I think it contributed to a

healthy exchange. I'm not one who minds, in fact, I encourage unsettling settled opinions. We had several very tough-minded Peace Corps directors who gave a lot of helpful input in the process of questioning AID methodology. I would say essentially there's where the rivalry would be, between the AID bureaucracy and the perception of the Peace Corps about how to [go] on to solving problems.

Q: Yes, I can see that. There was nothing destructive?

LAISE: No, no, no, nothing.

Q: At the time you were there, did you have any women officers?

LAISE: Yes, a political officer.

Q: Was she successful in her job? Did you find she was up to snuff?

LAISE: Well, she wasn't the best we had. She went back and became the Nepal desk officer and got married and left the service.

Q: If she wasn't the best, it had nothing to do with her being a woman?

LAISE: Heavens, no.

Q: Speaking of being a woman, how in the world did you manage to keep your marriage on an even keel when you were in Nepal and your husband was in Vietnam?

LAISE: Well, I'm not sure. First of all, it was not unusual in the sense that when my husband went to Vietnam, the state of the war in Vietnam was such that women, wives were not allowed there in any case. The military wives, I think, never did go during the period of time my husband was there. They remained in Bangkok or the Philippines. The civilian wives returned, I think, shortly after--well, after '78, I guess. Civilian wives returned in some numbers. The president had given my husband a plane, with directions to come to Kathmandu and get a rest every month, and some change, recreation. That didn't work out with the plane that he came every month, but the plane came every month and either took me down or brought him up. I suppose you would have to say that the quality of our time together had to make up for the quantity. Since his task was so demanding, and since so many of his military officers there did not have their wives, and it was a twenty-four-hour job, I think the arrangements that we had was perhaps one of the things that kept it on an even keel. Because we each had our interests and our occupations to pursue, and when we got together, it was when we could give it time.

Q: Were you able to telephone each other often?

LAISE: No, our only communication was through ham radio, operated in Nepal by an American Jesuit who founded some of the schools there. I had to make the trip out to the edge of the valley where he had his set every Sunday to make the contact. Ham radio was forbidden as far as sending from Vietnam because of the war, but they did allow one of the embassy ham radio

operators to operate one out of the embassy for this purpose only. You know one of our ambassadors [William J. Porter] in Vietnam was a ham radio operator.

The reason that this all started as our avenue of communication, was because Father Moran, the ham radio operator in Nepal, had exchanged messages with Bill Porter in Saigon, so they knew that it was a good connection. Subsequently, I think, ham radios were forbidden from sending out of Vietnam except for this one that operated when Ellsworth spoke to me. But you know, we were speaking to the whole world then, and so, generally, it was just for voice contact, and most of our communications were by letter. But again, that was through unclassified pouch, operating by Thai Airlines that flew up into Kathmandu. They would get it to Bangkok, and Bangkok would get it up to Kathmandu.

Q: Did you find that women were healthier than the men at your post, or didn't it matter, given that salubrious climate?

LAISE: The climate was salubrious; of course, we had a lot of gastrointestinal disease. I don't think I was aware of any distinction. The effect of the Nepalese diet was very interesting on the Peace Corps, as between women and men. The standard diet was what they call dalbat, it's rice and dal--sort of a dal soup or gravy. It's twice a day because there isn't that much variety in the food in the rural areas. Of course, that's heavy. The rice is starch and dal does have protein. The women gained weight and the men lost weight. That's the only distinction I can think of at the moment as between men and women.

Q: You don't find that men are stronger in enduring non-stop entertaining than women are?

LAISE: Well, mind you, in Nepal, there wasn't all that much entertaining that you would have in a major post. I did a great deal of entertaining and I enjoyed doing it very much, largely because the entertaining was related to interesting people who visited from America, and who really were one of the great resources I had in building relationships and better understanding of our country, because while the formal programs of the State Department were limited as to what they could send to Nepal, Nepal, because of its appeal to many interesting people, drew people who would ordinarily not be on any programs we had and who constituted a very important segment of American life. Being the facilitator for their meeting appropriate Nepalese was part of the enjoyable part of the task to me, because it was one way of furthering our interests. And I must say, an agreeable way.

E. MICHAEL SOUTHWICK
Rotation Officer
Kathmandu (1967-1969)

Ambassador Southwick was born in California and raised in California and Idaho. Educated at Stanford University, he entered the Foreign Service in 1967. Basically an Africa specialist, Mr. Southwick served largely in African posts, including Burundi, Rwanda, Niger, Kenya and Uganda, where from 1994 to 1997

he was United States Ambassador. He also served in Switzerland and Nepal. In his Washington assignments, he dealt with African and United Nations matters. The ambassador was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: You went to Kathmandu?

SOUTHWICK: We went to Kathmandu.

Q: You were there from when to when?

SOUTHWICK: '67 to '69 and Carol Laise was the ambassador.

Q: Yes. What was Nepal like in those days?

SOUTHWICK: Well, I'm going to do a little bit of transition with this first. Because I'd never been out of the country, I'd never been in New York; we spent about a week in New York before we left. We got on a ship and went on the Constitution across the Atlantic into the Mediterranean, stopped a couple of places and then we got to Naples. I saw Pompeii, which I had always wanted to see. Then we went to Delhi, spent a few days there. In Delhi I got culture shock. We had rented a cab. We were going around and seeing some of the sights. We were mobbed by beggars and lepers and all the rest of it. We were staying at a very fancy hotel, the clash between the hotel and sort of what was going on in some of these slums in Delhi was striking. I said if Kathmandu is like this I don't think I'm going to make it.

Anyway we got to Kathmandu; it's about 4,500 hundred feet high. It's beautiful. The temperature was nice. We were met at the airport. People were smiling and not just sort of staring at you. It just seemed totally different and we were driven into town and to our apartment and it seemed nice and people were welcoming and we got involved with the community and involved with the work and it was an extremely exciting time.

Q: What was the political economic situation there at that time?

SOUTHWICK: Well, this was a little country between India and China. There's a big Chinese embassy. We had a big installation there to listen in on what was going on. There was some unrest among the Tibetans. Some of that was being run out of that embassy I suppose at this point knowing what I know now. This is what I knew then. It was the Cold War and the game there was to keep Nepal out of China's hands. That meant cooperating with the Indians, although even then it was hard to cooperate with the Indians. It's always been hard to cooperate with the Indians. Also at that time we started getting a big influx of American tourists, mainly hippies. It became very fashionable in the late '60s to go to Kathmandu because drugs were cheap, life was good. It was a good place to disappear. Life was good in the sense that you could live very cheaply and if you were interested in Hinduism or Buddhism and mysticism, where else is better?

Q: Well, before we move and we will be talking about that, how was Carol Laise as an ambassador?

SOUTHWICK: I found her interesting, but I must say I couldn't quite figure her out. I found her somewhat mercurial, up and down, very professional. She was one of the most senior women in the State Department and had a very good career, had married Ellsworth Bunker a few months before Susan and I arrived in Kathmandu. Ellsworth Bunker by that time was down in Saigon as our ambassador, but he made an agreement with Lyndon Johnson that a plane would take him up to Kathmandu every few weeks for what we referred to as conjugal visits. Carol I thought was professional, but I found her a little bit hard to figure out. I don't think we clicked very well. The first two years we had a rotational system in the embassy, six months in one section, six months in another, but with a slight modification there. You did this rotation thing, but for the first year you took care of the consular section in addition to these other things and the second year you were the ambassador's aide, so I did have a year as her aide. During that period I felt I got to know her a little bit better. I felt that she was kind of a frustrated person and nothing was ever right. I frankly didn't find her very pleasant. I thought that from a professional point of view in terms of running the embassy and conducting diplomacy, I thought she was professional in that regard, but as a human being I must say I didn't have all that much regard for her.

Q: What was the role as you saw it at the time of the royal family there?

SOUTHWICK: Well, it's a Hindu monarchy and the king was the incarnation of [*inaudible*]. It was sort of hard to rebel against a country run by God, but it was stable. It was clear that it was a system that couldn't last. They had suppressed [*inaudible*] was democracy there had arrested the leading person in the Nepali congress party and the royal family, and the whole power structure there was resistant to change. I think they recognized that change was coming. The question was how fast was it going to come? The king when I was there was Mahendra and his son Crown Prince Birendra succeeded to the throne not too long after we left. It was Birendra, King Birendra, who was murdered in this palace bloodbath that occurred a few years ago.

Q: The son or a nephew or something?

SOUTHWICK: It was one of their children I think. He was being asked to marry somebody he didn't want to marry. That's the story and the person who acceded to the throne was someone named Gyanendra, who we knew a little bit because he represented the government at a 4th of July celebration, came to Carol Laise's residence. He retreated to the living room and wouldn't leave or didn't leave and spent the whole night there until 6:00 AM. A few of us in the embassy were caught up in this and so we played records, danced and kept having food brought on wondering when on earth this man, he was only 19 or something like that at the time, his entourage would leave. We later learned that this was how he lived his life. He was sort of a playboy, play all night and sleep all day. Why not?

Q: How about did you observe how the Chinese and the Indians operated within the country?

SOUTHWICK: The Chinese were kind of off limits. We weren't allowed to speak to them. The Russians we had to write up little reports if we spoke to them. We still had a little bit of contact, a little bit more open with the Russians. The British loomed large there because it had been, I don't want to say a British protectorate, but they had been the only ones allowed in the country until the late '40s and they recruited Gurkhas and that was about it. Then the tourism thing; It

was a dirt poor country. People lived in these little patches of ground. Very picturesque, very pretty.

Q: Did you get out and see the Peace Corps?

SOUTHWICK: Yes.

Q: Harry Barnes talks about getting out there.

SOUTHWICK: Yes, we had a big Peace Corps there. It was about 200. It had a very good program, very adventurous. Peace Corps volunteers would be sent out of the village. They'd have to walk a few days. There were only two roads in the country, one to India and one to China, so everything was either by helicopter or by aircraft or by walking. One of my adventures after about two weeks there we had an American who was hiking in the Everest area. He was trying to get up closer to the base camp area. You could not climb mountains then when I arrived in '67. The mountains had been closed because some American climbers had strayed into Tibet, so the Chinese government told the Nepalese no one is climbing mountains until we say so, but still people would come and go to more than the foothills. They'd get to about 20,000 feet.

Anyway, one of these wealthy Americans was up there and broke his leg in a fall. We got a message, kind of a garbled telegram saying, please rescue me. I first went there with a short take off in a land vehicle to the nearest airstrip to Everest thinking he would be there based on this message. He wasn't there. The next day AID (United States Agency for International Development) had these short take off and land aircraft and a couple of helicopters. I went in a helicopter all the way up to Khunde about 13,000 feet where Sir Edmund Hillary had a clinic and we picked the fellow up and it was just the most exciting experience that anybody could have. Flying in a helicopter at that altitude going up this valley and seeing Everest in the distance; it's like the IMAX, the exact same thing as in the IMAX, about the ascent of Everest in 1996. So, I thought the Foreign Service was pretty good.

Q: Well, now, let's talk about being a consular officer and dealing with this. This was at the height of, well not just Americans, it seemed like a whole generation of '60s were wandering around that area.

SOUTHWICK: Something happened in the fall of '66 and the word went out among this group of people worldwide, Christmas in Kathmandu. So, I don't know what the exact number was, whether it was a few score or a few hundred of these hippies converged on Kathmandu and that led to a kind of migration of these people, usually people in their early '20s who were fed up with Western society and interested in Eastern religions. Some of them would come overland; some of them would fly in, what have you. By the time I arrived, there was a fairly substantial population of a couple hundred. That made consular work a full time job because at that time, as you know, as a consular officer, the welfare whereabouts kind of cable and at that time you could kind of track people down and find out how they were. People would get sick and my greatest worry was that people would die of dysentery or some such thing. In that place they had to either be buried or burned in Nepal. I had this fantasy of having to write letters to some bereaved parents saying we burned your son today according to the Hindu rituals which is what he wanted,

you know? Probably some poor kid who had been raised an Episcopalian or something. My job as I conceived it as a consular officer was to make sure no American died. They weren't going to die on my watch.

Q: You didn't have any die on you?

SOUTHWICK: No. I got them out of the country and two of them did die after they got out, one of dysentery and one of a dysentery related illness.

Q: How about the drug situation?

SOUTHWICK: It was all over the place.

Q: What was this, hashish?

SOUTHWICK: Hashish basically. I don't know if there were stronger things or not, but it was almost a joke. It would be advertised in the paper. It was very cheap. As a joke for the outgoing Peace Corps doctor we gave him a little bit of hashish in a little plastic bag to kind of remind him of his years in Kathmandu.

Q: Did you find with, I would imagine this would be a group, the students at this point, but a difficult group to deal with because part of it was anti-authoritarian. I mean God knows a consular officer is as authoritarian as all hell.

SOUTHWICK: Well, it was funny because I must say having that job, my first job, in some ways I felt more powerful than in any other subsequent job that I ever had in the Foreign Service. I had, it was a shabby building, but I had a big office, one of these GS-16 desks, two flags and all the rest of it. Some of these people would come in to see me and find a contemporary of theirs across the desk. This was I think in many instances disarming to them and to me. I think it helped create a kind of a sense of community just in terms of age and so forth, but even though I may not be living my life like them, I could understand them. That helped a lot and I made a lot of acquaintances because I decided that I didn't want to spend a lot of time finding people. I established a little network. After I did that I felt I could find anybody, any American within a day any American anywhere in Kathmandu Valley just through the little network that I had built up informally. I was able to build it up because I was not hostile to people and I was respectful of what they wanted to do and I tried to be helpful if they had medical issues to deal with.

Q: What were the Nepalese authorities doing? I would think this would be a difficult group because many of the tourists would be hoping for sustenance from the authorities.

SOUTHWICK: Oh, yes. There was some worry that some of these hippies would become public charges and would not be able to support themselves. They might engage in activities that were not desired. In fact, one group tried to establish a commune on one of the hillsides of the Kathmandu Valley and a few of them were arrested. I got to know the police chief pretty well. Then towards the end of my tenure there, my successor in consular work had to deal with what I would call roundups. The government would run around and pick up some of these folks, put

them on a truck, take them down to [*inaudible*] which is the highway. It wasn't a highway; it was an extremely curvy road down to the Indian border. It took about five hours to get there and try to dump these people into India. That worked a few times and then the Indians said, oh, no, we don't want them either. Part of what we had to do occasionally was the whole repatriation business. I think what happened with the Nepalese was that they, although it is kind of a mixed Hindu Buddhist society, and essentially very tolerant, I think they felt some of the behavior of the hippies was something that they didn't like.

I remember when a couple of white people were there and they had frizzy hair and they had Afros. If you were an African, you would have an Afro. I remember one day my consular assistant came in to me and he said, "You know those two people with the big hairdos, the fuzzy hair." I had already nicknamed them the fuzzy wuzzies. He said, "The foreign ministry just called and apparently the royal palace called the foreign ministry and told the foreign ministry get those two out." So, the foreign ministry called us and said get those two out. I can't remember what we did. I think we went to talk to them and told them that they probably should think of leaving and they did.

Q: How could you get people out?

SOUTHWICK: The visa structure for India was you'd go there for about six weeks, I think it was six months, then you had to leave and then you could come back and so some people did that. I think some people despite the romance of Kathmandu got bored with it and wanted to be at home where they could drink the water without getting sick. Health was a huge issue. It's one of the unhealthiest places in the world for anybody. It's dysentery, malaria. I think it's all right maybe for a few months or a few years. I met some people there who stayed years.

GILBERT J. DONAHUE
Peace Corps Volunteer
Palung Valley, Nepal (1968-1970)

Gilbert J. Donahue was born in Virginia in 1947. He received his bachelor's degree from American University in 1968. His career included positions in Mexico, Ivory Coast, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Brazil. Mr. Donahue was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 2000.

Q: How did you find Nepalese?

DONAHUE: I did not find it a particularly difficult language, although I never achieved the degree of fluency in it that I have in some others. It has a more complicated alphabet than western languages have, but the benefit is that there aren't any silent letters. Everything is pronounced. So, in fact, once you got the hang of it, you could read everything fairly easily in comparison with English. A lot of the structure was similar to Latin or Greek. The individual words would not be the same. There was some borrowing of English language words, especially in Hindi, a little bit less in Nepali. But certainly at the village level without the need for a lot of

complicated syntax, I could make myself understood.

Q: When did you go out?

DONAHUE: We went to Nepal in September 1968. We flew by way of Hong Kong and Calcutta. We had a brief orientation program when we arrived in Kathmandu and then were sent with a volunteer who had already been in the country to visit that volunteer's village. The idea was that we would go to a similar part of Nepal, maybe not near where that volunteer was, but a similar area. So, we were sent for a kind of cultural experience. It was to have language immersion. Part of it was to see how a successful volunteer was already doing a volunteer-type job in the country and what that involved. Before arriving in Nepal, several of us were selected for additional language work – that is, a language other than Nepali. Everybody else in the group would continue with Nepali instruction during in-country training. Some of us were to be given additional instruction in one of the dialects of Hindi that was spoken in the southern part of Nepal. One of them was called Bhojpuri and one was called Maithali. I was in a group that was chosen to learn Hindi. So, following the in-village experience with the other volunteer, we went to the training site located near Birganj in southern Nepal. We continued to have some agricultural training, but also training in the language that we had been selected for. During that period, towards the end, we had another cultural experience of living in a village with a farm family that spoke the language we were training in. Then we were sent to the area where we would be assigned our village. There were four of us who were trained in Hindi and we traveled together by train.

It was a very complicated journey to get to the western part of southern Nepal, a city called Nepalganj. Then we met there with the head of the Agricultural Extension Service, who introduced us to the Nepali extension agent with whom we would be paired. We were sent out to our villages. The problem that we faced was that USAID had had a program to introduce irrigation for agriculture in that part of the country. Contrary to how it might be ideal to go about it, they built all of the earthworks and even cement irrigation elements so that there were these long canals and channels into the countryside, before they discovered that there was no water. They had drilled holes over 100 feet deep and they found oil without water. The entire infrastructure existed, but we had no water. So, we were actually trained in irrigation and we got out there and it was dry as a desert. In fact, in my first few weeks in the village, I experienced my first sandstorm. It was really quite something.

The Peace Corps had made an effort for us to try to stay as healthy as possible. They issued us a number of things, one of which was a metal screen to put on windows of any house that we would have. I had one window high on the wall of the room that I was in. It had bars on it, which was typical for a security measure. I had put my piece of screen up there on the inside and thought I had fastened it well to the bars, but that sandstorm totally blew in the screen. There was so much force. The inside of my room might as well have been a sand dune. That is when I began to realize the challenges we were up against. We arrived in the village in probably late October or early November of 1968, which would have been after the end of the monsoon season and the very beginning of the cool season in that part of the subcontinent. We got through the winter fine, but there is a hot, dry season before the monsoon. During that period -- in March, April, and May -- things were getting bad in the village. In my village, there were two or three

wells that started going dry. People would have to walk several villages over even to get water to drink. There was nothing to buy in my village, so if I wanted to buy rice or anything to eat, I would have to make the trip into Nepalganj. We found that even the town market had fewer and fewer items for sale.

Several of the guys got together and asked each other whether it made sense for us to remain in that place. I think the monsoon was late that year and people in our villages started dying. Especially the children. So, Peace Corps asked us to go into Nepalganj and stay there while they made a decision whether to keep us in that part of Nepal or not. In the end, they called us back to Kathmandu and two of us were sent to other parts of Nepal. Two remained in Kathmandu until the monsoon season got well underway and they decided to return to their villages in Nepalganj. I ended up spending the rest of my period in Nepal in another part of the country. After maybe two or three weeks of decision in Kathmandu, I was sent to an area just southwest of the Kathmandu Valley on the road to India, on the Tribuvan Rajpath, which is the major road from the Indian border to Kathmandu, in an area called the Palung Valley. The floor of the valley is about 4,800 feet, and the mountain rim around it is about 8,000. This is considered a hill in Nepal. The word "mountain" refers to mountains that have snow year round (the permanent snow line on the Himalayas is about 21,000 ft.). It was a wonderful agricultural region. I was able to use all of the training that I had had and add crops other than rice.

Q: What sort of crops were they growing?

DONAHUE: Rice was the staple, but they also grew what we call corn and what British English calls "maize." They grew lentils, which is their chief protein. It's a legume, it naturally adds nitrogen back to the soil, and it's a good thing to grow in the soil. They also grew potatoes, which the villagers did not eat but they sold to India as a cash crop. Some villagers had fruit trees as well as vegetable plots. Most farmers lived at a subsistence level, only growing enough to feed their families.

Q: As a Peace Corps volunteer moving into a village, how were you accepted and how effective do you think you were?

DONAHUE: I think we posed a cultural problem for the villagers for a number of reasons. Nepal is a Hindu kingdom. Not all of the people are Hindu, but the majority is.

In the Hindu world view, all foreigners who are not Hindus are automatically considered untouchables. Therefore, a true Hindu would probably go out of his way not to come into physical contact with the foreigner. There would be a sense of not communicating directly with the foreigner and maybe even disregarding the advice of a foreigner. However, in traditional Hinduism, a person's social status and caste are often related to the color of the skin, with the lighter being higher. As Caucasian Americans, we had lighter skin than anybody else in the village. So, we were seen favorably from that regard, from the traditional mindset of the Hindu. Furthermore, as Americans, virtually everyone who had listened to a radio or had any knowledge of the world outside of Nepal had heard of the United States. There was an incredible amount of curiosity about how Americans lived. In those days at the village level, there were very few who would have seen a movie of life in America. Only Nepalese who lived in Kathmandu or those

who had traveled to India might have had that experience. But there would still be all kinds of stories or expectations of what life in America would be like. People had heard, for example, that Americans lived underground. We had to say, “Well, there are subways in some big cities, but people don’t actually usually live underground.” There were all kinds of stories like that that we had to counter or debate. For the most part, we were taken as automatic experts for modern life, for modernity, science, or technology. People would come up and ask how you would do a given thing. In most cases, we didn’t know. Among our groups, there were very few who were trained in science and engineering and capable of saying, “This is how you would construct an electric generator.” But on the other hand, we were resource people for the village. We could always send to the American Embassy in Kathmandu, and somebody in U.S. AID would usually send a brochure aimed at the village. So, some of the volunteers were actually fairly effective in being able to do village construction based on no particular knowledge of their own but the fact that we had a manual.

Q: In your village, how did you move socially?

DONAHUE: I’m speaking of the village in the hills of Nepal where I spent the rest of my tour. In many ways, it was not a typical village. It was closer to the highway connecting Kathmandu and India. Therefore, a larger proportion of villagers would have been to a big city or had some exposure beyond their village. Usually, they sought me out for advice. It could be advice for anything like, “Should I send my son to college in Kathmandu? Is it all right for my daughter to attend school? Is it worth my while to go to India to look for a job?” For a number of reasons, many Peace Corps volunteers found it useful to wear Nepalese clothes, Nepalese costume. I did often when I went around the village. I think that that provided an entre because it demonstrated my sensitivity towards their culture. They also knew that in public I would abide by the many strict rules about how you must eat, how you must say “Hello” and “Goodbye.” I was careful to scrupulously abide by those social elements. But people also knew that when I was in my private space when my day had been over, I was sort of doing my own thing, whatever it may be.

Q: I talked to other Foreign Service officers who served in Nepal. It seemed to have been a strong bonding there, more than in many other places.

DONAHUE: Yes. I think so. First of all, I think the Nepalese people were fairly open. One of the reasons why I had wanted to go to Nepal over India, for example, was I was interested in being in a country that did not have a colonial heritage, had not been under imperial rule. I found many differences between Nepal and India in that respect. India had the benefit of a lot of infrastructure that Nepal did not have. But there had also been a rather jaded relationship between India and the British overlords that tainted the kind of contact that foreigners would have with Indians for some time. There was much less of that in Nepal. To the extent that there was a lot of overt materialism, or perhaps even some anti-foreignism, that was in Kathmandu, not in the village. Once you established rapport with people in the village, you felt you could have an enduring friendship. Although there were limits to the extent to which you could understand each other, there would always be a willingness to try.

Q: What was your impression of the government of Nepal, the structure of village life and all the way up?

DONAHUE: Nepal was a Hindu kingdom and remains so. Yet, the country has had a very unusual history. I believe the history of the monarchy went back to the 1300s or 1400s in Kathmandu Valley, whose inhabitants were Newari, not Nepali. The Nepali royal family comes from the area west of the Kathmandu Valley, centered on a town called Gurkha. That is why the troops that used to fight in the British army are called Gurkhas. They conquered the Kathmandu Valley over 200 years ago and unseated the Newari rulers and expanded their rule all over Nepal. In wars with Britain, they pushed south of the foothills of the Himalayas into what is now called the Terai, the broad part of the Gangetic plain south of the foothills that goes from west to east and towards India. As a result of a battle with Britain over 200 years ago when the British could not prevail against the Nepalese, the British gave them that land as a kind of buffer state between India and Nepal. During most of the 1800s and up until about 1950, the country was actually governed by a hereditary prime minister. The royal family continued but had no political power during that period. The king was considered a reincarnation of Vishnu, the Hindu god, and was very rarely seen in public. When the king did appear in public, it was a very feudal setting. People had to avert their gaze, clear the path and get out of his sight.

Q: It sounds like the Emperor of Japan during the Shogunate.

DONAHUE: Very much so.

During this period when the royal family had no power, Nepal was ruled by prime ministers with the surname Rana. As I recall, the rule went from oldest brother to younger brother to younger brother rather than from oldest brother to his son. There were many branches of the family and they had different statuses depending on whether their mothers were also members of the Rana family. So, there were class A, B, and C Ranas. In the days that I was in Nepal, 1968-1970, many of the large buildings in Kathmandu had, in fact, been built as palaces for one or another of the branches of the Rana family. There were really only two palaces that would have been for the king that were truly royal palaces. There were probably 10-15 so-called Rana houses. For a number of reasons, the Rana family came to an end of its rule in about 1950 and the king took over power again. There was a lot of pressure on this. It was following India's independence. There was a lot of pressure on the king to permit parliamentary democracy in Nepal. There was a Nepali Congress Party that was patterned on and supported by the Indian Congress Party, but it had been in and out of favor with the king. There had been several elections and several parliaments, which had been closed by the king. So, parliamentary democracy existed after a fashion, but there were many issues that remained the prerogative of the king, and the parliament never was able to govern all issues of the country in the way that we think of the parliament as doing. There had been long periods without any parliament. When I arrived in Nepal, Mahendra was the king. He was very old for a Nepali king. They tended to die rather young. His son Birendra got married while I was in Nepal, in 1970. King Mahendra died shortly after that. I believe the one who got married is still king. But most people didn't have an opportunity to actually see the king. He would only be in public on certain feast days. [Note: King Birendra was murdered by his son in tragic circumstances in summer 2001.]

Q: Would there be royal officials or central Kathmandu officials who would be in the village or not?

DONAHUE: The country was divided into zones. The word for a zone is “anchel” and the head of the zone was an “anchelatis.” There were 10-12 zones. The king generally appointed the heads of those zones. So, they were members of a royal family or something akin to that. Then under them was a district called a “jilla.” The head of the jilla was also appointed but would not necessarily have been highly ranked or a member of the royal family. There were also military districts. So, depending on the part of Nepal, there would be a number of reasons why high-level officials from Kathmandu would travel to that area. Certainly, they would go to visit the province governors and they would go on occasion to visit the military facility. I do not remember a high level visit of a Kathmandu official to any of the villages that I happened to be in at the time, but there would be parliamentarians as opposed to people from the executive part of the Nepali government. They would be around. They probably were accessible to families who were well connected anyway.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the leader of the village?

DONAHUE: Yes. The Nepalese system at the time was referred to as “panchayat democracy,” based on customary village headmen. It was obviously a very male dominated, paternalistic type of society where there would be a natural leader, often a customary leader. In many cases, something like the chief of a tribe would be given the title panchayat of a village or area. Sometimes the term village does not fit in a mountain setting because there would be many distinct areas of settlement, none of which would be large enough to actually need a village council. Most of the people living in that particular settlement would be related to each other so that if they had any problems, it would be sorted out within a family context. But when there was a need for some way to span the interests of several families, then you would call that a panchayat or a village council. There would be someone who would emerge or who would have been appointed as the person to sort out those issues. The Nepali-speaking mountain village where I lived, the Palung Valley, had its own panchayat. It was more formal than in many areas. It met about once a month and had an agenda and went over and over issues. It’s hard for me to say whether there were issues that went unmet and the extent to which the panchayat tended to favor one group’s interests over another. In fact, I thought at the time and I think now, too, that it was fairly well representative of the village. It was Nepali-speaking, however, and there were people in the village whose native language was not Nepali, but Nepali was the national language. It made sense for the meeting to be conducted in a single language. In addition to a caste-based social organization, Nepal has tribes. India does as well but they’re not a big part of India’s society. They are relatively more important in Nepal. The tribes often lived away from the villages and on occasion included hunters and gatherers, but also included people that were very much on the fringe of society in terms of the reach of government. Sometimes people from those tribal groups would come into the village to engage in barter trade or something like that. As far as I recall, they had no relationship whatsoever with the formal government structure. However, sometimes their young men competed for, and filled, positions as Gurkha soldiers. Surnames associated with such tribes are Tamang and Gurung, and you see these names frequently in books about the exploits of the Gurkha Army.

Q: What about dating? Here were a bunch of young American males in this society. I’ve heard that the Nepalese don’t take too kindly to foreigners messing with their womenfolk.

DONAHUE: I was never really attracted to any of the women in the Nepalese villages that I lived in or visited. However, there were some American Peace Corps volunteer women posted outside of Kathmandu. Through them on occasion, I met some Nepalese women who were interesting. I wouldn't say I dated them but we had social contact. In the Nepalganj area, there was an American woman Peace Corps volunteer assigned as a kind of home economics teacher at the high school. So, she lived in the city of Nepalganj. She had a fellow teacher who was Nepalese with whom she shared a house. Occasionally, they would visit the village to give an outing to their students, or if there were volunteers who were in Nepalganj, we would get together for a meal. So, we knew the Nepalese woman in that respect and we met some of her relatives as well. Our friendship gave us an insight into a particular kind of Nepalese family, a fairly well educated one. So, we were able to bounce things off this woman that we dared not ask people in the village. In the hill village where I lived later, there was a high school. One of the teachers there was a woman from a different part of Nepal who had been educated in India, so she was much more modern than the village women. I was able to talk with her more in the way that I would be able to talk with an American woman. We certainly never dated or anything, but we would see each other in a public place like a teashop. At least it provided a chance to have some social contact.

I forgot to mention that my Peace Corps group trained with some Volunteer secretaries, who were posted in Kathmandu. We would get together with them when we visited the capital. I am still friends with them after all these years.

Q: By the time you left there in 1970, what was your impression of what you and the Peace Corps had contributed?

DONAHUE: Certain expectations were not borne out. Because we knew that rice was the most important crop in Nepal and we had been trained especially in rice cultivation, one of our overall goals was to spread the cultivation of a type of rice that had been developed in Taiwan that has a short stalk and a lot of grain. I think some volunteers had a degree of success with that, but where I lived, a very high value Indian-type rice called basmati was grown. The villagers simply did not like the taste of the Taiwan rice. For a number of reasons, they resisted using it. They preferred growing their traditional variety because it had a higher market value. Their logic was hard to fault. So, I sort of gave up on that score and tried to find ways to get improved yields from their local rice variety. However, I did have success with other crops. I was able to introduce better varieties of maize and potatoes than they had been planting. They didn't mind that at all because most of the maize was used for animal feed. So, by adopting a different type, the people's diet was not changed. They sold the potatoes as a cash crop, so they were happy to sell more. Again, they were not eating them, so it was not a cultural problem. On balance, I think I made some headway. I was able to demonstrate some of the elements of modern life, including the importance of a modern latrine. I hope I spread in the village the importance of education. I would talk a lot with parents about the importance of putting their children into the high school, making sure that they at least got through that. But I think that the kind of change that we can bring about is usually on the margins and takes many, many years to see the results.

CARLETON S. COON, JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kathmandu (1970-1973)

Carleton S. Coon, Jr. was born in France in 1927. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Germany, Syria, India, Iran, Nepal, Morocco, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 26, 1989.

Q: The bigger it is, the more room there is for maneuvering. In Kathmandu what were--we're talking now in the '70 to '73 period-- our interests in Nepal, American interests?

COON: Basically, to keep it quiet. Our principal interest was the negative strategic interest that Nepal had a singular capacity to embroil India and China into a major war--a major Asian war--and we wanted to contribute to conditions which would make that very unlikely.

Q: Why could this possibly come about? What scenario are you talking about?

COON: The scenario would be very easy if the Indians invaded Nepal and the Chinese decided to react. And the Indians, if you look at the history and the relationship in detail, and then what the Indians did around 1959, '60, '61 with cross border operations when things happened in Nepal that they didn't like. Indian attitudes toward the Himalayan kingdom as being yet another principality that they hadn't gotten around to cleaning up and regulating. This was not outlandish. In fact, it still isn't in what the Indians are doing right now is systematic, that this estimate was not badly founded. It's far fetched at the moment, but it's not out of the ball park completely. Let's put it this way, the principal reason this scenario is unlikely to happen now is more a function of Chinese disinterest than of Indian restraint.

Q: How did you find the staff in Kathmandu?

COON: Mixed. The locals were very good. The Americans--some were quite good, some were not so good, and I found dealing with A.I.D. quite fascinating, and dealing with other agencies more or less interesting. One in particular, the one that's usually nameless, provided some interesting tests of my management negotiating skills.

Q: We're taking a return to Nepal. What was the situation? How did we feel about American interests in Nepal at that time?

COON: Basically things hadn't changed very much. If you take the umpteen countries that exist in the NEA area and rank them in order of importance as far as NEA front office is concerned, Nepal is either at or very close to the bottom. My instructions essentially were, keep it that way. We had all sorts of problems in South Asia but they weren't with the Nepalese particularly. They were with India primarily, and Pakistan, and of course, Afghanistan was the really big account at that point. This was still very early in the saga of the Soviet adventure there.

Q: The Soviets went in December of '79 into Afghanistan?

COON: Yes.

Q: So they were fighting a full scale war in Afghanistan--or I guess it was leading up to that at the time. How did this reflect on your work on Nepal? I mean, did this make them more interested in America?

COON: I think there's no question but what the Nepalese high command, the King and his principal advisers, and most of the political leadership in Nepal, were strongly influenced by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in the direction you suggest. In the direction that the Soviets were not a reliable neighbor, and that strong US support was a very good hedge against Soviet adventurism, even though there were a lot of mountains between them and Soviet territory. They felt that way. They also felt equally that a stronger relationship with China was a good hedge against Soviet adventurism; China being more physically in between, even if less powerful. They also mistrusted out in the Indians even more than usual, because of the Indian close relationship with the Soviet Union. So all these things sort of operated in my favor in the sense that it increased my access to these people and influence with them--perhaps marginally, I don't know, it's hard to say.

Q: How were your relations with the King, and how do you evaluate him at that time?

COON: He had taken over--his father had died while I was DCM in January of '72, and Carol had been in Saigon and I was the Chargé at that time. We went and presented ourselves to the new King the same day. I'd seen a little of him during that period. I knew him better than my predecessors had, when they took over as Ambassador. The palace is in many ways still a very traditional institution, and a very medieval kind of a thing. And the King rations out his exposures to foreign diplomats, and Ambassadors, very deliberately, and very sparingly. And I saw as much of the King, I believe, as any of the diplomats in Kathmandu, but I cannot really say that I got to know him well, or that I saw him frequently. It was sort of hard work getting to see him sometimes even when I needed to, except on ceremonial occasions when you wouldn't have a chance to talk--you just shake hands and say, "Congratulations on your National Day, your majesty," or whatever. And his role is a curious one, because in theory he is an absolute monarch, but in a practical sense the country is modernizing fast enough and has developed enough modern institutions, and there are enough modern people running them in the country. So it isn't like the bad old days of the Ranas, when he could just order that something be done, and it would be done. Of course, in those bad old days there wasn't very much to do. It was isolated, they had no communications. Mostly what was happening was what was happening in Kathmandu Valley, and life was just much more limited.

JANE ABELL COON
Wife of Deputy Chief of Mission, Carleton S. Coon
Kathmandu (1970-1973)

Ambassador Jane Abell Coon was born and raised in Dover, New Hampshire. She received a bachelor's degree from Wooster college in 1947. Her Foreign Service career included positions in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Ambassador Coon was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin on November 4, 1986.

Q: What kind of school was there in Kathmandu for these children?

COON: It was a small American international school, Lincoln School, which was a very good school, and I was very pleased with it.

Q: You were there two years, were you?

COON: Three and a half years.

Q: Were you really? That is a good long time. You not only are one of the women who left the service to be married, but you subsequently came back in, and you had left at a pretty high position and now you were the wife of a DCM. How was that, switching gears that way?

COON: I don't think I was very conscious that it was difficult, but in fact, looking back on it, it was difficult. We were out in the Foreign Service context again, in a wonderfully exciting assignment. We loved Kathmandu. It was a wonderful family post in the sense that you could do a lot together as a family. And we did a lot of day hikes. Once I got over my problem with my ankle, we did several treks during the three-and-a-half year period. Mostly, I think with one exception, with the children. So it was a very satisfying family post.

I was in the slightly anomalous position of being the DCM's wife, working under an [woman] ambassador who didn't have a spouse in residence.

Q: I gather that Nepal does attract--

COON: Well, you have to recall that this was the early '70s. Nepal was the last stop on the hippie trail, and Nepal was overrun with hippies. But there were also mountaineering expeditions, there were trekkers of various kinds, and there were just an awful lot of really very thoroughly off-beat people who came through Nepal that were fun, in many cases.

And then the girls were there in the summertime. Lizzy came back to school. We put her in Woodstock after Christmas. She is the next-to-the youngest daughter. So that I spent some time, particularly the first year, traveling between Kathmandu and Woodstock.

FRANCIS J. TATU
Chief of Political Section
Kathmandu (1972-1974)

Francis J. Tatu was born in New York in 1929. He served in the US Navy from

1946-1952. Afterwards, he received his bachelor's degree from University of California in 1955. His career includes positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Washington D.C., Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia. Mr. Tatu was interviewed by Susan Klingaman in October 2000.

Q: What did we see as our interests in Nepal?

TATU: Again, it was preserving their independence. They were threatened by all sorts of sources. There was a definite threat from India. They perceived - we didn't acknowledge it, but it was true - that our presence inhibited the Indians. There was a threat from China, then China played off against India. So the Nepalese, the Nepali, did quite well in getting assistance from both sides.

Q: Did you live on the economy there?

TATU: Well, you could say that, yes. There was a house that the embassy had leased, was in the economy. It's a very small town, a little town, so I was within easy walking distance of the embassy. We had an embassy that was crumbling down literally, but it had a lot of character. I remember once there was great consternation because a mendicant cow had taken to sleeping at the embassy front door. Well, Hinduism is the major religion there, and you can't fool with cows. The advantage of an embassy like this was we were right on the edge of the bazaar, so people would walk in. We'd get walk-in informants, we'd get walk-in whatever, whereas when they built the new embassy it was two miles away, finished just as I was leaving. I doubt if anybody ever walked out there. I used to get an awful lot of weird visitors. There was definitely an opposition to the royalty, and these dissidents would come in and tell me their stories. This was one of the two places where I was invited to help overthrow the government.

Q: With the Nepalese opposition?

TATU: Actually this wasn't so much the opposition; this was a general, former chief of army, who was a kind of a dreamer. He thought that he could get enough of his old colleagues together to do this.

Q: How did you deal with him?

TATU: Well, I just had to sort of softly put him down. Those days are gone forever. I don't know if you know about the history of Nepal, but, very briefly, there was this family group, the Ranas, who controlled the country for actually a couple of centuries, and then somehow the royalty overthrew them. The royalty was going to execute all the Ranas, and then they realized that they had been inter-married with them all those years.

Q: Which one? Oh, this one. He thought you could...

TATU: General S.J.B. Sarda Rana, formerly the commander-in-chief.

Q: Did he want you to enlist U.S. government support?

TATU: Yes.

Q: And how did he think you were going to do that?

TATU: Well, you know, he thought, "I had so much power." All Ranas have the name Shumser Jung Bahaur and then their individual names, so they're known as "SJB."

Q: Tell me about some of those villages. How were you received and so on? You didn't have that language.

TATU: No, I didn't have that language, and that is a country where there are multiple languages. A wonderful example of this: I had an assistant whose name was Kaiseh Lall, who was really a good little guy, quite a prominent citizen in his own right. He wrote, and he was a known author. Anyway, he was a Nepali. Within the valley, the Kathmandu Valley, there's a concentration of these people who are multiple religionists. For example, he came in one day with a spot on his forehead, which is Hindu, you know. I said, "I thought you were Buddhist." "I am." "What are you doing with a "tika spot?" "It's the day for it." But they also had other languages. So I went on a trek with him and we were on our way to Everest, and at one point I left behind my down jacket, and it gets t really, really gets cold up there. So we got to a point called Namchi Bazaar and I said, "We've got to rent a jacket here for me." So he goes off and he comes back proudly with a pair of trousers. He couldn't communicate; the guys there were Sherpas. We had many language problems, but all in good graces.

Q: What did you find out about their quality of life?

TATU: Well, just their subsistence economies; that they had no knowledge of what was going on in the rest of the country; very, very isolated; poor communications. Very touching experience. Because of the switch-back nature of the trail, people can see you coming from miles away. On two occasions mothers had brought their children up to the trail, hoping we were doctors. We gave away all our medicine in the first two days.

Q: And what other countries besides, China and India were actively involved in Nepal?

TATU: Well, the Soviets were very interested. They did a lot of recruiting. I remember once there was some kind of youth thing going off in Eastern Europe, and the Department asked how many Nepali would be amenable to attending this, and I went back and said, "Probably the whole country if the Sovs would pay for the transportation and expenses."

Q: So the Soviets were active?

TATU: Yes, we had a relatively benign association with the Sovs. Also, since Nepal was once a British protectorate they had a sentimental interest, but they channeled their assistance through the UN. Then there were the Gurkhas, the legendary fighting men. The Brits had a quota of

Gurkhas they could recruit each year, a highly-prized position. I've forgotten how many, something in the neighborhood of 800. And when these fellows completed their service, the Brits helped them get settled, and taught them how to farm, or help them join other services, such as for Bruni.

Q: I assume we had a large AID mission.

TATU: Yes.

Q: Was it an interesting assignment for you?

TATU: Oh, yes, it was. I enjoyed the people, those that I knew, mostly among the elite. It was very exotic, and my kids had a good tour there.

Q: What about schooling for kids in a place like Nepal?

TATU: For the younger ones there was an international school. For the high school age, we had separate tutoring set up.

Q: Any other comments about Nepal?

TATU: Without going into these personal anecdotes, we got to know a lot of the Ranas. There was a group of Jesuit priests there. At the time that the royalty decided it was time to overthrow the Ranas, The king, King Tribuhan, had an association with a Russian expatriate who ran a brothel in Calcutta. The Jesuit priest, an American named M.D. Moran, who was the education minister for India's Behar state, which adjoins Nepal. The King, would go off allegedly on a trip to Calcutta for health purposes, but he would actually go there to study and become educated and become a modern man. He would take chests with him that he would fill with books and take back. So they set up - these three meeting in this brothel in Calcutta - a bloody revolution. When it was over, the Russian - his name was Boris Lokanovich - for his efforts in this regard, Boris was given a palace. This is his ballroom in the palace. I didn't prepare these pictures for you; it just happened. I was digging out some pictures the other day. The priest got a palace which was somewhat removed, where he set up this school. We used to refer to him as the hippie priest. We'd hear his motorcycle coming in in the morning and we'd say, "Oh, my God, Father Moran's here for breakfast." He was a very interesting guy. He had ten other colleagues with him, and they made no effort at conversion. He said that for one thing it was illegal, technically illegal, but he said, "As long as we are able to teach values." This incidentally was on a trek...

Q: So you did have to know some of the intricacies of the social scene to survive?

TATU: Definitely.

Q: It sounds like a very interesting assignment.

TATU: Well, it was.

Q: I've known other people who've been in Nepal, and everyone seems to have liked it very much.

TATU: I can't think of anybody who dissented except maybe... Some of the technicians, you know, they found it difficult to get around.

Q: But professionally and was it interesting and a good place for families?

TATU: Yes.

BARBARA H. NIELSEN
Peace Corps Librarian
Tribhuvan University, Nepal (1973-1975)

Barbara H. Nielsen was born in New York in 1949. She attended Middlebury College, Indiana University, and Yale University. She has also served in the Peace Corps in Katmandu from 1973 to 1975. Her career has included positions in Montevideo, Tegucigalpa, Dakar, Santiago, Algiers, Stockholm, and Athens. Ms. Nielsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on December 16, 2004.

Q: You were in Nepal from when to when?

NIELSEN: I got there in December 1973. I stayed two years.

Q: Until '75. What was the situation in Nepal at the time you got there?

NIELSEN: It was very peaceful. The monarchy was very much in control. There were some beginnings of disaffection with the monarchy and there was an opposition struggling to make its voice heard but not very effectively at that time. The Maoists that we read about today and for the last 10 years didn't exist. It was certainly no threat to the government. Nepal was not a democracy and so legitimate criticism could be made that their political system was shutting a lot of people out. In any event, it was a peaceful monarch. The monarch was very much in control. Political parties were pretty rudimentary and not very influential.

Q: What sort of living conditions did you have?

NIELSEN: I was privileged in the capital. I rented a room with different families, Nepalese initially, and then I rented a little apartment with a Tibetan family. In that circumstance, I did have running water, which was quite a big deal because you didn't have to go very far before people needed to haul water from the stream. I had running water, though it was cold running water. We didn't have heat either, but I was still very privileged materially. I didn't have a kitchen, so I took my meals in a variety of eateries around town. They were very cheap. You could eat copiously for nothing. You had to expect to be sick a fair amount of the time, which was true, but you did recover. That was the beauty of being young.

Q: Did you learn Nepalese?

NIELSEN: Yes, they speak Nepali, which bears some resemblance to Hindi. It's Indo-European. If you trace Nepali back far enough, it's based on Sanskrit. They use a Devanagari script just like Hindi, so once you can read Hindi, you can read Nepali. It's a language spoken only in Nepal, so most of the Nepalese, when they get some education, they learn both Hindi and English. Higher education is conducted in English, just like Indian higher education.

Q: What were you doing in Nepal?

NIELSEN: I was the reference librarian at Tribhuvan University, which was the only university in Nepal. I don't know what exists today. Maybe they have some additional ones. It's a public university. It was a great privilege to go there. At that time, the literacy rate was five to 10% and even less for girls. Someone who had a secondary education and then was going to college was really an elite. We dealt with the elite and they were modeling their system on U.S. models of education. There was considerable input from USAID and other private NGOs. The textbooks were in English. The Nepali collection would have been in Nepali or other languages, but the undergraduate coursework that was conducted in English was based on U.S. materials as well. So, reference service was not well known and the idea was to establish it. That's what we worked on doing. The librarian at the time, the library director, Shanti Mishra, and her husband were U.S.-trained and they were pioneers in creating academic libraries in the country.

Q: How did you find the students, your contact with them?

NIELSEN: They were very friendly, personable. They weren't accustomed to asking questions, so you had a pedagogical role to bring them in and try to teach them what a library could do for them and then help them get the materials they needed. Also, the faculty was part of our target audience. They, too, would have been trained in another system where probably the professor handed out the class notes, the students memorized those notes, took exams, and there wasn't much attempt to have them do independent research. The idea was to give them some ideas about how they could improve their teaching, improve their research. We worked a lot with the faculty in that field.

Q: Was there much Indian influence from Indian universities?

NIELSEN: Tremendous. Historically if you studied abroad – and if you were going to study at a university, you had to study abroad – where would you go? It would be India. China is the other neighbor, of course, and the Chinese and the Indians in traditional Nepalese politics were seen as powers to play one off against the other. While the ties were much stronger with India, the Nepalese were certainly flirting with the Chinese as well to make sure that it didn't become the colony of India.

Q: Did you find yourself in the position of an Indian educated faculty kind of resentful of an American librarian?

NIELSEN: Not really. At the time, the Nepalese were open to American assistance, probably not universally, but by and large what I encountered was a receptivity to things American. Young people were happy to have association with Peace Corps volunteers. You were seen first as a Peace Corps volunteer and they thought this was kind of fascinating because the concept was unusual. They recognized that Americans were wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. In fact, they had misperceptions about just how wealthy we were, but by any Nepalese standard, the poorest American was very well-off. So, it intrigued them to think young Americans were giving up something to come to Nepal. The volunteers generally were idealistic, and came with pure motives. These were the early '70s and you had primarily young volunteers without too much baggage and not a lot of experience either. They were perceived as good kids who were there to help and probably did have something to offer, so the welcome was quite genuine.

Q: Did you have any contact with our embassy?

NIELSEN: Relatively little. On rare occasions, we would be invited. It was a nice thing to be invited to the residence for real food. Carolyn Laise was the ambassador at the time I was there. She was very gracious in hosting us. We had ice cream, which was a treat. I think it was homemade with goat's milk, so it was very rich, very delicious. It was definitely a treat. We also got to meet Ellsworth Bunker, who came over for R&R from Vietnam, I guess, to visit his wife. He didn't tell us what was happening in Saigon. Otherwise, I really don't remember going to the embassy. The USIS person there, Kent Obey, was also very friendly and I did visit the American Center regularly because it had a wonderful library. It was heavily used. The young Nepalese students packed it on a daily basis. Having that experience encouraged me to pursue the Foreign Service again. It was a very positive experience to see how our library program was functioning and the number of Nepalese that were served. It seemed like a very good resource that we were providing.

Q: When you were in Nepal, were you observing the drug culture? Nepal was one of the points where the young people, not just Americans, but European and Australian and Japanese, had their wanderjahr. Nepal was a big place to go in those days.

NIELSEN: Yes, it was. That was something of interest. We met a lot of the young students or young people who came through Katmandu. They would often visit the library. I did meet them in various places. Hashish was legal and there were tea shops where you could go and have brownies laced with hash. The signs would be freely advertising hashish and derivatives. Hard drugs weren't particularly in vogue there. So this was the environment. But we were told quite categorically that any drug use would result in our immediate departure, so that was something to take into account. While using drugs could be legal in Nepal, it wasn't legal once you were there under the aegis of the U.S. government, so it turned out not to be an issue.

Q: I was wondering whether you ran across, particularly young Americans, who got there and sort of settled down to enjoy hashish and became almost besotted with it and became protection and welfare cases. Was there much of that?

NIELSEN: Perhaps. It didn't come to my attention. Since I wasn't doing consular work, it did not come to my attention.

Q: I was just wondering whether it intruded in your life.

NIELSEN: It didn't, and it didn't intrude in the Nepalese culture either. Marijuana grows naturally there. I can recall, one of my language teachers, I visited him at his house and there in the garden was some naturally growing marijuana which was not used for anything. It just grew there like other plants. So the Nepalese were not really big drug users themselves. I think the drug problem became much more severe later in the '80s among the Nepalese as well. I don't have much information, but apparently drugs were one of the reasons that the Crown Prince killed his father and other members of his family.

Q: Did you make good friends with Nepalis? Was there much social interaction?

NIELSEN: Yes. The Nepalese are very hospitable and very friendly. They liked Americans. It was relatively easy to get to know them. You got to know those that you worked with best and those also who were Peace Corps staff or associated with Peace Corps. I did make some friends along those lines and we were always invited to weddings and family gatherings. I have to say, I haven't actually kept up any of those ties. It was easy to get to know them.

ANTHONY QUAINTON
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kathmandu (1973-1976)

Ambassador Anthony Quainton was born in Washington state in 1934. He graduated from Princeton University in 1955 and joined the Foreign Service in 1959. He served at overseas posts in Australia, Pakistan, India, France, Nepal and as ambassador to the Central African Republic, Nicaragua, Kuwait and Peru. Ambassador Quainton has also served as the Deputy Inspector General, Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, and the Director General of the Foreign Service. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: You were in Nepal from when to when?

QUAINTON: I arrived in Nepal in late 1973 and left early in 1976. I was there roughly two and a half years, not completing my three years because lightning struck and I was asked to go Central Africa as ambassador. For a country of relative isolation and seemingly insignificance, the embassy in Nepal was a large one. There was a big AID mission, a substantial Peace Corps presence of over 100 volunteers, and the usual array of political and economic officers. So, it was in fact, a very interesting managerial job. The ambassador allowed me to do most of the managerial work, although that was not always easy. Part of the problem was that I was quite junior. I was not in the senior service at the time, I think I was a class three officer under the old system.

Q: The equivalent of colonel.

QUAINTON: Yes. The AID director, Carter Ide, was a career minister, which made him the same rank as the ambassador. He took directions from no one. That was always a problem. He was very able and managed the AID mission skillfully, but there was always a certain amount of tension with the embassy as the result of the autonomy that the AID director insisted on maintaining and because of the very high access levels which he had in the Nepalese government.

Q: This sounds a little bit like a throw back to the fifties and forties when the AID directors had essentially this autonomy and the money. But supposedly this had changed when the Kennedy letter to the ambassadors came out saying they were in charge.

QUAINTON: I don't know if it was a throwback. The reality is that if you have resources and programs you have access. That is true today. That was also the time when the United States was greatly concerned about Nepal as a buffer between India and China. It was on the border of Tibet and there were large numbers of Tibetan refugees in Nepal and we had a certain number of programs working directly with the Tibetans which gave other members of the embassy privileged access to the highest levels of the Nepalese government. The government was an absolute monarchy at the time, although there was some limited local self government through local councils or "panchayats." But, the fact was that the king took all important decisions and the officials at the palace were our principal interlocutors. The only other Nepalese player of any significance was the finance minister, who subsequently became ambassador to Washington and is now ambassador in India. He was western educated at Claremont, and the AID director dealt with him on a daily basis.

Q: Were we interested at this time in trying to promote "democracy?" Did we have any policy towards this particular aspect of Nepalese life?

QUAINTON: There was no significant effort made by Washington or us in the mission to promote democracy and persuade the king to be more liberal in his policies. It may be that the ambassador raised this issue from time to time. It certainly was not a salient feature of our policy. We were much more concerned with preserving the independence of Nepal from what we saw as the predatory intentions of its two large neighbors and in helping Nepal, one of the most backward countries in Asia, develop momentum in its economic development. We were much engaged at the grassroots level through the Peace Corps and the many AID programs which we had in place. But, the political agenda focused on ways to strengthen Nepal vis-a-vis its neighbors, and to mitigate tensions with India in particular.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing there mainly?

QUAINTON: The Peace Corps was doing essentially rural development and English language teaching. The rural development was down in the lowlands bordering India and some of it was in the mountains - small water projects, cooperatives, etc. There was a considerable effort to teach English as a second language, a program which existed in many other countries. Nepal was a particular challenge for the Peace Corps because of its extraordinary terrain and the lack of roads. It was Peace Corps policy at the time not to post a volunteer more than a twenty four hour

walk from the nearest road.

Q: Were you more or less able to do that or was there a lot of fudging?

QUAINTON: No, we were able to do it. Quite consciously we knew what the distances were. It was important to be able to get Peace Corps volunteers out because they often had accidents and illnesses. We had a helicopter on lease which was available to rescue volunteers. It was a time when the Peace Corps maintained the maximum distance from the embassy. That isn't to say that the Peace Corps director wasn't a member of the embassy's country team, but the volunteers didn't see themselves as working for the United States government. I can still remember, I guess it was in 1970, when there was the swearing in of a new batch of Peace Corps volunteers, a substantial intake. They refused to take the standard oath of allegiance to the Constitution, insisting on writing their own oath to the ideals of the Peace Corps and the government of Nepal. This caused the ambassador some considerable concern and instead of being present at the taking of the oath, he sent me, his deputy. Of course, the volunteers had to sign the constitutional oath if they wanted to get paid, but they refused to take it in an open, public setting. So, there was a little bit of tension between the Peace Corps and the embassy, although individual volunteers whom we got to know out in the countryside were very friendly.

Q: Did you have any problems with the Peace Corps?

QUAINTON: No significant problems. There were the logistic problems of maintaining a program scattered around a very mountainous country. A much greater set of problems arose from world travelers who came to Nepal. There were large numbers of young Americans who were there for the drug scene, the Buddhist scene, and to live in "esoteric Asia." They often got into difficulties with the authorities by overstaying their visas, by getting into scraps with the police, etc. The consular officer was very busy dealing with the problems of the world traveler.

Q: How did your consular officer deal with the problems of people involved in drug related incidents which might include fighting with the police, etc.?

QUAINTON: Very few ended up in jail. The Nepalese were fairly tolerant of drug consumption if those involved were not unruly and didn't commit other types of illegal acts. Usually, drug problems were medical problems. Young Americans who fell ill would have to be repatriated and their families would have to be informed. That was more of a problem than dealing with the Nepalese authorities. Many of the world travelers looked for jobs, including as teachers in our cultural center, where there was an extensive English teaching program sponsored by USIS. My wife ran this program for USIS throughout almost the entire time that we were in Nepal. Getting visas for these world traveler teachers was a constant problem.

Q: What was AID doing?

QUAINTON: AID had had a whole series of programs over the years. They had done a fair amount of road building in an attempt to break down some of the country's isolationism. They had agricultural development projects in various parts of the country and were particularly concerned about the deforestation of the country. If I am not mistaken, they also had family

planning/population programs. Nepal had a very high rate of population growth, which created serious economic problems, particularly in the hills.

Q: Was there any political issue about family planning programs in those days?

QUAINTON: No, the Nepalese are mainly Buddhist and there were no religious or political leaders opposed to family planning. A fair amount of education was required because family planning was not part of the culture. I am not sure how successful our programs were, but there was no official resistance to the AID programs that I can remember.

Q: What was your impression of the king?

QUAINTON: I didn't see a great deal of King Birendra. There was a tradition in Nepal that once a year the king would come to dinner with the American ambassador, and he also had dinners once a year with the British and Indian ambassadors. These were highly contrived affairs. The only other guests were members of the royal family, two or three embassy officers, usually the ambassador, DCM and political officer and their spouses, and the king, and his two brothers, and their spouses. The king was very young. His coronation took place while we were in Nepal. He spoke good English. My sense was that he was not an entirely self-confident person. His father had been king for a very long time. He had been a strong figure in Nepal and had allowed Nepal over the last five years of his reign to move towards democracy, but full parliamentary democracy was still far away on the horizon.

Q: You mentioned that he would dine with the British and Indian ambassadors too. What about the third shoe, the Chinese?

QUAINTON: He may also have dined with the Chinese ambassador. They were the only four countries of any significant presence and importance to Nepal, although the Germans, French, and Israelis had embassies, as did other South Asian countries. But for geopolitical reasons, the two big neighbors and the United States, and for historical reasons the British, were the countries with significant access in Nepal.

Q: What was the feeling about China that you were able to gather during this period?

QUAINTON: The Nepalese always tried to play the Chinese off against the Indians. The Nepalese were obsessed with India and feared Indian domination and hegemony and the possibility that they would be overrun if India's population was allowed to come across the border and settle. The government was obsessed with a desire to protect the Nepalese people from the mountains, or the hills, as they were euphemistically called. Krishna Rasgotra, the Indian ambassador, was a very able man who had already been minister to Washington and was later to be ambassador to Washington and foreign secretary. He was very much a proconsul who regarded India as having a special relationship with Nepal and not adverse to squeezing the Nepalese in economic and trade terms if that were necessary to assure that Nepal did not stray too far from the Indian path by developing overly close relations with the Chinese. The Nepalese, on the other hand, tried to maximize their relations with the Chinese as a counterweight to India. The Chinese relationship was quite a warm one.

Q: Did Bangladesh play any part?

QUAINTON: There was a Bangladeshi ambassador in Kathmandu. The Nepalese, during this period, developed air service to Dacca. They were always concerned that their only road and air access to the outside world was through India. Tibet in the seventies was not an open area. They were anxious to establish air links with Dacca and Thailand in order to be able to bypass Delhi.

Q: Did you get any feeling that during this time Nixon and then Ford and Henry Kissinger had any interest in Nepal. Did it figure in their calculations?

QUAINTON: Well, only to the degree that Nepal was seen to be an important buffer against Chinese encroachments. Because of this Nepal got rather more attention and resources than other countries of comparable size in the third world.

Q: Did the mountain climbing challenge reach over to the embassy? Did you find yourself supporting American mountain climbers?

QUAINTON: There was a little bit of that. Mountain climbing was more limited then than it is today. There were a couple of Mt. Everest expeditions during the time we were there and, of course, expeditions to some of the other major peaks. These expeditions were always a worry. There were a couple of cases where Americans lost their lives on expeditions. In general, the mountain climbers were highly professional and skilled. They had trained for their expedition. It was the world travelers who walked the mountains without equipment who tended to be much more of a problem. Mountain climbing or trekking really was a great embassy pastime. Almost all of the officers in the embassy did some trekking, and the ambassador and I strongly encouraged it in order for officers to get a feel for the country. The only way to see the country was on foot. I certainly did some trekking with my family and with embassy local employees.

Q: Were you feeling any of the glow from the opening to China which happened shortly before you arrived there?

QUAINTON: Dr. Kissinger had gone to China in 1971, and we arrived in Nepal a little more than a year later. We could travel up to the Chinese border, but there was still no access for Americans to China. There was virtually no diplomatic contact with Chinese embassy officials in Kathmandu. They had a large embassy watching the Indians. Our relations with the Chinese were correct when we met them at diplomatic gatherings, but there wasn't much more than an exchange of courtesies at that stage. By 1976, that had begun to change and the ambassador was invited to the Chinese ambassador's for dinner.

Q: How was the situation in Tibet with Chinese occupation refugees reflected in Nepal while you were there?

QUAINTON: I don't believe there was much of an influx of refugees in the 1970s. When the Tibetans came out in the 1950s, they went to India or Nepal. There were substantial colonies of Tibetan refugees in Nepal. They were fairly well settled and had set up small cottage industries.

But there wasn't any steady flow of Tibetans into Nepal.

Q: Did we ever find ourselves having divergent views which became evident within Nepal with the Indians?

QUAINTON: Oh, yes. India was quite heavy handed in its dealings with the Nepalese. There were annual trade negotiations, the access negotiations with Nepal. The Indians always took a very hard line and the Nepalese always complained to us about the Indians. In New Delhi, our embassy tried to persuade the Indians to be somewhat softer in their position in order not to push the Nepalese in the direction of the Chinese. But, the Indians were not susceptible to advice on relations with their neighbors, particularly the Nepalese, anymore than they have been in regard to Pakistan and Bangladesh. They were not going to have the United States tell them how they should comport themselves. Ever since the crisis of 1971, in fact, they saw our policy as being strongly hostile to Indian hegemony in South Asia. They felt we failed to recognize India's legitimate privileged relationship with its neighbors and were always trying to undermine Indian influence.

Q: What about the little principalities?

QUAINTON: Well, there were Sikkim and Bhutan. I mentioned earlier that I was on the first delegation that went to Bhutan and also on a delegation that went to Sikkim. Sikkim was semi-autonomous and governed by the "chogyal." India already regarded it as part of India. Bhutan was nominally independent although under very strong Indian influence. India until the 1960s took little interest in Bhutan whatsoever, allowing the King to exercise effective control. They did worry about Sikkim because the "chogyal" was married to an American, and she had quite a following in the United States and constantly stirred up American domestic opinion about the plight of the Sikkimese under India. Eventually the Indians closed down the Sikkim's limited sovereignty, as they had of the other princely states shortly after independence.

Q: Was there any particular crises or any great problems that you had during this time?

QUAINTON: There were no crises but the big social event of this time was the coronation of King Birendra. The President sent a personal friend as the head of the U.S. delegation, Philip Buchen, and a group of other friends, including a woman who subsequently became ambassador to Nepal, Marquita Maytag.

Q: The lady with the tent in her back yard where she used to entertain her friends.

QUAINTON: Yes. The Nepalese set a limit to the number of people who could come in the delegation. We exceeded that limit by some order of magnitude. Ms. Maytag and others were not able to attend the coronation, and it fell to the DCM to entertain the disgruntled members of the President's party. The lucky ones who attended were overjoyed by the exotic nature of the coronation. But, others, who were not so lucky, were less happy with the embassy's performance. In fact, the embassy got a great deal of criticism in Washington for its failure to produce invitations for all those in the President's party.

Q: How did you handle this?

QUAINTON: Well, there wasn't much we could do except to go back over and over again to the Nepalese, telling them how important it was that all these people to attend, but to no avail. We explained to the Americans that the palace courtyard where the coronation was to take place was very old and small and located in the center of the city, and there literally wasn't extra space. Eventually they understood that, although they felt much aggrieved having been dragged halfway around the world without being able to attend the coronation. It wasn't a real problem, but to the ambassador it was a major crisis.

Q: Did you have any congressional delegations?

QUAINTON: There were no congressional delegations, although several members of congress came for the coronation. One was a southern congressman who insisted on teaching Sunday school while he was there. There aren't very many Christians in Nepal although there were some American missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant. There was a Protestant church in Kathmandu run by missionaries who also ran a hospital. He said he had never missed teaching Sunday school in 30 years and wasn't going to miss it in Kathmandu, and he didn't miss it.

DAVID J. FISCHER
Head of Economic/Political Section
Kathmandu, Nepal (1974-1977)

Born in Connecticut and raised in Minnesota, Mr. Fischer was educated at Brown University, the University of Vienna, Austria and Harvard Law School. He joined the Foreign Service in 1961. His various assignments abroad took him to Germany, Poland, Sofia, Kathmandu, Dar es Salam as well as to the Seychelles, where he served as US Ambassador from 1982-1985. His assignments at the Department of State in Washington include those dealing with the US relations with China, with Public Affairs, and with Arms Control issues.

Q: When were you there?

FISCHER: 1974 to 1977. I was there originally there on a two-year assignment, and I liked it so much I extended for a third year.

Q: Let me just ask, before you went were there health considerations? I mean Kathmandu is up at 12,000 feet.

FISCHER: No, not that high. The city's at about 5000 feet. City! I mean it's a village. We had small children. My daughter had been born in Bulgaria, so we had three small kids. I think it was schooling issues that concerned us than anything else. It turned out, in retrospect, to be the best international school, probably in the world. It's an extraordinarily good school. But, this was the assignment in which I could fulfill all my Walter Mitty dreams. I mean a lot of us join the

Foreign Service with the expectation that we'll be wearing white linen suits, carrying a fly whisk, pith helmet, and this was an adventure. Of course, part of that image had to be a Land Rover, and we had the biggest one they made. I should have read the Post Report with greater care, since at that time Nepal had less than 150 miles of roads. And believe me, a Land Rover may be a great "off road" vehicle but not in the Himalayas. And Kathmandu was a 9th century village with streets no more than 6 feet wide, if even that. I ended up getting a motor cycle. That's how I commuted back and forth to work. But, my wife was stuck with this huge Land Rover. And my wife, for those people who don't know it, is very small, very diminutive, about five feet three inches tall and there she was huddled behind this huge truck trying to make her way out to the local markets.

Health conditions were awful. I endeared myself to my colleagues when I helped get the post differential raised from 15 to 25 percent. Kathmandu was an enchanting assignment, but it was no accident that the World Health Organization had established its worldwide Cholera Program in Kathmandu. We all felt that the differential (a salary bonus based on hardship) should be at least 25%. I went down one Saturday morning to where we bought meat in the local market. It was a place called "Yellow Goat Alley" because the Nepalese dip their raw meats and their sheep heads and goats heads into saffron as a religious device. To make a long story short, I took a famous series of photographs of a woman defecating upstream from the river where the meat was being washed and on the basis of that photograph, the differential was increased to twenty-five percent.

Q: That was one of your lesser duties as a Political Officer? What did the Political Officer really do besides, I assume liaison with the Agency? You didn't have much time to follow political parties in Nepal.

FISCHER: There were no political parties in Nepal. It was one of the last absolute monarchies in the world. The king was an incarnate God. When I arrived, the former king had died, "long live the king." The new king, King Birendra, was coronated there in an incredible ceremony in 1975. It was an unbelievable kind of social event with society people flying in from all around the world. For some reason what passed for "international society" decided that the coronation was the place to be in 1975.

Q: This is the current (1999) king?

FISCHER: Yes, King Birendra is still alive and ruling in Nepal, albeit with very circumscribed powers. He was educated at Harvard and Eton. Very westernized with the exception that he was not about to allow in my time any political opposition or political parties. What did I do in Kathmandu? I did precisely nothing. It was an extraordinary three-year assignment, and I extended because I found Nepal to be an extraordinarily fascinating country. I always tell people interested in the Foreign Service that every assignment has an upside. The office job may be boring, but if you take advantage of living abroad as an American diplomat it can be a lifetime experience. I knew nothing about the two of world's great religions, Buddhism and Hinduism. I had always been interested in mountain climbing. I organized an expedition to climb Mt. Everest in 1976, which was a lot of fun. But above all, my family would go out on treks for three and four weeks at a shot at least twice a year. And this was ostensibly to go and be able to "feel the

pulse of the Nepalese people." In fact, I didn't speak Nepali. The fact that where we went - up in the mountains - there wasn't a person to be seen for days on end. But it was simply, everyone in the Embassy understood; this was one of the reasons you served in Nepal. We had very few, if any, national interests in the country. It was just a chance to relax and unwind. For me it was truly a life changing experience. I mean, our kids today, if you ask them about their Foreign Service career, and their memories of the Foreign Service, the first post that will come to mind is Kathmandu. To climb at eighteen thousand feet! My daughter in those days, well, she had just been born, so she was an infant until age three, and we used to throw her in the back of a Sherpa porter in a basket and go off for two or three weeks at a stretch. It was wonderful.

Q: Did we, the U.S., the Embassy get in between in any way, if there were disputes between India and Nepal or between Nepal and China?

FISCHER: Of course, China in those days was very important. Kissinger had gone to China but we certainly had no diplomatic relations. The Chinese Embassy had a huge establishment there, but it was off limits to us. So we never had any contact with the Chinese. We "watched China," but the Nepalese were both small and insignificant, as well as very discrete. The CIA may have had access to information, but State did not.

Q: Off-limits as U.S. policy?

FISCHER: Right.

Q: And we had no back channels?

FISCHER: In the years I was there it was very tense between India and Nepal. Indira Gandhi's India was both authoritarian and expansionist. These were the days when she abolished democracy and took Sikkim as an integral part of India. The Nepalese were extremely nervous about the possibility that they might be next. India had always accepted Nepalese independence but did so reluctantly. They wanted a Nepal which was politically subservient to India. For their part the Nepalese sought to balance themselves between two powerful states: India and China. They were not above using one against the other. In the mid 1970s the Nepalese were trying to fend off an expansionist India. India used very heavy-handed tactics against the King whom they saw as naïve and inexperienced. Firstly, they stationed one of their most senior and toughest diplomats as Ambassador, Ambassador Rasgotra who was known as the "gray fox." He acted like a colonial governor. Secondly, India gave sanctuary to opposition political parties which were banned in Nepal. Thirdly, in 1975 they imposed a blockade on landlocked Nepal. It was an enormously powerful weapon, since virtually all imported goods had to be imported through India. The Chinese had built a road from Tibet to Kathmandu but was in position to truck in fuel to supply Nepal. One of the impacts on the Embassy, of course, was a very strict gas rationing regime which I think was 5 gallons a week. That didn't make my wife any happier with her Land Rover!

Q: Were there any Communists in Nepal at that time for the Political Officer to talk to or not talk to?

FISCHER: There were, and I had a couple of friends, one of whom went on to become prime minister of Nepal whom I saw occasionally. I must say one of the real inhibitions and handicaps in living in Nepal, Nepal is one of the few countries that I lived in where I didn't speak the language. English was an accepted legal language of government, but to be an effective political officer I believed you really had to speak Nepali or Newari; the other language spoken in the Kathmandu region. We had two Foreign Service Officers who spoke not only Nepali, but even Newari. Harry Barnes who later went on to become Ambassador in Romania when he was DCM in Kathmandu long before my time, decided to learn not only Nepali, but he learned court Nepali. This is a very special language spoken only within the royal court, and he ended up being the King and Queen's bridge partner because he was the only foreigner, I'm sure that they had ever met, who was able to converse with them in court Nepali.

We had another Ambassador long after my time, Peter Burleigh, Peter had been a Peace Corps volunteer in the valley, and so he spoke the vernacular of Kathmandu valley, Newari. Peter was certainly one of the very, very few foreigners who could speak Newari.

Q: Are Newari and Nepali similar?

FISCHER: No, they are totally different language groups.

Q: At that time did any of the American Officers speak Nepali then?

FISCHER: No. One of the CIA operation officers spoke acceptable Nepali.

Q: Did the King and Queen speak English?

FISCHER: Of yes, the King and Queen spoke English. The King had been educated at series of western universities, including Harvard for two semesters.

Q: What was Nepal's relationship with the United Kingdom?

FISCHER: It had defeated the British in a war in 1813. However, it became if you will, a vassal state to the British raj in India, and it supplied the most famous soldiers in the British army, the Gurkhas. It was an anachronism because the British still had within Nepal a Gurkha recruitment training program. They would go out once a year and interview a thousand young men between the ages of 14 and 16 and out of those thousand they would take a hundred. It was an extraordinarily competitive examination program. The British had this small group of people, and they would walk through the hill stations and talk to young boys. I was always amused that the British may have given up the Empire "east of Suez," but they maintained the Nepalese recruiting program and even maintained a small base in eastern Nepal until the late 1970s. The Gurkhas had great historical significance for the British, as well they should have.

Q: Hill stations meaning villages?

FISCHER: Villages not in the high Himalayas but in the foothills up to fifteen thousand feet.

Q: What makes Gurkhas such good soldiers, assuming they're good soldiers?

FISCHER: Basically they found kids who had no formal education, they certainly couldn't read and write, and they were looking for young men. Here, they were recruiting at 14, 15, 16, who were inherently extraordinarily intelligent. Courage and bravery for which the Gurkhas are well known was simply a given. And so they were looking for people who had this extraordinary ability to solve problems, and they were personable young men. I was very impressed with the people they got. The stories about the Gurkhas are legion and while some of them may be exaggerated, the fact is that it is still considered one of the elite fighting forces of the world. These were young men who were willing to trade their lives for the opportunity to see the world. And see the world they did. They were stationed everywhere in WWII. The initial attack up Casino Ridge in Italy was led by them. They served in Malaysia and Hong Kong, as well as in London.

Q: Let me ask, since you are one of the few officers that's probably had to deal with Kings and Queens, how did you deal with them? I assume you as a Political Officer met the King and the Queen and got to know them.

FISCHER: I did not. The Ambassador was the only one to deal with the King. The DCM and I would occasionally have to go and see the King, but he was an incarnate God. And so, therefore, to be in his presence was a rarity. I dealt with people in the palace who were his personal advisers. The King had three or four people that ran departments. There was one in charge of Foreign Affairs. There was a Foreign Ministry, but it was useless. I mean it had nothing to do with what was going on.

Q: Wasn't Nepal's foreign affairs carried out by India?

FISCHER: No, it was a totally independent country, or at least it tried to be. In fact, they saw themselves as quite independent of India. Nepal is one of the few countries in the world that does not operate on standard time. Nepalese clocks are always 15 minutes ahead of Indian clocks, even though they are in the same time zone.

Q: And they had an Ambassador in the U.S.

FISCHER: Yes, absolutely. We had a fairly large Embassy there in terms of the numbers of Americans. I suppose we had at least one hundred, and fifty Peace Corps volunteers; we had a very large AID program and I guess in looking back on it, those were the two areas that as a Political Officer occupied my time. I more or less oversaw the Peace Corps program for its political ramifications, and the AID program I fought tooth and nail because I thought it was essentially money being misspent. We concentrated our AID programs in health. Absent a family planning program, this was a bankrupt policy as far as I was concerned, since whatever gains we made in health were being wiped out by the climbing survival rates of babies. Not that this was all bad. Nepal figured in UN efforts to eradicate smallpox, and they were successful.

Q: I want to go back for a second to dealing with the king. How did the Ambassador deal with the King? Was there bowing, was it face to face, could he speak directly to him or was there screen?

FISCHER: Bill Cargo when he was an Ambassador...

Q: Whom I assume was a career?

FISCHER: Yes, career. Bill had been preceded by Carol Laise. She had been married to Ellsworth Bunker when he was Ambassador in Vietnam. They must have been the first "tandem" Ambassadorial couple, but Bunker would fly into Kathmandu once a month or so to visit Carole. She was a grand lady and widely respected in Nepal. She had been quite close to the King, and when she left in about 1973 or 74 relations with the Palace while proper, were not especially close.

Q: Birendra was the son of the former king?

FISCHER: Son of the former king. So when Bill Cargo was there, he did not have that kind of the relationship. I suspect he saw the King on business three or four times a year. We only had one major problem with the King. Nepal in those days was the world's largest supplier of hashish oil. When you went into western Nepal, as I did once, you could stand on a hill, and as far as the eye could see, for tens of miles, nothing but the most magnificent stands of the world's tallest marijuana plants. This was a medicinal product. The Indians had always purchased marijuana and hashish oil from Nepal. Well, suddenly the Nepalese discovered this was worth a lot of money; so there was a lot of smuggling going on to the United States. We had put enormous pressure in 1974 and 1975 on the Nepalese to pass laws making hashish and marijuana illegal.

Of course, prior to that, Nepal had been a Mecca, a magnet for every hippie from around the world. There was a very famous restaurant in Kathmandu called the Hash House, where every dish had been made from hashish oil. Marijuana was available on the street for virtually nothing. People were giving it away. So we put a lot of pressure on the Nepalese to make marijuana and hashish illegal. There was a law on the books, it was passed in 1974, with our pressure, but it was never enforced. Partly it was never enforced because the King's brother who was a royal prince, had control of the hashish trade. We knew that it was being smuggled into Washington in the diplomatic pouch by the Nepalese ambassador. Hashish oil itself is a highly concentrated form of marijuana and although marijuana was cheap in those days in the United States, hashish oil sold perhaps for as much as a thousand dollars an ounce. It was a commodity of some value. We knew it was being smuggled in the diplomatic pouch into the Nepalese Embassy in Washington. We managed to have a pouch drop on the tarmac at Dulles airport, where the bottles of hashish oil cracked open. And that became a little dicey because we had clear evidence that it was the King's brother who had been sending this via diplomatic pouch.

Q: Diplomats in general at that time in Nepal when hashish oil was legal, were there circumstances when diplomats had to use it to be diplomatic. Was there ever pressure on a person for form reasons to use it?

FISCHER: No. There were a lot of guys at a lot of cocktail parties who were stoned out of their minds. I never used it except one time. We brought a U.S. Customs team to Kathmandu in an effort to convince the Nepalese they should control trafficking. They simply couldn't imagine how widespread the stuff was. There were people on the side of the road in these little villages

who were giving the stuff away. It was a commodity, dirt cheap. I had never used drugs. I remember one night the guys from Customs came to my house. I said, I gotta try this stuff; I don't know what it's like. So I took a small vial. It's a thick gummy substance, it looks like tar and I dipped a toothpick into it, and I smeared it down the seam of a cigarette. My wife was upstairs bathing our children in those days, and I smoked this cigarette. It was the equivalent of going from one scotch and soda to about three fifths in about five seconds. My heart began to beat. I know a lot about drugs because I'd been involved in customs side of the issue, and I remembered that it takes four hours for the body to metabolize hashish or marijuana. If you can hold out for four hours, you're ok. Well I closed my eyes and said, "I'm just going to sit here quietly, I'm not going to do anything, and wait for an hour to go by." So I sat there on the sofa and waited and waited and opened my eyes when I thought an hour had gone by, looked at my watch and one minute and thirty seconds had gone by. So I went upstairs to my wife who was bathing the kids in the bathtub, and I said, "I'm going to die. My heart's going." She looked at me and, "said you idiot! Why did you take this stuff?" I remember walking out in the backyard, and I walked in a circle for four hours. This was my first and last experience using drugs.

Q: To summarize the Nepal time and I understand very well, and I have one more question. How much of an accomplishment was it to climb Everest? A lot of people talk about out of area assignments. What did you get out of it? How did it help later? Obviously, you seem to have enjoyed the assignment very, very much.

FISCHER: It was lucky that I went to Kathmandu when I did because there was a period in the seventies when there were virtually no promotions in the political cone for a seven-year period from FSO 4 to FSO 3. Now that was an important promotion in those days because that was going from Junior ranks to middle ranks or something; it was a key promotion. So I was stuck in Kathmandu, and it didn't make any difference where I was because I wasn't going to get promoted anyway.

What I got out of it was simply an appreciation of a culture. Kathmandu in those days was a beautiful place. And frankly, it also changed the way in which I chose assignments. My wife and I and family were one night sleeping in a Sherpa house at 16,000 feet in a little village called Namche Bazaar. We were sleeping under an attic under dried yak carcasses, while in the room below us there was an exorcism done by Sherpa Tibetan monks of a guy who had developed some illness, and we went down and watched the ceremony. I turned to my wife and said, "God, we're in National Geographic." This was the ultimate in terms of Foreign Service experiences. As a result, I no longer became so concerned for a promotion for a benefit politically as to make sure the post was interesting. The head of USIS in Kathmandu was a wonderful guy, Kent Obee. Kent was a passionate mountain climber; his wife was a very good writer. And every year we used to get Christmas cards subsequent to our assignment in Kathmandu. Kent was assigned in Tanzania, and their Christmas card was filled with exotic stories about camping out in the African bush. I ended up going to Tanzania largely because of the sense of adventure. We as a family, at least I did, and I think my wife did, wanted to experience some interesting places. In my particular field, in those days I was involved in Soviet and Eastern European affairs, the standard career path was to go to Bonn, to go to Moscow, to go to Prague, to go back to Bonn, to maybe go to NATO, to stick within one geographic area. So the GLOP assignment changed all of that for us, we said, "Hey, let's take advantage of a career that let's us live in interesting

places." It is kind of odd when I read travel magazines to realize that we lived in some of the world's most exotic travel destinations: Nepal, Tanzania and east Africa and finally, the Seychelles. And Munich, of course, isn't exactly a tourist backwater.

FRANK D. CORREL
Development Officer, USAID
Kathmandu (1977)

Frank D. Correl was born in Germany in 1929. He received his BS from Rider College in 1950, and his MA from Columbia University in 1955. He served in the US Army from 1953 to 1955. His postings include South Korea, Vietnam, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, and Zambia. W. Haven North interviewed him on September 29, 1990

Q: Did you travel in the Rapti zone?

CORREL: Yes. We stayed in a guesthouse somewhere. As I remember, we had somebody along who did some cooking, so we lived on Nepalese food and a few imported items that our carriers had brought along. I remember one of the things we looked at was a family planning activity, but that wasn't until we were close to leaving our area there after about a four or five day stay. A helicopter came and took some of us straight up to a village high in the mountains where this family planning activity was being carried out. John Eriksson, for some crazy reason, decided to walk and he ended up, when we saw him, draped across a horse, totally exhausted. The Nepalese luckily had found a horse to put him on part of the way up the mountain. But, he literally stayed up, which I knew that I really couldn't have done and survive to be useful.

One remarkable aspect about that trip was that, after long, long flights from Washington, with an overnight in London and a few hours rest in New Delhi, good old Sam Butterfield had us met at the airport in Nepal and, without a stop at a hotel, took us immediately to the office of the Minister of Finance. There, Nepalese and AID officials were waiting and we were supposed to explain what our task in Nepal was. I remember glancing around at some point while doing my little presentation for the Minister and Sam and all the Minister's people, and seeing that my three companions were all asleep.

Q: I'm not surprised.

CORREL: Yes, it was absolutely crazy.

Q: Why the Rapti zone?

CORREL: I guess they had figured out that the area had some potential. Looking into it, our inclination was to check it out, and we came to the conclusion that it seemed reasonable.

Q: What kind of activities were you proposing?

CORREL: It was very much connected with agriculture production and the by now usual family planning and education activities. In the case of training and education, we ran into the overall problem of would the participants return and serve out in the countryside. I remember putting in several caveats in our report with regard to making it very highly focused and including safeguards that would insure that these people would actually work out in the countryside afterwards.

Going back to your question concerning the Rapti zone. Different donors were working on different areas of Nepal and somehow the Mission had zeroed in on the Rapti zone as their most likely area. In very remote countries, donors coordinated their approach geographically. Obviously, when we were there, accessibility was a very dubious thing, at least for us, used to modern means of transport and communication. If you were prepared to walk, then everything was possible, because walking was the common way to travel around Nepal. Invariably, even Peace Corps people and technicians we sent out in the field walked to get to where they were going.

Anticipating a question of yours about governments and democracy, I remember very well that we did not feel that there was very much we could say about that subject per se. We did approach it, in a way, through the question of country versus Kathmandu on the question of resource distribution and application.

Q: All right. Were there other elements in the strategy in Nepal that you were recommending or was Rapti the main program?

CORREL: Rapti certainly was the major program. Again, the usual aspects of strengthening the agriculture research in the country and family planning were big items. I'd like to say one thing that we did do in Nepal as we saw these opportunities. I think it's fair enough for me to take credit that during the days I was in the Near East South Asia Bureau, from mid '73 until I went off to the DSP in September of '75, I found that there was a real problem with regard to overseas mission programs, that is, they were all supposed to put their money into developing projects. The technical support catchall project had been abolished and after talking it over with one of the analysts on my staff, I made a recommendation, which the Bureau adopted, to provide support for project development from Bureau funds, rather than out of annual country program amounts. It was different from Tech Support, it was called Program Development and Support, and it was intended to be flexible but carefully administered, basically to give a Mission Director the opportunity to ask for money. He had to justify activities that promoted or strengthened the program but were not necessarily a part of a project. We promoted use of this new authority in Nepal. I know that the idea did not come from another Bureau. I developed the concept for the Near East South Asia Bureau. One of my previous colleagues from the old Africa Bureau days, Sarah Jane Littlefield, had gone to the Asia Bureau at one point, and she approached me to ask whether it wouldn't be possible to borrow an allotment of Program Development and Support (PD&S) funds from our fund for her programs. We had to turn that request down. But, after that it became an agency wide thing. Unfortunately, later on, it was put into a straight jacket of rules so that later eventually I found it unrecognizable and very hard to get. But, I thought that in the early days in '75 and even when I was Mission Director in Lesotho some years later, it was a

very valuable tool where a little bit of money accomplished a lot of useful things. I just wanted to mention that.

Q: Yes, as I recall, it was a very useful device.

CORREL: I can't say I got any credit for it, but I was pleased enough to see how it was used in the earlier years. It was helpful. I just wanted to mention that Nepal was the first opportunity I had to really do some programming using the PD&S funds.

SAMUEL H. BUTTERFIELD
Mission Director, USAID
Kathmandu (1976-1980)

Samuel H. Butterfield was born in 1924 in Idaho. He attended the University of Idaho for some time before being stationed in southern Italy during World War II. After serving in the US Air Force in World War II, he studied at Georgetown University, receiving Bachelor and Master degrees. Working first for the Bureau of the Budget, in 1958 he joined the International Cooperation Administration as a desk officer for Berlin. Subsequent assignments in ICA involved him in matters in Libya and East and South Africa. After the establishment of AID, Mr. Butterfield served as Mission Director in Tanzania, Sudan, and Nepal.

BUTTERFIELD: Several months later I left Washington for Kathmandu, Nepal, and what turned out to be the most exhilarating four years of my life. Lois followed in February, 1977.

I arrived in Kathmandu in November of 1976 and concluded my assignment there in December of 1980.

I found myself in one of the most exotic countries in the world. If ever the word exotic fits a nation as a whole, it fits Nepal. The country is physically beautiful. It has eight of the world's 10 highest mountains, the Himalayan Range, which runs the length of the country at the northern border. It has beautiful smaller mountains which are known as "hills" in Nepal, which go up as high as 14,000 feet. The Himalayan Range, of course, rises over 29,000 feet. The Middle Hills are terraced by the wonderful Nepali farm families, who must be among the world's very best. They are highly efficient in terms of output per unit of land, must be one of the most efficient farmers in the world. I won't go into all of it; it is simply a beautiful country.

The Nepali people are cheerful. I concluded that what they were doing was smiling in adversity, because their lives are hard, very poor, a constant battle to keep enough food in the house to feed the family. In the mid-70's Nepal was almost entirely a rural nation. Kathmandu Valley was urban, although it also had rural segments. Kathmandu Valley is an extraordinary place, simply filled with charming, unique architecture and carvings and temples. Everywhere you turn you see that religion. (primarily the Hindu religion, but also the Buddhist religion) permeates every aspect of life, and similarly, for every aspect of life there is a religious component.

Well, one could go on and on, but I won't. Suffice it to say Nepal was a country in which there were constantly additional things to discover and to enjoy. My wife Lois became well versed in the intricacies of the Hindu pantheon of the aspects of God, and also of the Buddhist religious symbols. In addition to that knowledge which we enjoy discussing to this day (1997), she also became expert in shopping for, buying, and enjoying the bargaining for lovely Nepalese carpets, which we also enjoy to this day.

Nepal had been closed to the outside world until just after World War II, and had really just opened its doors to the world when the USAID mission began its work in 1951. Nepali society and government were medieval.

For the next decade or two, during the '50s and '60s, although decreasingly as the '60s came to a close, the USAID mission and the Indian Aid Mission from the neighboring giant to the south, were the principal sources of both capital and technical assistance for the Nepalese government's development plans. By the time I arrived there the World Bank was the major capital provider. The Asia Development Bank was there. The Japanese were there. The British were there. The Swiss were there. The United Nations had a large technical assistance program. Australians were providing very effective technical assistance. Nevertheless, the Nepali public's perception was one of that USAID was still, if not the major donor, certainly the leader among the donors by right of our years of significant support. Public perception also was that we had done a great deal for the country. Now I suspect that while we had done a lot, we were given credit for more than we deserved! However, I always declined to make that comment too loudly.

Nepal was struggling with the problem when I arrived, as it did for a number of years into the future and had for a number of years in the past, of being both a monarchy and a fledgling democracy. Without going into all of the interesting history of the democratic initiatives and the monarchical responses, let me say that during the four years that I was there, Nepal was an absolute monarchy. All orders were from the top. Parliament was of little policy significance. Now that's not entirely true, and perhaps I've overstated it, but basically the traditional forms of government of an absolute monarchy in which they say everything came from the top, were those which prevailed, and the democratic impulses were submerged. That has now changed. In 1990 a revolution took place relatively painlessly, and the system was changed to a constitutional monarchy in which Parliament is the pre-eminent authority. The political parties compete through a democratic process for control of the handles of government via elections and universal suffrage.

Government officials had in the latter years of the 1970s--so did most educated Nepalese and, perhaps, non-educated Nepalese-- ambivalent feelings about the foreign aid programs. They were pleased that foreign aid was being provided. They were not pleased with the presence of so many foreigners, almost all of whom lived with a level of material goods that few Nepalese could ever hope to emulate. There was continuing tension about our affluence in the midst of their poverty.

Also, the AID mission had, in the two years prior to my arrival, gone through a reduction in force process that was painful and had an unavoidably negative impact on the morale of our

numerous Nepali staff members. Nepali staff morale was something to which I had to be constantly sensitive.

The USAID program at the time of my arrival was primarily a set of well-designed, traditional projects. By traditional I do not mean that they were unimaginative or failed to use new approaches when those seemed to fit. I mean that they were not designed in light of the New Directions or the new mandate which the Congress had given us.

A new element in the donors' and Nepali governments' thinking was the Nepal Aid Group. After a number of years of Nepali government efforts to bring it about, they had succeeded in convincing the World Bank and the donor community that there should be a Nepal Consultative Group chaired by the World Bank and to which Nepal and the donors would belong. It would be used as a forum for addressing Nepal's development strategies and development requirements for external aid. The Nepal Consultative Group was very important to the government of Nepal because it provided a degree of prestige by putting Nepal among those countries which enjoyed a World Bank-chaired aid group. The Nepali officials assumed Nepal would be seen as among the countries which the donor communities took seriously in regard to their development efforts. Indeed, in AID, there was some evidence of this because the program planning bureau, PPC, was at the time of my departure for Nepal thinking of a substantially increased allotment of funds for Nepal over the next several years.

My overall goal as Mission Director in 1976 was, thinking ahead over the next few years, to implement the New Directions mandate, in which I strongly believe. This account of my stewardship of the AID program in Nepal will be about how I tried to do that. Nepal and its programs and its people are so endlessly rich with vignettes, including many about the US foreign aid program, that it would be possible to provide a very colorful tapestry, but that would almost take another six to eight tapes to transcribe. I think the readers' patience would be exhausted, if it is not already, long before they got through it. So I will talk about what was special during my time in Nepal. We should focus on what was the main thrust of my management, namely the implementation of the New Directions mandate and a parallel effort within the mission itself, and particularly with the Nepali staff, to both raise morale and to do so by increasing their role and understanding of the program's planning work and implementation work.

I remind the reader or listener that the New Directions mandate, passed by the Congress in the Foreign Aid Authorization Bill in 1973, was essentially a charge to those of us in the AID program to move its focus more closely and more effectively to improving the lot and the development yield for the poor majority of the peoples of Third World countries. In the past our focus was mainly on national production levels. That focus often resulted in our emphasis in our work assisting large producers rather than small producers, and not addressing the huge gap in income between those at the top and those in the middle of the Third World economies and societies.

For a thorough discussion of the ins and outs of this matter and both the problems and opportunities, I refer the listener or reader to the monograph I prepared in 1974 or 1975 called "A Practical Agency Approach to Rural Development", subtitled, "A Draft", which can be found

in the USAID library. And for a brief review of a very important aspect of the refocused development emphases, an article that I wrote for the Society for International Development's journal in the Spring of 1977. The article had the rather long awkward title of "Why It's Difficult for Developing Country Leaders to Get Started in Rural Development".

An essential aspect of the New Directions was that the participation of the rural people, and by extension the participation of the host country experts in the development and implementation of development projects, and particularly the USAID-assisted projects. The degree of participation should substantially increase over prior projects. That was an aspect which I attempted to implement in a number of directions.

So, with my focus on the New Directions, there were two large questions. One was should our existing projects be adjusted in the light of the New Directions from Congress, and secondly, with regard to any new projects, what should they be and how should they be planned. This narrative will focus on those two matters and I now will proceed to the question of the projects that were in place when I arrived in Nepal.

As I said earlier, these were good projects, they were traditional projects, well designed. Most of them involved good quality experts. Several of them had been quite successful and there was promise in most of them.

The projects in agriculture, education, health, family planning, and the local construction projects, of which we had several, were backstopped within the mission by an able team. My predecessor, Charles Grader, had done an excellent job of assembling first class professional persons despite the backwater nature of Nepal. I give him a lot of credit for that. It was fortunate for me that such was the case. They were dedicated, they were well informed, they were up to the mark on new developments, and they worked hard. They were diligent in their service to the United States. As I mentioned earlier, in the interest of space and time, I will not mention all of the able people, including the contract leaders who were involved in the activities in Nepal. There are two reasons for that. The first is time and space. The second is that I may omit somebody without intending to and that would be something I would not want have appear to be a slight to that person's contributions. So I shall not deal with personalities.

The Mission's team was able. I saw no reason to make changes when I arrived. I still think that was the correct decision although over time, as one would expect, differences and frictions came up and had to be dealt with.

Significant existing projects which I dealt with throughout the time I was in the AID mission were the following:

ERNESTINE S. HECK
Wife of Ambassador Douglas Heck
Kathmandu (1977-1980)

Ernestine S. Heck was born in Oregon in 1940. She received her bachelor's degree from Oregon State in 1962. Her career has included positions in Bombay, Saigon, Teheran, Niamey, Katmandu, New Delhi, Colombo, and Madras. Mrs. Heck was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 1997.

Q: As you saw it, how did Nepal strike you?

HECK: Well, Nepal was by 1977 beginning to come out. Nepal had been a hermit kingdom, as people who know about Nepal probably already know. There has been royalty there for many, many years, but the royal family had been in effect captive for 100 years by a family of hereditary prime ministers, who basically kept the king amused with women and drugs and things. The royal family only came into power after Indian independence. India was very instrumental in bringing them into this. Once again, when we were there, the royal family was a hereditary and absolute monarchy. It went through a period of introspection and in early 1980 an election which allowed it to maintain its hereditary monarchy, but it was beginning to change. Of course, after that period the country has changed dramatically. The monarchy is no longer absolute and no longer controls everything, but while we were there, it was very much that. It was a very conservative society, which is not to say that there weren't things going on on the periphery, but the period of democracy had been some years before, 15 years before. My husband had been there to set up the embassy. There had been a prime minister and a government that really mattered. That disappeared, and the government was in effect exiled, and the politicians were exiled. So when we were there, it was a very conservative and a non-political society. Just before we left in 1979-1980, the beginnings of a return to a democratic system were in train, and some of those politicians would come back, and it was a very exciting thing to meet the men who had been, if not worshiped, at least very much admired by a number of people but had been totally gone during our period there. On the other hand, the king, who was and is a very sweet man, his father, who had been raised in the period of repression when the royal family was basically nothing, had tried to make the current king into a modern man, and he had sent him away. He had sent him to England, to Eaton, I believe, or Harrow. In any case, he sent him to England to a boarding school. He was sent to the United States. He went to college for a while in the United States. He was supposed to go to Japan for a while. That, I think fell through at the last minute because of things happening at home, but still he had been sent out to learn what the world was like. My husband had been instrumental in caring for him when he was in the U.S. as a young man, and inviting him into his home for holidays and things like that, so we had a special place with the king, and that was nice. In fact, we had gone when we were in Niger, we had a private invitation from the king for his coronation, and we did in fact go from Niger to Nepal for that. So my husband has had a better working relationship than perhaps somebody in the same boat. Where that got him I don't know. The king was and is, as I said, a very good man, a very nice man, probably not a terribly bright man and probably not a terribly politically astute man. Now it doesn't matter so much, but when he was the absolute ruler, it mattered a great deal.

Q: Before you went out, what were you getting from the corridors and people you talked to and from Doug, what were American interests in Nepal?

HECK: This is the Cold War. The major interest in Nepal for India, for China, for Russia, for the United States was all the same, that it was a border country, that it was the protective layer. The

Indians particularly, although they would not admit this publicly, had kept a large contingent of their spy agencies and so on there because of the closeness of China, and there had been trouble between India and China going back to the early '60s. Russia and the United States looked at it from a slightly broader perspective, but it was still the same thing, that this was a country that was somehow a boundary between the Communist and non-Communist worlds. So what were our interests? Well, the Cold War. In fact, when we opened our embassy there in the '50s and my husband was the person who was sent up to set it up - there had been a USIA presence but not an embassy presence. It was that we had heard that the Russians were about to open, and we were going to open ahead of them. We made it by about four months. It had nothing to do with whether it mattered. It had to do with what the Russians were doing, and that goes back to the late '50s. Those are the main interests. If you believe in the theory of universality, of course, Nepal is a very important country because of what it contained, Mount Everest and the mountains and all, but if I were the Secretary of State today and had to choose 100 countries, I probably would not put Nepal in there.

Q: What was the United States doing there? We had AID and Peace Corps and that sort of thing.

HECK: We had a big AID exposure, we had a big Peace Corps, we had USIA, we had CIA. I think that probably AID and what goes on with AID are the most important aspects. This was an extraordinary little country that goes from 29,000 feet to 100 feet in less than 100 miles. If you don't think that gives you problems in terms of development, let me tell you. This was a country that needed a lot of development assistance, and we were very big in that. Of course, the Peace Corps loved it - lovely people, beautiful landscape. What more could the Peace Corps want?

Q: What about the embassy staff? How did you find your role there?

HECK: It was strange. I think, Stu, that my role as a spouse in Africa was much easier, because in Africa, if we didn't pull together, we were going to fall apart entirely. Nepal was a much bigger American presence and a much more divisive or divided American presence. It wasn't an us-against-them role that I had seen in Africa. I think I preferred Africa, as much as my husband adored Nepal, and I must say I adored Nepal, but as a spouse it was more work and there were more divisions and more of the silly-rule things that I suspect every ambassador's wife deals with, including unhappy women's groups.

Q: Did you feel that part of your task there was to reach out to the Nepalese women and all, and would that go anywhere if you did?

HECK: Someone who had come to Nepal from India would probably laugh at this, but it looked so sophisticated to me I couldn't believe it. These were women who had been to college maybe and had been away to school in India. They realized that there was a world out there. Our daily newspaper was called *The Rising Nepal*, and it always had a happy little thing on the front page which told us what the royal family was thinking about that day. This was not sophisticated in terms of perhaps what a lot of people in the Foreign Service are used to, but it seemed great compared to Africa to me. I felt a lot of empathy with the Nepalese people, a lot more real camaraderie and a real ability to understand and accept what each other was saying, and personally I loved that. I was very happy there.

Q: I assume the Soviet menace, or whatever you want to call it, was pretty far away, wasn't it? But China...

HECK: China was very big, and China was by far the most important country for Nepal obviously. It sits on the border. Nepal has a number of refugees from Tibet, which of course borders Nepal. Nepal has always balanced a very fine line trying to keep India on one hand and China on the other satisfied. To them Russia is a long way away, the United States is a long way away, and they're happy with both of us, but neither of us matters to them like China or India. The mountains go across the Chinese border, the Tibetan border, and the flatland goes along the Indian border, so I doubt that you would get any Nepalese to say this to you, but they really are much more scared of the Indians than they are of the Chinese, and you can see why.

Q: Here you are sort of an Indian hand. Did you find Indians rather heavy handed in their dealing with Nepal from your perspective or not?

HECK: In the three years that we were there, we had two Indian ambassadors. The first one, who was a south Indian, I found not at all heavy handed. The second one, who was from north India, I did find heavy handed. I remember the south Indian, Ambassador Mennan, making the complaint once - and I could understand this and appreciate how frustrating it must be. He was in negotiation for his country with Nepal on an issue that had to do with water rights, building a dam, you know, of electricity, and he basically said that every time they came to a solution, they agreed on something, the next day the Indians would be told no, because overnight the Nepalese had decided that something must be wrong if the Indians had agreed to this. Therefore, we have to back away from this one and go further. I can appreciate that. Any big country next to a small country ought to get that point. I think we should appreciate that. The second ambassador that came along, I think, yes, he was very heavy handed. The Nepalese, having worked with the Indians for 150 years, were into looking for this in everybody and probably seeing it more often than not. Nepal has less population than any Indian state. It is just another dinky little Indian state to most Indians. By happenstance it's not a state, it is an individual country, sort of like Bhutan is an individual country, but most Indians don't see any particular reason for Nepal being independent and, yes, they would like to run over it, why not?

Q: Outside of your and Doug's personal concerns or people you knew, did the take-over of our embassy in Iran and the attack on our embassy in Islamabad have any - in 1979 were there any reflections in Nepal concerning that?

HECK: There were. In '79 this would have been before the take-over in Tehran but after the trouble in Islamabad. Two of Doug's ambassadorial colleagues, the Russian (then the Soviet), and the Pakistani, both came to him individually and told him that there was a hit team out to get him and that it was Libyan and that they were there. They were looking at several places in South Asia looking to find an ambassador they could get. We lived a block away from the Libyan embassy. There were just some trees and grass between us basically, and we went into a hiding mode. Basically there were two gates on our property, but they both went out onto the same street, so there was no such thing as getting away. You couldn't go in one way and come out the other. The CIA came to him with a bunch of disguises which were sort of ludicrous. If a

car comes out of our gateway, then where is it coming from? The State Department wanted to pull him home, and he refused to go. It was not quite time for R&R, or home leave rather. We basically lived with that fear for a couple of months. We kept all the blinds down in the house, and we tried all sorts of strange ways. It was not a very pleasant time in my life. We did finally go on home leave, and when we came back, we were told that whatever the group was, they had gone. So that happened. They didn't find anybody in the general neighborhood. There was no other ambassador in South Asia who was attacked. I don't know how many they might have looked at, but it was not a happy place.

Q: While you were there - this was when Carter was President - did the full recognition of China cause any change at all, or did that reflect at all where you were?

HECK: The Chinese were very careful around us during the late '70s. It had only been five or seven years since Nixon's visit to China, and they were on a very short leash. My husband used to tease them about our wanting to go to China, and the bottom line was that we couldn't go to China until such time as Beijing allowed as how we could come. So we never did make that border crossing into Tibet. But it was something of a cautious duet that was done between the United States and China while we were there. We had relationships. We were obviously both interested in Nepal for perhaps mirroring reasons, and we danced around each other on a number of things. But, no, we didn't have a particularly close relationship one way or another.

Q: Well, did the situation in Tibet, the Chinese occupation or whatever you want to call it of Tibet, have any reverberations during the time you were there?

HECK: Well, it was very important background for the time we were there. When the Chinese went into Tibet in the '50s and when the Dalai Lama came out, the United States was very involved in trying to pull down the occupation. We had supported a Tibetan who was geared to do just that, to pull down the Chinese government. Of course, it didn't work. We have never really admitted this publicly. Of course, the Chinese knew. Yes, it made a big difference. The Tibetans who were in Nepal were very much business oriented, business class, I guess you would say. I cannot speak personally for the ones who went into India with the Dalai Lama, who has settled there now, but these people who were in Nepal were absolutely anti-Communist. They were all businesspeople who wanted to have a country that was open to other businesses. What we would do today, of course, is something I would not want to guess, but very much we had been seen as on the losing side in Tibet, because we had put a lot of effort into aiding these Tibetans. In fact, many of them we took as far as Colorado, where we trained them and then dropped them back into Tibet to form that revolution. Well, it didn't work, or rather, it ran its course but didn't work. So we had a certain amount of responsibility for the way things were.

Q: Well, was there a large refugee community?

HECK: Yes, a considerable community in Kathmandu in the Kathmandu Valley around Bodinau, which is one of the big Buddhist temples there, and in the hills up toward the Tibetan border. There are valleys full of people up to 11,000 to 12,000 feet along the Tibetan border who are themselves related to Tibetans. There has always been a big movement back and forth between these people. They're not Nepali per se, but they do live in that part of the boundary

area.

Q: I was wondering whether the care and feeding of the refugees, support for them, was sort of part of our effort in Nepal or not.

HECK: No, not by the time that we were there. It may have been before, but the movement of these people was in the '50s basically and '60s, and by the time we got there it was the late '70s. They were well settled, building themselves community, making carpets, living their own lives. The only time I remember us being involved either individually or as an embassy had to do with helping various of these Tibetan/Nepalese getting travel documents, because the Nepalese weren't particularly pleased to call them Nepali, but they had to have a passport if they wanted to travel somewhere. I do remember us getting involved once for someone who was going to go on Smithsonian business or going to do something at the Smithsonian, and he ultimately got himself a passport that said he had been born in Nepal, which, of course, was a crock, but at least it gave him the document that he needed to go on his trip to Washington. We're now into the third generation. These people have been out of their country for 40 years almost.

LAWRENCE DUNHAM
Assistant Chief of Protocol, Office of Protocol
Washington, DC (1987-1988)

Mr. Dunham was born and raised on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts and was educated at Catholic University and George Mason University School of Law. After working briefly in the United States Customs Service in Washington, DC, he joined the Department of State's Office of Protocol in 1983. He worked in the Office of Foreign Missions as Diplomatic and Consular Liaison until 2001, at which time he was appointed Assistant Chief of Protocol, serving in that capacity until 2005. Mr. Dunham was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

DUNHAM: There is another case that stands out in my mind, and if I wrack my brain there will be others, but this was one involving an ambassador. This also was publicized. A number of years ago there was a fine man who was ambassador of Nepal. One morning I got up and put the news on and there was a report on television about him being picked up for shoplifting. The incident hit the news before we even learned about it at the State Department. In that case the ambassador had gone to a book store. Allegedly, he had taken a book off the shelf and brought it out to his car. He claimed that he had taken the book from the store to his car because he had a letter in the car which had been sent to him from his daughter. She was in medical school in another country. She apparently had written to him asking if he could buy a book in the United States which wasn't available where she was. Something like Gray's Anatomy. He said that he had left the letter in the car and wanted to bring the book out to the car so that he could check the title against his daughter's letter. The store clerks felt that he was shoplifting. They went out to the car and brought him back and called the police. I understand a call went out over the police scanner, which was monitored by one of the local television stations. They sent a reporter to the store and he interviewed the clerk subsequently. The clerk gave him the information related to

the story and the incident. Before we could get a police report and process it according to our procedures, the incident was reported on the news. It was also publicized in the newspaper and, of course, the Nepalese foreign ministry found out about it. They recalled the ambassador and fired him. He never got a chance to present his side of the story.

RICHARD W. BOEHM
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kathmandu (1978-1980)

Ambassador Richard W. Boehm was born in New York in 1926. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II and joined the Foreign Service in 1954. His career included positions in Japan, Germany, Luxembourg, Nepal, Turkey, Thailand, and Washington, DC, and ambassadorships to Cyprus and Oman. This interview was conducted in 1994 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: You were there from 1978 to 1980?

BOEHM: Right. Two years, as it turned out. Although we really had no very important business, I wasn't disappointed with the assignment. Let me take out the word "very." We had no important business in Nepal at all. Development assistance was probably the thing that we handled more than anything else.

And then we observed the politics of the place. China and India were the two powers with an interest in Nepal. Of course, it lies right between them. The Chinese were very active, and so the Indians were also very active. India held all the cards. India was bound eventually, as it was already, to be the dominant, outside power. The Chinese were giving it a shot. At that time China and India were not on good terms, so it was interesting to observe and report on that. However, we didn't have any serious, political business.

Q: Could you give us some idea of what the political situation was? What was Nepal like at that time?

BOEHM: At that time Nepal had an absolute monarchy, with a king of the ruling Shah dynasty which had been in power in Nepal for 200 years. Let me correct that. A king had been on the throne for 200 years. For roughly the last 100 of those years--and maybe a little bit longer--the succeeding kings had been figureheads, while the Rana family provided hereditary prime ministers, Maharajahs who actually ruled the place. However, after the end of World War II, when India gained its independence, the then figurehead King Thibhuvan of the Shah dynasty made a move, with India's support, to throw out the Rana's. He resumed power, which his family hadn't held for 120 years. The king during my time in Nepal was the grandson of King Thibhuvan, whose son, King Mahendra, had toyed with democracy. He had allowed elections to be held, and there had been a Parliament under the well known Prime Minister, B. P. Koirala. King Mahendra hadn't liked the way things were going. He found out that he didn't enjoy sharing

power. So he had all the leaders arrested and abolished the Parliament. It was still an absolute monarchy under his son, King Birendra.

It was kind of a humane dictatorship. Along with B. P. Koirala, you had a couple of other political leaders. One of the senior leaders was a man named Ganesh Man Singh. Ganesh Man was in jail. He was a political prisoner, as B. P. Koirala also had been. Every respectable Nepali had probably been in jail at one time or another. Ganesh Man fell ill, so the Palace let him out of jail and paid for him to be taken to the United States for medical treatment. When he came back to Nepal, he was put back in jail. [Laughter] It was that kind of a humane dictatorship, not a tyranny in the traditional sense. It was a semi-benevolent despotism.

Your question was, what was the political situation? There was some turmoil. Toward the end of my stay there the students rose in rebellion and marched around the streets for a while and hung shoes around people's necks, which is their way of humiliating people, including some of their own leaders. The Palace handled that by seeming to make concessions, agreeing to a referendum, and then rigging it. They succeeded in achieving the outcome that they wanted. They had something called the Partyless Panchayat system. This started with groups of five villages, which is what Panchayat means. These groups elected a representative to the next higher level who, in turn, would join in electing representatives to Parliament. The Parliament had almost no power. That was the system at the time.

The king promised to institute a more open system. What he promised was not an election but a referendum on whether or not the people wanted the Partyless Panchayat system or an ordinary Parliamentary system of political parties. It was a fairly close election, but the Partyless Panchayat system, which was the one preferred by the king, won the referendum. However, holding the referendum served to defuse the tension in the political system. The students went back to the university, and things went on as before until, as I'm sure you know, there was another, big disturbance a couple of years ago, and a genuine democracy was installed, which is now in place.

Q: Did we have any interest at that time in doing anything?

BOEHM: Well, we always promoted democracy. So, of course, we welcomed the referendum and we urged everyone to make sure that it was honestly conducted.

Q: How did the Ambassador and you as DCM operate with the Nepalese government? Was it much of a government?

BOEHM: There was a full panoply of ministries and officials. Then you had the whole palace structure, with advisers at the palace, who were kind of a kitchen or shadow cabinet. It was very difficult to penetrate the inner workings of the palace. You had to get to know a few key people and try to see if you could establish a dialogue with them to find out what was going on. As I say, it was a very closed kind of political system with various people in the power structure that worked in a very secretive way. The Queen, for example, was thought to be very influential, but one didn't meet her.

We tried to establish contact with what one might call the Opposition. This included people like B. P. Koirala, who was still alive. He was quite ill then and stayed in his house, but I was able to call on him a couple of times. He was a very inspirational figure--one of those people in whose presence you feel that you're seeing a saint. He was a very spiritual kind of character. So you could meet him and those who, during the brief period of democracy, had been the leaders of the government. Various people knew part of what was going on. You could meet them and have lunch with them and try to piece together a picture of what was happening and what was going to happen.

I have a feeling that the situation was much less complex than we thought it was. [Laughter]

Q: This was during the Carter administration, so human rights...

BOEHM: Human rights were a big issue. Patt Derian was Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs. I must say that I didn't think that she was at all effective. Her approach was a poor one. She rubbed people the wrong way. During her one visit to Nepal that I was able to observe, she broke a lot of china without accomplishing anything, except that she made the Embassy's ability to function more difficult. We made what noises we could on the subject of human rights and hoped to have some impact. We used our contacts, not just to find out what was going on but to try to implant ideas about what we thought to be good.

We had the aid program, which I was going to talk about. This program probably gave us the only leverage we had. The United States didn't want to play a very prominent role in Nepal. We left that to the Indians and the Chinese and, to a lesser extent, to the British, who had been semi-colonial overlords. They actually at one point had invaded Nepal and were very influential when they held power in India. India continued that tradition of being the dominant outside power in Nepal, but we had the aid program. All of the aid people around the world wanted to be in Nepal, because Nepal was desperately poor. It was one of the two or three poorest countries in the world, with a per capita GNP [Gross National Product], when I was there, of about \$100. Many Nepalese were not part of the money economy at all. If you went up in the hills, you would find a kind of subsistence agriculture. The people picked up a little money by carrying a load of salt from Tibet down to India, bringing back containers of kerosene on their backs.

It was a very hard economy. People were experiencing hardship, but the Nepalese, it seemed to me, were able to endure hardship much better than most people. They were very cheerful. They were sustained by a very, very strong culture, particularly in the hills. Although Nepal is officially Hindu and is known as the world's only Hindu kingdom, in fact a large proportion of the population were Buddhists, especially among the hill tribes, who were Tibetan or Mongolian, ethnically speaking.

Everywhere there was need, in terms of the standard of living of the people, which was very low. Nobody had clean water. Everybody had too many children--that whole situation was going on. There was a lot to do. Every donor country in the world, whether bilaterally or through international organizations, wanted to be in Nepal, aiding the country. It was receiving too much, ineffective assistance. A road would be built. There was one called The Western Hills Road,

which we built with AID money. It was badly designed. Its only result was that the mountains began to flow down into the valleys every time it rained. It was a mess.

I found that our AID projects were very sweeping in their intent and scope but very ineffective in practice. I argued for much smaller projects at the village level, such as buying villages the necessary piping and letting them build the water lines to supply the village. But AID resisted that.

Q: Why?

BOEHM: Because it would have cut out a lot of AID consultants. AID operates on the basis, not only of permanent staff, but also of consultants. Most of their projects are carried out by consultants or private firms that they hire to do this or that project. This is one of the things that bothered me most about AID. They spent an awful lot of their money on travel, sending people to the United States for consultation and bringing people out to do a study. They kept doing feasibility studies. The project would not be carried out, and two years later they would do another feasibility study. When you broke down how their assistance was being used, you found out that a very large proportion of it was going for travel and feasibility studies. Nothing was really happening. Maybe that's a good thing. When they did something, it often turned out to be sociologically bad. So I found very little to admire and much to criticize in their operations in Nepal. And I saw this elsewhere, as well.

Then, of course, most of the consultancies were held by former AID employees. Somebody would retire from AID and set up a business, the purpose of which was to receive contracts from AID. I thought that the whole thing was a scandal.

When you looked at Nepal, a desperately poor country that really needed help and then you saw this money being frittered away on travel, consultants, and what have you, you could get emotional about it. I used to get emotional about it. I still do.

Q: You mentioned other countries--the French, the British, the Swedes, the Germans.

BOEHM: The Swiss were in there, too. They had very good projects. First of all, Switzerland doesn't have an aid organization--or didn't have then. If they wanted to do a project in a country, they would hire people temporarily. They didn't pay them very much. These people were motivated. The Swiss would send them out. They were on the site. They weren't in Kathmandu. They were out where the project was, making sure that it got properly done. They would choose appropriate projects that suited the locality, doing something with the mountains and the rivers, which, of course, the Swiss know something about. They'd finish it and then would go away--would return to their normal lives. There was no career aid service [in Switzerland]. As I was saying, everybody--the Swedes, the Germans, and the Swiss and many other countries--were there.

The British, of course, had a special position there, not only because of their former position in India but because of the Gurkha soldiers. I suppose that you might call this a fascinating footnote in British history--far more than a footnote in Nepalese history. The Gurkhas are from the hill

tribes in Nepal. They're all recruited from a couple of traditionally warlike tribes--the Gurung and a few others. The British had a number of regiments of Gurkhas in the British Army, which were assigned all over the world. In the Khyber Pass, for example, in Pakistan, as you drive up to the pass, you find that there's one section of the road, flanked by rock walls, where the various British regiments and Army units that have served and fought there had their coats of arms and their names carved on the walls. One of them is a Gurkha Regiment. They've been all over the place. When Britain was at the height of its colonial power, these Gurkhas would serve all over the world. Britain was phasing them out. They were down to probably one battalion at their headquarters in Hong Kong.

The British felt an obligation to do something for the Gurkhas who had completed their service, which normally was for 18 years. The Gurkhas would then return to Nepal and go back to their villages. The British figured--and this also has to do with their aid program--that they had taken these men from very primitive villages, trained them, taught them to read and write, taught them mechanical skills, taught them to think, and taught them a little mathematics. Couldn't that be used in the service of development? So they started something called The British Gurkha Ex-Servicemen's Reintegration Scheme. A typical British title. What they did was to take a retired Gurkha from his village and give him something that had to do with development. One example would be animal husbandry involving raising goats. They would teach him to breed goats and improve the strain, then give him some goats, and put him back in his home village. They were doing that very successfully and very effectively.

The Indians have quite a few Gurkhas in the Indian Army. Nepal itself has maintained some Gurkha troops, which they use in peacekeeping activities. They have them in South Lebanon and here and there in the world. There was a curious circumstance when Brunei was about to gain its independence. The British had always had Gurkhas in Brunei. The Sultan of Brunei said, "No independence unless you agree to leave the Gurkhas here in Brunei." The British didn't want to do it but finally agreed. There are Gurkhas in Brunei to this day. He knew what he was doing. They are fine troops and very impressive.

Q: They are renowned. They are probably right at the top of any group of fighting troops. With that cadre of [veteran troops in Nepal], did the ex-Gurkhas represent any sort of danger to the Nepalese Government?

BOEHM: No, they didn't represent any danger at all. They stayed out of politics and played no particular role in political life.

Q: That's interesting, because often when you've "taken them off the farm," what will they do, "once they've seen Paree?"

BOEHM: You could keep them down on the farm. They'd seen "Paree" and just wanted to go back to their villages. They were very impressive. There was a kind of family tradition of service in the Gurkhas. An older brother would encourage his younger brother to join the Gurkhas, and probably his father and grandfather had also served. Then, at the end of their service, they'd go home [to Nepal].

Q: What about the role of the Indians [in Nepal]? Our relations with India weren't of the best.

BOEHM: Well, we knew that India was big brother in Nepal. The facts of geography, demography, and economics dictated that India would always be the dominant power [in the area]. There are plenty of Indians in Nepal. We saw that recently after the recent revolution [in Nepal], when the elected government came in. India had been angry with Nepal for some reason--I've forgotten now what the reason was. The Indians had denied Nepal access to the port of Calcutta, which is the main entrepot for Nepalese imports and exports. This was really having a crushing effect on the Nepalese economy. The first thing the new Nepalese Government did was to go down to New Delhi and surrender [to the Indians], in effect. India can put the screws on Nepal any time it wants to. The Nepalese know that. They resent India, as a small country next to a big country often does, whether it's Mexico and the United States or Luxembourg and Belgium. But the Nepalese know the facts. They know that they have to get along with India and that India has the last word on things.

Q: What about China?

BOEHM: At that time we didn't have diplomatic relations with China, but we were moving in that direction. This was some time after the Nixon overtures to China, but we still hadn't established formal, diplomatic relations. The Chinese had a very large embassy [in Nepal]. The Indians had a huge embassy. The British had a pretty big embassy. There would be a diplomatic corps function at the number two level once a month--lunch or something like that.

You would encounter the Chinese Ambassador and the Chinese DCM. Relations with us were quite cool. My recollection is that the signals from Washington indicated that it would be all right if you started social contacts on a more formal basis with the Chinese, even though we hadn't opened formal diplomatic relations. So, at one of these diplomatic corps luncheons, I took the Chinese DCM aside and asked him if he would come to lunch at my house. He said that he was occupied and was very busy. Obviously, he had no instructions. I invited him for a specific date, the next Thursday, I think. He said he couldn't do it. I said, well, how about the following Thursday? You name the date. He said that he was really very busy and had no time for this. [Laughter]

That very afternoon it was announced that the United States and China would open embassies and would establish diplomatic relations. He called me up and said that his calendar had room for a luncheon. [Laughter] So I got to see him from time to time. He would invite me back. Once in a while we would have lunch or dinner. I don't think that much came of it, but we did have some contact and were able to get some feel for how China viewed India in Nepal, and that kind of thing.

China was then competing [with India] in Nepal. They had an assistance program, most of which involved construction projects in Nepal, using Chinese workers. They did the same thing in Pakistan, with the Karakoram Highway. They had, in fact, built a road connecting Kathmandu with China, which was opened up to Americans during my stay there. I wasn't able to make the trip, but the then Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Dillon Ripley, came down from China and visited Kathmandu, by way of that road. He was in the first group of American tourists who

came through from Tibet. China was actively trying to promote as close connections with Nepal as possible. Ultimately, there really was no contest. As I say, India holds the cards [in Nepal].

Q: You left Nepal in 1980.

BOEHM: I had said that I would spend a three year tour in Nepal. I stayed there for two years. A couple of things happened at roughly the same time. Ambassador Doug Heck's tour came to an end. He was to be succeeded by a political appointee at that point. My former boss in Ankara, Jim Spain, who had been DCM there when I was Political-Military Counselor, was made Ambassador to Turkey. He was looking for a DCM. Jim offered me that job. I was perfectly happy in Nepal and was utterly absorbed by that fascinating place. The culture is a remarkable one--the most exotic that you can imagine. The country is picturesque. I would happily have stayed for the third year, but the DCM job in Ankara was a good one. It kind of reversed my own fortunes which, as you have seen, had been sort of declining. [Laughter] So I accepted that job and was ready to go there when suddenly a new Ambassador to Nepal, a political appointee...

MARY JO FURGAL
USAID Contract Employee
Kathmandu (1983-1984)

Ms. Furgal was born and raised in Illinois. She attended a number of colleges and universities in the US and Austria, including the University of Chicago, where she pursued Library Science Studies. She entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1978 and served as Cultural Affairs Officer in Colombo, Madras, Katmandu, Dhaka, Bucharest and Harare as well as in Washington, DC. Her assignments were primarily tandem assignments with her Foreign Service Officer husband. Ms. Furgal was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

Q: What was your impression of Kathmandu?

FURGAL: It was like 14th Century medieval Europe. We lived in a decent house by Western standards but it wasn't big; it was a duplex in a U.S. Government compound. AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) staff and the PAO's secretary lived next to us.

I liked Kathmandu a lot but it was the most or I should say the least developed place we lived in. But I worked for AID in contract. I guess you couldn't work for your own agency on contract if you were on leave without pay but you could work for another government agency. I trained a Nepali woman, one of the secretaries, to maintain their in-house library. Everybody had their books stashed in their own offices; and wouldn't share. These were the Americans; the U.S.A.I.D. head issued a fiat and we took all the books and set up a little library, a task which employed me six months, part-time. It was fun. We took one trek while I was there.

Q: Did you have, in getting the books did you sort of almost have to yank them from the people?

FURGAL: Fortunately some of that had been done but not all of it. But there was support after people realized how it worked and the benefits to all the staff. There were a lot of Peace Corps people in USAID; one third of the staff had been Peace Corps in the early Nepal batches. They just fell in love with the place.

Q: Who was the ambassador up there? Do you remember?

FURGAL: Jane Coon, I believe. You see, we get mixed up because from there we went to Dhaka and one Coon was in Dhaka the other was in Kathmandu. Which Coon was in which place I don't remember.

Q: We don't have to worry about that.

FURGAL: It's not important.

Q: Well, you went down to Dhaka from when to when?

FURGAL: We left Kathmandu '84 and went to Dhaka '84 to '86.

LEON J. WEIL
Ambassador
Nepal (1984-1987)

Ambassador Weil was born in New York in 1927. He attended Princeton University and spent his entire career in the securities business. It was not until President Reagan appointed him Ambassador to Nepal that he joined the Foreign Service. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: Rather than wait and come back, why don't we talk about it now? What was the situation there, stock exchange-wise when you came?

WEIL: Fortunately, at the time I arrived, the government of Nepal had just passed a law which permitted the creation of public stock companies. There had been an institution in the country...it had a different name, but had to do with the marketing of government bonds to private investors in Nepal. This, of course, was very small. This new piece of legislation which was passed just at the time that I was arriving created an opportunity for public shares and therefore the institution changed its name from its previous name, which I can't remember...something like Kathmandu Securities Marketing Board...to the Kathmandu Stock Exchange. Just a few weeks after I arrived, I saw a notice in the English-language newspaper, Rising Nepal, that there would be a formal ceremony commemorating the establishment of this new institution called the Kathmandu Stock Exchange, which actually was simply a change of name from the previous organization. So I had my secretary call up and tell them that the American Ambassador would be coming. There reaction was one of great elation. They never dreamed that anybody from the diplomatic corps would be coming to an almost mundane kind of event. But when I got there, there was a seat of

honor for me. They were delighted because they had heard that I had spent my entire career in the securities industry. When I came to this occasion and met the officials I told them that I would be delighted to help them and work with them and be of special assistance to them. And I did. I arranged for the director of the Exchange to come to the United States under a USIA tour. He spent a month here going to the New York Stock Exchange, the SEC, the Boston Stock Exchange and learning how our country did it. I also sent him off to Bangladesh because I traveled to Bangladesh once and had visited their stock exchange and wanted the Nepalese counterpart to go there. That was helpful to him.

Then I received a number of prominent visitors while I was in Nepal. Among whom were John Shad, the Chairman of the Securities Exchange Commission; and John Whitehead who had been a senior partner of Goldman, Sachs and also Deputy Secretary of State. These individuals had learned of my work with the Stock Exchange and they wanted very much to come to the Stock Exchange, so they visited the Exchange and, of course, this made the people there feel like they were very important and therefore it was a wonderful boost to their morale.

Another fortunate thing that happened was that while I was there Steve Weisman, who was the New York Times Bureau Chief in Delhi came up to Nepal to go on a trek. I was with him on this trek as was Carrie, my daughter who is sitting next to me. Steve Weisman and I were walking along the trail one day when he said, "While I am up here, I would like to do a story about Nepal. Do you have any ideas what would be an interesting story?" So I started to tell him about the Stock Exchange. He thought that would be interesting. I said, "Okay, when we walk back to Kathmandu we will go over there, and you can see for yourself."

So I took him over and he wound up with an article about the Kathmandu Stock Exchange which received enormous publicity. It was in the International Herald Tribune as well as The New York Times. Many friends of mine in the securities business saw it--John Shad saw it, John Whitehead saw it. Therefore I became somewhat famous for assisting this development of a stock exchange in one of the world's least developed countries.

Q: How has the Stock Exchange been doing? Has it been an element within the changing of the economy and development of Nepal or not?

WEIL: Well, it's had some concrete economic benefit, but in the beginning I felt that it had more of a symbolic benefit in that it became symbolic of the government's commitment to free enterprise. Later on as things developed, there were a number of companies that actually raised capital through the Stock Exchange. There were two joint venture banks, one was Hindu Suez, which had a joint venture to establish a Hindu Suez Bank in Nepal. They raised money through selling shares. And Grindley's Bank also raised money through selling shares. There was some activity. They started out with eight companies that were listed. The secondary trading was virtually nonexistence. Companies agreed to be listed because the law encouraged listing by granting a slight tax reduction. So it paid you to be a listed company because you got a tax reduction even though there were no shares actually traded. For instance, there was a hotel that was listed. The hotel had maybe 12 shareholders. They were not buying or selling. They did qualify technically as a listed company and received whatever benefits listed companies got. There were a few other companies like that. And then there were a few companies that had

maybe a 100 or so shareholders where occasionally there would be a transaction. But there were no independent brokers in Nepal; no telephone communications really in the beginning, so it didn't have all that much effect.

In the second year of this, however, when they started to do some underwritings, they started to develop a list of shareholders. Each bank underwriting created about 5,000 new shareholders. So when I left Nepal the number of listings had gotten up to about 23; the number of shareholders was somewhere over 15,000, which is a tremendous thing when you think of the economic poverty in Nepal. There was a little bit of trading.

Now, I have been back to Nepal twice. I am leaving in three days to go back on my third visit since I retired as Ambassador. I was back last November and had lunch with the staff of the Stock Exchange. They told me that the number of listed companies has now grown to over 40 and the number of shareholders has increased to about 30,000, which again is remarkable. So it is starting to have some effect. But when I was there it was very slow.

Q: What was the political situation in Nepal when you got there?

WEIL: In 1980 there had been some disturbances and as a result there was a referendum on whether or not Nepal should continue under the party-less Panchayat system with reforms or switch to a multi-party type of government, which they had experimented with 20 or so years before. The referendum turned out to be about 55 percent to retain the present system with reforms and 45 percent to go with a multi-party system.

The principal reform was that the people could now elect directly the members of the National Assembly. The Assembly would then select the prime minister. There was an election in 1981 under this system and a prime minister was selected. Now this was before my time. In 1983, for the first time in the history of Nepal there was a vote of no confidence in the parliament and the prime minister was dismissed and a new prime minister was installed.

But the system, this party-less Panchayat was in effect and these changes came about as a result of reforms that the king had put in.

There was a certain amount of unhappiness because Nepal was a very poor country. You didn't hear too much about the opposition. Political parties were banned. While they could meet without too much interference, they had to identify themselves as banned parties. The strongest was the Nepali Congress Party. As long as you said, "I am a member of the banned Nepali Congress Party," you were okay.

So things looked all right in Nepal. There were the usual grumblings. You couldn't tell what the opposition was. On the 19th of June, 1985, I was sitting in my office and I heard what sounded like a loud thud and within 20-30 minutes we got the news that five bombs had gone off in Kathmandu. Two of them were outside the Palace. They were very small and didn't do too much damage, although one of them did scatter bricks all over the business end of the Palace. Another bomb went off in the Anapurna [ph] Hotel and killed three hotel employees. Another one went off in the doorway of the Parliament building, killing one person and injuring another. Then

there were several other bombs that went off in towns outside of Kathmandu. This was the first inkling as to the extent of the opposition movement. It turned out that this particular group that set off the bombs was a real extremist group. They really didn't have too much political clout. The political clout from the opposition came much later.

As a matter of fact, came after I had left. The revolution that brought about the subsequent changes and a new constitution for Nepal occurred about two years after I had left. So while I was there there really was not too much evidence...in 1986 during my tour there was a parliamentary election because there was one every five years. They elected a new parliament and interestingly enough, now that I think about it, there was quite a lot of turnover among the people elected. A lot of the prominent people were defeated; leftist groups did gain about 13 seats and people were quite surprised; and nobody really realized the extent of the Communist Party activities throughout Nepal. It was all illegal and it was done underground so that it was very difficult to get a handle on it. But they were starting to work and it all came to a head in 1989.

Q: When you were there, there were a considerable number of people put in jail weren't there?

WEIL: I wouldn't say a considerable number of people. There were some political prisoners, but I don't think that there was a large number in jail. The father of the Nepali Congress Party spent about 16 years in jail, and was not in jail during my tour. As a matter of fact I went to his house to attend a wedding reception for his daughter, so he couldn't have been in jail at that time.

Q: Were you under any instructions or if not instructions were there any media pressure from the United States to have the American Ambassador try to put the Nepalese on a course more in line with the way we saw things? Was this a problem for you?

WEIL: Well, one of our objectives in Nepal was, in typical State Department language, to encourage the king to continue the democratization process and urge him to make additional reforms. That was the way we put it. We wanted to encourage him. We wanted to say to him, "Look you are moving in the right direction. We want you to continue to move in that direction as fast as you think you can go."

Q: Sounds rather presumptuous. What did it mean in actual fact? How did you and your staff interpret this?

WEIL: I don't agree with you that it sounded presumptuous. I think it would have been more presumptuous if we were to say to the king, "Now look, this is the way we think you should run your country." We didn't do that. We wanted to encourage him to continue what we felt he was trying to do. Now, as it turned out he didn't do it fast enough. He got behind the curve and never caught up. But that is another story. Our official policy was to encourage further reforms and move the country towards democracy. We basically wanted to insure Nepal's sovereignty and stability. We, of course, have a great deal of interest in Nepal's welfare, just because they are such nice people. We have a humanitarian interest in Nepal. But aside from that our interest in Nepal was to preserve its sovereignty and stability because it is an important buffer between two giant neighbors--China and India. These two neighbors have fought several wars and Nepal

occupies a 500 mile border between the two countries, so basically we wanted Nepal to exist and we thought we would help them by: 1) assisting in their economic development and 2) encouraging them to develop their political system and encourage democracy.

Q: Well, how does one encourage democracy?

WEIL: Well, it is very difficult when you have to maintain your relations with a government. But then there are lots of ways you can encourage them to become more democratic. You do this through your contacts, and through any way you want. I, for instance, had public contact with the Nepali Congress Party which was officially banned as were all parties in Nepal. I invited them to the residence for lunch. I attended the leader's reception. As a matter of fact we had a little meeting...the State Department didn't instruct me to do any of these things, it was just my own way of carrying out the goals and objectives. There is certainly a lot of leeway in letting you do what you want to do. We had a meeting of the Ambassadors from the UK and Germany and myself to discuss whether or not we would attend this very public wedding reception for the daughter of the leader of the Nepali Congress Party who had been in jail. The present king's father put him in jail. King Birendra may have had him in jail, too, in the late 1970s, I don't recall. We decided that we would attend the reception and along with the Ambassador from India, we were the only members of the diplomatic corps to attend the reception and it was so noted in the press.

Q: In the first place how did you deal with Nepalese officials to get the normal government things done and were they taking due note of what you were doing?

WEIL: As far as the Nepalese officials were concerned you have to understand that there were two parallel governments in Nepal. There was the elected government and then there was the Palace. I used to joke that the system of government in Nepal was a absolute monarchy operating the government through an elected bureaucracy, which in effect was what it was. Now the government, which I considered to be the prime minister, the foreign minister and the various secretaries who ran the government, who were my contacts on a day-to-day basis, they were not the ones to talk to as far as democratization was concerned. The ones to talk to on that subject was the Palace because the king in those days created the constitution. He gave it to his people. He could take it away. He could amend it. That is not true today under the new constitution. But that was the way it was during my tour. So it was useless to talk to the so-called government about democratization, but I did in talking to the king in my private audiences encourage him. You can't tell a king what to do, obviously, and that would be presumptuous anyway. But you certainly went out of your way to pat him on the back whenever he did anything that could be interpreted as encouraging democratization.

Q: You mention that the German, British and American Ambassadors--I would imagine that if you add the Chinese and the India Ambassadors, these would be the countries that probably had the greatest role, you might say, of interest. Was the fact that Nepal has always had very close relations to the British, was he sort of the first...?

WEIL: No, the British had an important role, but the most important ambassador as far as the Nepalese are concerned is the Indian Ambassador, because this is the country with whom they

have the trade. This is the country with which they have a 500 mile open border and the majority of the economic activity was between the two countries. That has to be Nepal's primary diplomatic relationship. A funny thing is that when the ambassadors used to have meetings...for instance if there was a crisis like a famine or an earthquake or various things that would come up where the government would want all of the ambassadors to get together because they were going to make an appeal to us, the Indian Ambassador rarely showed up, because the Indian Ambassador never liked to become one of many in its relationship with its neighbors. This was true in many other areas of relationships with countries in South Asia. India always liked to deal one on one with their neighbors. So the Indian Ambassador rarely showed up at these meetings.

But the most important ambassadors were the Chinese, because it was an important neighbor; then the US and the German and the British for different reasons were important to Nepal. After that came their other neighbors in South Asia, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. Then the others were much less important like Thailand, Egypt, Israel, Italy and the countries like that. In my tour there there were 19 resident ambassadors. Most of the ambassadors were actually domiciled in New Delhi and were ambassador to India from their respective countries and also accredited to Nepal.

Q: Obviously you had your political section, CIA, Defense attachés...were you getting the feeling that either the Indians, the Soviets or the Chinese were meddling in Nepalese affairs? You mentioned the Nepalese Communist Party, was this internally driven or externally?

WEIL: The communist situation in Nepal is a little mixed up because you have the Chinese and their affiliated communist parties; you have the Soviets and their affiliated communist parties; and you had the West Bengal and their affiliated communist parties. So actually you had a lot of communist organizations and even today, now that they are all legal and some of them are quite strong, there is quite a diversity of them. They have controversies among themselves. The Chinese supported communists and the Soviet supported communists and I do know the Chinese and the Soviets did give active support to their respective communists. It was always a source of great concern of the Palace. They were definitely anti-communist. As a matter of fact the worse thing you could call somebody in Nepal in the days I were there, was a communist. Today the communists are a major force in the political life.

Q: How about Nepal's role in the world--the UN and things? Were you running to them all the time asking them to vote this way and that way?

WEIL: That was a very important part of my job. We were constantly getting requests from the Department to go over to the Ministry with a demarche on one issue or another. We would always receive a visit from USUN--one of our ambassadors to the UN would come out on a tour to South Asian countries and call on the Prime Minister and review the issues that would be coming up in the General Assembly and the Security Council. It was one of the more important parts of my job to inform the Nepalese government of the various issues and hope that they would see things our way. Fortunately, they did. Nepal had parallel views to ours on many important issues in the UN. We were always very proud of that. They had a much higher voting record as far as we were concerned than India, which had one of the worst.

Q: While you were in Nepal, did you ever feel that China was a menace or did the Chinese think Tibet was enough and weren't really looking toward expansion?

WEIL: No, China never appeared as a menace to Nepal. As a matter of fact, they always appeared as a great help to Nepal in helping Nepal resist the pressures they would be getting from India. So they were there to insure Nepal's independence rather than to threaten it.

Q: Was there a tendency on the part of India to look towards Nepal as territory to absorb?

WEIL: India's record as far as Sikkim was concerned which once was an independent country and their sending troops into Sri Lanka, made Nepal very nervous. When you really sit down and talk to a Nepalese historian, he will remind you that Nehru once made the remark that India's northern defensive frontier were the Himalayas and if you look at a map, the Himalayas are on the wrong border. This is something the Nepalese always remember.

Q: So they want to have good relations with the major powers like the United States so that if push came to shove, they wouldn't have lost their credibility...

WEIL: Or identity. Nepal was always anxious to demonstrate their independence and sovereignty. They did it in a number of ways. One of them was to be an active member of the United Nations. They served on the Security Council, they contributed troops to the United Nations Forces in Lebanon. They participated in all national forums. They were members of the non-align movement. They went out of their way to try to show the world that they were a country and independent and sovereign.

Q: Not a hermit kingdom that nobody cared what happened to.

WEIL: Right. The hermit kingdom episode lasted mostly from 1850 to 1950. After 1950 it opened up to the world.

Q: What about our AID program there? What were we doing and looking at it from some distance, how effective was it do you think?

WEIL: Our AID program averaged around \$15 million a year. At the time the program started at that level, Nepal had about 15 million people. So it was a per capita of \$1, which is a little on the low side. Nepal is really not a country that has any great strategic importance. It is a very useful country as far as we are concerned, but it is not one of the front line states on the edge of the battlefield, so to speak, like Pakistan or Israel. So our aid was primarily humanitarian. Of course it has been some time since I was there and I have forgotten a lot of the details of our AID program, but in the beginning our first AID programs built a few roads, eradicated malaria in the southern part of Nepal, helped to open it up to agriculture.

During the time I was there we were not getting involved in capital intensive projects because we didn't have the money. We would do training programs, contribute to teacher training. We had a program where teachers out in Nepal would be trained over the air by Radio Nepal. We had special lectures and things that teachers would listen to so they could upgrade their skills. We also operated several integrated rural areas where we would try to do everything--irrigation,

agriculture, forestry, fish farming, etc. We had money going into an oral rehydration program which we operated in connection with money that was going into family planning. We would approach family planning both from the contraceptive side and from the health side to try to get the Nepalese to realize that if they did certain things they wouldn't lose so many children and wouldn't have to have so many children.

How effective was all of that? You know, you don't know because you don't know what it would be like if it hadn't occurred. I would hate to see nothing happen, but the record is not a good one. I really would like you to tell me what underdeveloped country in the world has really been helped by so-called economic aid?

Q: Talking about effect, what about American youth and the hashish trail? That really goes back to the 60s and 70s, was there any residue of this as being a problem for you as the Ambassador?

WEIL: By the time I got there in 1984 the hippie generation had started to age and disappear. There were a few of them left in Nepal, but they were getting bald and getting older. They were starting to go into the commercial life--opening up little restaurants, etc. So the whole scene on freak street has pretty well disappeared.

There was, however, a re-emergence of a drug problem which didn't involve foreigners or Americans, but started to involve the local Nepalese because Nepal was right in the center between the golden triangle of Burma, Thailand, Laos and the golden crescent, which was Pakistan and Afghanistan. The airport at Kathmandu was one of the places from which some of these hard drugs would be exported to Western Europe and elsewhere. One of our constant programs was to encourage the Nepalese and help them tighten up on the airport.

But as far as that hippie generation that you mentioned, it has pretty much died out. Maybe Carrie, sitting next to me, knows more. She visited me on several occasions. But there certainly wasn't much evidence of it when you walked around.

Q: Where there any other problems that I may not have touched on?

WEIL: I thought you might ask me something like that. So I gave some thought to it and there are two main problems that I would like to talk about.

One of the main overall problems which entered into many, many areas of our relationship, was the very fact that I was representing the world's richest country in one of the world's poorest. The Nepalese could never understand why the United States could not be more helpful to them. They reminded me, and they were right, that they had been a friendly country, they had contributed troops in World Wars I and II, they had parallel views on many important issues, they were the only country in South Asia to recognize the State of Israel, and they were a moderate member of the nonaligned movement, they tend to tone down some of the radical states that were in the non-aligned movement. In light of all this, they could never understand why we really didn't help them more. They could not understand our own budgetary constraints, and they viewed us as being so rich and they were so poor. That was something that sort of permeated everything in our relationship that sort of created a bit of a problem.

One of the problems that I had, and this started during my consultations prior to my going and it was a problem to the day I left: It was a problem that I never realized existed and that is the conflict between the evangelists who wanted to proselytize and the Nepalese Hindu State that outlawed conversion. When I signed on I never knew that it even existed, but I was made painfully aware of it during my initial consultations. I called on members of our congress who represented the Bible belt, so to speak, and I was shocked by the intensity of this particular controversy. There are people in this country who believe that it is their religious right to go and convert...you used to hear in the old days about converting the heathen, you don't hear that term anymore, but nevertheless they do the same thing. They go out to convert people to Christianity. They feel that it is their religious right to do so. When you interfere with their ability to proselytize, you are actually interfering with their right to practice their religion.

Now this runs into conflict with a State that bars conversion by constitution. In the Hindu religion you can not convert to it any way. You can't get in and you can't get out. So this was a terrible problem as you can probably gather. There is no solution to it. It was a constant source of irritation and controversy...

Q: What would happen?

WEIL: Well, people would come out from the United States and do things illegally and wind up in jail. Then, also, there were people knowing of the situation thought that it was in their best interests to create a situation where they would be put in jail to illustrate what they felt was the injustice. So you had to deal with people who were extremists on this subject, who were moderate on this subject, and on the other side people who were also extremists and moderates. The Nepalese were embarrassed by the issue and tended to not keep any of our people in jail over it, but to get them out of the country as expeditiously as possible. That was the way they handled it.

It was always a contentious issue and there are people in our congress who serve on organizations who support proselytization. If you can figure out a solution to all of this, I am sure you would go down in history.

Q: I have seen correspondence in our files dealing with Greece where it is prohibited there too, going back to the 1860s on the same subject. There is no answer.

WEIL: No. I think that is a pretty good one to end on. There are a lot of others--we had the drug problem, we had people who would get arrested, but these were the normal day-to-day problems that you have. But the religious problem was such a difficult one because there was no way to get it resolved. I am the kind of person who likes to bring the two parties together and make some sort of agreement and get the thing settled. But there was no way to settle this.

Q: You left in 1987.

WEIL: Yes, I left November 11, 1987.

Q: What did you think about Nepal when you left?

WEIL: Well, I thought that Nepal was making uncomfortably slow progress, doing things that they had proclaimed they were doing. I thought that the privatization program was going too slowly. That there was more rhetoric than action. I was very uncomfortable about that and made a speech on that subject about two months before I left. Some of the radicals in the parliament got up and said that I should be PNGed for making such a speech and criticizing the government, but 97 percent of the people thought I had said the right thing by pointing out that while the rhetoric was there, the performance wasn't and that no efforts had been made to privatize some of the trading companies, the national airline, the cement company...the major industries in Nepal were state owned. I didn't feel that the country would make real economic progress unless the private sector was given a chance.

ALFRED A. THIBAUT, JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kathmandu (1988-1991)

Albert A. Thibault, Jr. was born in Massachusetts on August 5, 1941. He received his BA from the University of Windsor in Canada in 1962, his MA from the University of Toronto in 1963, and another MA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1964. He entered the Foreign Service in 1969. His career has included positions in Guinea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia.

THIBAUT: From Lahore I was then assigned to Kathmandu, Nepal as DCM. I was there from '88 to '91. I was selected by Ambassador Milton Frank, who was a political appointee who wanted someone who knew the region. The Department had proposed a number of candidates and he had narrowed them down to three or four and interviewed me in the State Department cafeteria in Washington and we immediately clicked. So he selected me to be his DCM. To me it was a great opportunity to build on my previous management experience to become a DCM, although at the time people told me, cautioned me, "You're spending too many years in South Asia. In fact, you've been overseas now since '79. Here it is 1988, nine years. You should think of a Washington assignment and you should start thinking of other regions than just South Asia." I had been told that earlier, even before going to Lahore. I didn't disregard that advice lightly but I've always been a great believer that there's, in a sense, a larger scheme of things and it's impossible, at least I have so found, to game the system. You think you're structuring your career path in a certain way and there's so many ways in which it can be thrown off. So you respond to the opportunities that are given to you as they come along. It was in that spirit that I sought the job and was happy to receive it.

So I was there from '88 to '91 as DCM. First with Ambassador Frank, who was a Ronald Reagan appointee. He had been the public affairs or relations officer for the University of California system, not just an individual campus like Berkeley or UCLA but for the system as a whole and had been on the margins of the Reagan kitchen cabinet in California politics. He was a former air

force office, a career air force officer and in fact had served in the India-Burma-China theater back in the 1940's, as a pilot flying the famous Hump. That's what interested him in coming back to the region and he was able to land the Nepal job as ambassador. But it was in the final year of the Reagan Administration. As I said, this was in '88. The election occurred in that year and President Bush '41 was elected. Ambassador Frank tried valiantly to remain on as ambassador. After all, he was a Republican and it was another Republican administration but it doesn't work that way in Washington. I won't go into the ins and outs, although if you're interested I can. But he was not successful in getting that extension and so he left after only one year. Ambassador Julia Chang Bloch, also a Republican political appointee, became ambassador.

Q: Also from California.

THIBAULT: Also from California. A very interesting, impressive lady with whom I worked very closely. She was the first Asian-American ambassador ever and was very proud of that fact. She had been born in China, come at the age of eight or nine to the United States. She was a political appointee, and I think her ties are to Senator Mitch McConnell, her sponsor, guru if you will, from Kentucky and her husband is a well to do businessman, based here in Washington. But, in fact, she had considerable relevant experience. She had previously been a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia, worked on the Hill, but then beginning with Reagan through Bush, she had become over a period of eight years a senior administrator in Peace Corps, area director in USIA, and an assistant administrator for Asia in AID. So it was not as if she had no foreign affairs experience.

Q: And especially, those particular organizations had ...

THIBAULT: Active programs in Nepal, exactly.

Q: This was serious stuff in Nepal.

THIBAULT: And she was a serious person. So State was just the most recent of her foreign affairs agencies, if you will. So those were the two ambassadors I worked for there.

Q: What was the situation in Nepal at the time, in '89, was it?

THIBAULT: I arrived in '88 and left in '91. The major event of that period, and it was a protracted process, was the shift from direct royal autocracy to democratically elected government. It did not happen easily, it did not happen overnight but fortunately it happened with very little violence, in fact with almost none and with the U.S. government and Ambassador Bloch in particular playing a very helpful, very constructive role, very supportive role. This is something we supported, at the same time, without the king being humiliated or his role in Nepalese society being significantly undermined. So it was a very careful balancing act. At the time it appeared to be a very successful transition. Things have happened since then that have brought out the weaknesses, especially among the democratic parties but also in the monarchy but at the time it was a great accomplishment.

Q: You served in Sri Lanka, you served in India, you served in Pakistan. How did you find the

Nepalese people, the society with which you were dealing. Was this a different breed of cat?

THIBAULT: It was a different breed of cat in several ways. First and foremost, Nepal has always been an independent country. It was never colonized. They're very proud of that. It did not have the institutional infrastructure that, for all of its shortcomings, for example in Pakistan, is still quite meaningful which the British created in the other countries. That is in Bangladesh, in Sri Lanka, in India, and in Pakistan, all areas which the British controlled. They did not have that experience. The monarchy is also the same family who were the creators of today's Nepal, having been in power for over 250 years, the same ruling family. It is different also in that Nepal is a Himalayan country. That's important because ethnically you have a mixture of Indian Hindus – indeed, Hinduism is the state religion - and Mongoloid groups in which there is also a significant Buddhist element and a Tibetan element. Tibet has always been an important neighbor for Nepal. There is also the Tibetan cultural influence and Tibetan physical presence as well, through the refugees from Tibet. That Tibetan Buddhism is very different from the Buddhism I encountered in Sri Lanka.

Nepal is very different too in that the army, maybe this is what makes it a little closer to Pakistan, but the army always has played a traditionally important role. The country is different also in that the social class that has dominated Nepal for many generations is very narrowly based and there is a big gap between the Hindu castes and a very large percentage of the population who are of Mongoloid, semi-Tibetan people. The famous Sherpas who lead people up Mount Everest are from that background. Many of your so-called Gurkha soldiers from Nepal are of that background also. The country is different, also, from the others in that there's only one significant city and that's Kathmandu. So Kathmandu dominates Nepal and always has dominated it since unification of Nepal in the late 18th century. Nepal is also different in that, as their expression puts it, they are between a rock and a hard place. Kathmandu is about five hours by road from India and about four and a half to five hours by road from China. So it's squeezed historically, culturally, linguistically. It's placed between two enormous neighbors, China and India, and has to be very mindful of its relations with both countries. So all of these factors add up to make it very separate, very distinct from the other countries of the Subcontinent. And finally and most obviously to Americans, it's very much a mountain dominated country. The Himalayas are there, the world's highest mountains.

Q: I've talked to people who served in the Peace Corps there and say, "You get out of Kathmandu and you take maybe a bus to someplace and then you walk for three days." In other words, an awful lot of villages are out there which

THIBAULT: And that points to another difference between Nepal and others, and that's the infrastructure is woefully inadequate, especially roads, communications, transportation, compared to the others.

Q: Just out of curiosity, I'm a military history buff. The Gurkhas have always fascinated me. They have been, still are, I guess, a part of the British Army. One, was this a term, I understand many of the men would come back and retire there. And do they represent a class or group apart or something?

THIBAULT: The word Gurkha refers to one of the regions of Nepal and it's the initial, core region of Nepal. The royal family, the current royal family, is descended from the ruler of Gurkha, which is a district of Nepal. So it's from that root that Nepalese soldiers have been known as Gurkhas. Now the British came in contact with the Gurkhas in the early 19th century, when they were fighting wars in northern India and were impressed by their martial qualities. The actual fighting men, not necessarily the officers, are Himalayan tribal people with very distinct Mongolian features. The officer class tends to be Hindu. These other ethnic groups are known as the Gurungs, the Tamangs, there are a number of them. The British maintained a "resident" or representative in Kathmandu, where the Indian embassy and the British embassy are now co-located, sharing that whole compound which the two governments divided in 1947. The British had an agreement with the government of Nepal where they could recruit Gurkha soldiers. And they maintained a recruiting base, which is still there in Kathmandu. The British officers would go out into the hills, as you say, on foot, and sign up young men. And often it became a family affair, but it tended to be from these particular social and tribal groups, not from others in Nepalese society. They're still recruited by the British Army and by the Indian Army, far more significantly by the Indian Army which has several divisions made up of Gurkhas. There were about 15 regiments in 1947 of the Indian Army that were Gurkha soldiers at the end of World War II. And the British and Indian governments divided them among themselves. The British kept two or three of them and the Indians took the rest. To this day there are Gurkha regiments in both armies. To this day, many of these people come back to Nepal, but increasingly today when their enlistment expires from the British Army they are hired by private security companies.

Q: I know. One of our colleagues, Tom Boyatt, I don't know if you know Tom but he was the head of AFSA. He runs an outfit that hires Gurkhas to protect banks and things like that.

THIBAULT: I saw them in Saudi Arabia. They're well recruited for that, heavily recruited. They're in Baghdad also, I mean in Iraq also.

Q: We really talked about the situation in Nepal but we haven't talked about the work of the embassy.

THIBAULT: We had a high profile and our presence in Nepal was extremely important to the Nepalese as a symbol of our commitment to their independence and sovereignty. . The neighboring presence of India and China is always a matter of great immediacy to the Nepalese. There's a statement, I can't recall whether I quoted it and I'm only paraphrasing it, but it's much more pithily stated by the founder of the Nepalese kingdom, in which he said, "Nepal was like a piece of bread sandwiched between two giant neighbors." As I say, he put it much more elegantly but you get the point. So our presence mattered a lot to them, as a balance if nothing else. They welcomed the other embassies as well, of course, but we were not just any outside power but the preeminent superpower. This was in the terminal phase of the Soviet Union and so the Soviet presence, which was never very important in any event in Nepal, was not of momentous concern to them.

We also had significant activities that we supported there. An aid program, an AID mission that was large. We have a vibrant Peace Corps presence as well that had a remarkable impact at the

village level, where those volunteers were stationed. So the commitment that the United States demonstrated through its presence and programs, and through having an activist ambassador like Ambassador Bloch, to the sovereignty and independence of Nepal was absolutely vital. I'll get to how this became important in a practical sense, not just as an abstract concept of international law. We had a very immediate access to the top leadership of the Nepalese government. The Nepalese were very mindful of any statements that we might make about them. Now, getting Washington's attention to Nepal, of course, was another matter. That was never easy. Nepal's a very small country, and so to get the attention of policy makers, not just for Nepal but for any country of that stature or lack thereof, is a challenge. But having an ambassador like Ambassador Bloch certainly helped, no question about it.

Q: Could you tell us about how she operated. One of the things being, this was a time when we weren't sending as many woman ambassadors as we do now and in a traditional kingdom like that, how was that? Firstly, how did sort of the gender thing work but also, how did she operate?

THIUBAULT: Well, as I think I mentioned, she had had considerable Washington experience, although she was a political appointee. Through the eight years of the Reagan Administration she had been a senior official of USIA, of the Peace Corps, and of AID. She was an assistant administrator for AID, for Asia, before she came to Kathmandu. So she wasn't a babe in the woods and she had been on the Hill as well, so she knew the congressional dimension to this. She knew how the foreign policy system worked. More important, she had well-honed instincts and acutely developed political antennae, unlike Ambassador Frank who, though a very nice person, did not have that experience. All this proved invaluable at a time of crisis. I think also that her personality, and just her character, were such that she was not a person you could ignore. Gender was never an issue in terms of access. In South Asia, I've never found that to be a major problem, including in Pakistan, a Muslim country. It's another matter in the Middle East, perhaps, but not in South Asia. So she very quickly established her credentials and as I say was able to play an active role.

At the same time, Nepal itself was undergoing great stress. Beginning in 1990, the system there, the so-called Panchayat system, essentially of appointed officials, that is appointed by the king, responsible to the king, came under severe challenge from pro-democratic forces, led by the Nepali Congress, which is a political party modeled on the Indian Congress, with which it had had ties for many years. There were increasingly numerous and growing demonstrations aimed at mobilizing public opinion around the idea of forcing the King to adopt democratic concepts and institutions. These were events that were sometimes marked by clashes with the police and rapidly spread around the country. They attracted U.S. and international media attention via the Delhi-based bureau chiefs who came to Kathmandu to report on them. The royal establishment, or the Palace, as everyone called it, became very anxious to explain to us what its approach was, sometimes voicing their suspicion that the Indian, through their ties with the Nepali Congress, might be fomenting unrest. I should add that we saw no evidence of the latter; there was every sign that these events were strictly Nepalese in character.

It was a defensively motivated dialogue, with the Nepalese anxious to make sure that Washington understood their perspective. We saw the individuals and groups who organized the agitation as legitimate democratic groups. We knew them well. I often had Bhattarai and Koirala,

NC party leaders who later became Prime Ministers, to my house for breakfast before they got caught up in meeting with their activists. At the same time, I had very close links with the King's senior adviser and, indeed, sheltered him at home for a couple of nights as he hid from mobs roaming his section of the city. These contacts gave the United States and the ambassador in particular the opening to promote dialogue between the Palace and the parties, to urge peaceful accommodation, which we then implemented, not only in the form of public statements in which we encouraged the democratic process; not only in terms of giving private advice to both sides, that is to the Palace and to the political parties; but also in terms of providing AID-sponsored, AID-funded programs that brought in American specialists on constitution writing, for example, legal systems and the like. Now, this is commonplace today, speaking in 2005 but I'm not sure it was quite as prevalent a practice back then but we put it into place in Nepal, again led by the Ambassador, who because of her command of the bureaucratic process, of AID's package of programs and money that could be tapped, and of individuals in Washington, could get a hearing on this and could certainly make a valid case. So all of that helped define the approach that we followed.

I should add, too, that just being in contact with leaders of the opposition was a specific decision we had to make. In other words, as often is the case in authoritarian systems, you had to consider the impact on the local establishment of being in touch with individuals and maintaining a dialogue with individuals who were dedicated to overthrowing that establishment. Now these were not revolutionaries, as the current Marxist terrorist, almost terrorist, group is that we read about in the papers occasionally when news of Nepal is reported. Yesterday or two days ago they blew up a bus. Today I see in the *Post* they issued an apology. Thirty five people were killed in the meantime. An honest mistake! That stream of political thinking was very recessive at the time.

Also, we had to consider the signal conveyed to the followers of these parties by having the American ambassador or the deputy chief of mission, my job, meeting with people who, in many cases, have been in jail for many, many years. The Ambassador's meeting with Ganesh Man Singh, the grand old man of Nepalese parties and leader of the Nepali Congress, who had been jailed by the king for well over 20 years, was a major event. So this was a period of ferment for us. Our objective was to encourage the process to be resolved, as I say with a democratic outcome but in a peaceful manner and reflective of the democratic values that these political groups claimed to espouse. And we worked overtime to influence King Birendra and his entourage and the Royal Nepalese Army, which was very loyal to the monarchy, to bend and to negotiate into being a new system which would have room for them. And you know, it worked. The Nepalese themselves deserved all of the credit, a positive commentary on their political values, but we had reason to be proud of what we had done on the margins. Needless to say, we had excellent relations with the new government that then took office in 1990.

One of the striking features of Nepalese politics, I don't know about today but certainly then, is that the established political parties, the Nepali Congress in particular but even the Communists, were committed to maintaining the monarchy. And the reason for this is that they saw the king as the symbol that helped keep the country together and as a symbol of Nepalese identity and distinctiveness with regard to India. That was very important to them. This was the king, Birendra, who was assassinated by his own son several years ago, the crown prince, in a terrible,

terrible incident at the palace. Mother and father and other family members were murdered, and finally the crown prince turned the gun on himself. But Birendra, who was much shrewder than his brother, the current monarch, the king was receptive to this approach and, again, we worked hard to influence the thinking of the royal palace. Many of the advisors to the king were sophisticated men who were widely traveled. Keep in mind that the Nepali elite are all English speaking. Many of them, most of them, have been educated in India, with some also in Britain, including Birendra, and some even in the United States. So they reflected to a greater extent than one might imagine a shared set of values, as well. But a key to their thinking was the notion of maintaining Nepalese identity and independence because the great fear of Nepal has been, presumably still is, and always will be, being swallowed up by India.

Q: Did you find, as you were trying to promote this peaceful transition to a democratic government, what was the role of the Indian embassy or high commission?

THIBAUT: It is the Indian embassy there; Nepal is not a member of the Commonwealth, so it would be the Indian embassy. Actually they were very helpful and we remained in close contact so that Delhi would have no misunderstanding of our activities and objectives. We wanted thereby to make sure that the Indians did not interpret our activities as aimed at undercutting them in their backyard. India is a democratic country itself. They have always stated that they recognize Nepal's independence. Their concern was with Chinese influence in a country that they regard as within their sphere of influence and that is important to their security in the Himalayas. So they watched the Chinese role in Nepal closely and tried to offset it, particularly at that time. I don't know if that's still the case. I assume to some extent it is. There was never any suggestion that the Indians had designs on Nepalese independence and, as I say, they themselves had extensive contacts throughout Nepalese society and politics. It would have been astonishing if it had been otherwise, given how closely the two countries are intertwined. I knew that. In fact, the Indian ambassador was my former professor and research supervisor when I was a student in India, and his officers were excellent people. So we worked closely together, along with the British and others. So it wasn't that we were pitted against the Indians or anyone else. We were all, in a sense, singing from the same sheet of music. No one wanted to see instability and a breakdown of public order in Nepal. That would be disastrous, not only for the Nepalese but for India itself. It would create a vacuum for the Chinese and so forth. So I don't want to leave any suggestion that we were at odds with the Indians. Quite the contrary.

Q: How about the Chinese?

THIBAUT: The Chinese were, they were sort of like Banquo's ghost in *Hamlet*. In other words, they played very little overt role, but everyone was wondering what in fact it was. But again, the Chinese line was that they had no designs on Nepali independence. They recognized Nepalese borders. Their concern was and had been with the impact of Tibetan exiles and refugees, large numbers of whom lived in Nepal, on what might be occurring in Tibet itself. So I think they tracked that issue very closely. But we saw very little evidence, at least that I can recall, of the Chinese in any way meddling or interfering in Nepalese internal politics. But we did not have the contact and communication with them that we did, as I say, with the Indians and with others. Still, I was invited regularly to the Chinese Embassy for private dinners (wonderful food, I should add!) as they sought to learn how much we knew.

Q: What was the Nepalese government doing about the Tibetan refugees?

THIBAULT: The Tibetans had, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959, I believe, fled to India, having passed through Nepal. Tens if not hundreds of thousands of Tibetans followed him over the years. Today there are very large Tibetan exile communities in India and the Dalai Lama maintains his headquarters in Dharamsala, in the Indian Himalayas, not far from the Nepalese border. The Nepalese wanted the Tibetans to pass through freely, wanted the Tibetans to leave as quickly as possible. Many of them did and some of them didn't. In the Kathmandu valley there were several, there are a number of Tibetan temples and communities there. Actually they have been quite helpful to Nepal's economy because they really started what is now a major export, which is fine quality hand-woven rugs that appeal very much to the interior design community. And we would have periodic discussions, shall we say, with the Nepalese over incidents that we would hear about in which Nepalese authorities turned Tibetans away at the border or sent them back to Tibet into Chinese hands. And the human rights community here in the United States and the pro-Tibetan lobby, which is very large and very vocal and very influential in the United States and has been since the Dalai Lama's exile, within hours would hear of these incidents in the remote mountains. They would inform the State Department which would alert the embassy and we, of course, would do our best to investigate these incidents. We maintained a dialogue with the Nepalese on their approach to, and handling of, Tibetans. Not only we Americans but others as well, especially the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) office in Kathmandu.

Q: How did the Nepalese government respond? You complain and they say, "Okay, you take them!" or something like that?

THIBAULT: They would say, "We don't know about these incidents and we'll investigate them. They may have happened in remote areas and we haven't been informed." And that had some credibility, in the sense that Nepal is a country with few roads and where communications are poorly developed. So that had some plausibility. Mostly, I have to say, it was a positive treatment. There were well known Tibetan handlers in Kathmandu and there was a well established bus route to India. UNHCR had a presence, that is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, had a presence in Kathmandu and they would ensure the flow of refugees once they got to Kathmandu. That was the question. Once they got to Kathmandu they were in pretty good shape and they could move on to India pretty easily. But at the border areas, which are mountainous and often snow covered and the like and at a very high altitude, you never knew what was going on up there. That said, relatively few were detained and turned over to the Chinese.

Q: Was the embassy tasked with keeping an eye on developments in Tibet? In other words, were you a listening post? You were the nearest post to Tibet.

THIBAULT: No, no, we never played that role. In fact, travel by Americans to Tibet, even then, was relatively routine. You could take bus routes, you could take a bus from Kathmandu to Lhasa. So it's not as if Tibet was sealed off. Later on, must have been after I departed Nepal, they introduced air service between the two towns. No, we were never tasked with monitoring

Tibetan developments.

Q: Which would basically consist of debriefing

THIBAULT: No, no, no, let me put it this way, no element of the mission had that responsibility or tasking and I would have known.

Q: Well then, what about errant Americas of one stripe or another?

THIBAULT: Just as a note, I don't want to let my discussion of the Indians pass without reference to a major problem that did develop, which illustrated the concerns that the Nepalese had, and again the interplay of Chinese and Indians. In order to demonstrate their independence, if you will, from the Indians and just their general independence, the Nepalese contracted to buy small arms from China during the time that I was there. This must have been in early '89 because Ambassador Frank was still there. Remember, before Ambassador Bloch, who arrived in 1989, there was Ambassador Milton Frank for a year, in the last year of the Reagan Administration. So they bought small arms from the Chinese. This greatly upset the Indians, who as I say watched the Sino-Nepalese relationship extremely closely. I got, from my counterpart in the Indian embassy, advance notice that the Indians would not stand by and let this pass and that Rajiv Gandhi, who was then the Indian prime minister, was personally engaged with this issue and acting under the advice of some of his advisors who advocated a kind of blockade. They wanted to bring home to the Nepalese that they had crossed the red line, if you will. So I reported this to Washington, but neither they nor our embassy in Delhi took it seriously. But within a matter of two or three weeks, the Indians imposed a fuel blockade on Nepal. And the importance of this to the Nepalese economy is explained by the fact that they are very dependent on the port of Calcutta. They are a landlocked country and they depend on the port of Calcutta and their well-established shipping routes for their imports, including oil products, from Indian refineries primarily. And the Indians cut that off which within a very short period of time brought the Nepalese economy to its feet. In the embassy, for example, we all rode around on bikes. The ambassador used his car, an armored car, minimally. Fortunately, Kathmandu was a relatively small place, so you could get around on foot or on bike more easily than you might in some other places.

But it was a major development and contrary to international law, which guarantees the rights of landlocked countries. Even in the worst times, when I was stationed in Pakistan, of Pak-Afghan relations, when the Soviets and their puppets were running the country and there were many suggestions to the Pakistanis that they put the squeeze on Afghan imports passing through the port of Karachi, they refused to do so, citing these provisions of international law. Now there were payoffs involved so I won't go into that, there are always wheels within wheels. So this was clearly illegal on the Indians' part, but yet that's how they acted, that's how they responded. And eventually, it was quietly lifted after a few weeks. But the Nepalese had gotten the point and there were no further arms purchases from the Chinese. So there was a very real basis for Nepalese fears about protecting the substance of their independence and sovereignty under Indian pressure, actual or potential.

Now you were asking about errant Americans. This was a constant concern. The consular

section, in size, is probably no larger than any other section in a post of equivalent size but it certainly had unique challenges. Previously, that is in the Seventies, Nepal was known for the hippie tourist trade and easy access to drugs and the like, which drew a very, let's put it this way, interesting mixture of people but didn't generate much income for the country while at the same time generating a lot of notoriety. The Nepalese government in the early Eighties really began to clean up its act, kick these people out, prevent them from coming in and began to encourage, very strongly, nature and adventure tourism and they were very successful at this. They had a major new airport, which the Japanese had built, and the Airbuses would come in from Japan, Europe and from the United States, bringing well heeled would-be adventurers who were there to explore the Himalayas and in many cases do some mountain climbing. It was a major source of income and of employment. There were many trekking agencies in Kathmandu and they were very generous with work permits and residence permits for foreigners in Kathmandu. So there was always, as part of this, a free-floating community, if you will. There were always a certain number of Americans, a lot of them from the West Coast. So this was a large part of our consular clientele.

What would often happen is that people would come in having perhaps two weeks or three weeks maximum to spend in the country and would immediately set out to climb in the Himalayas which are spectacularly beautiful. I've never seen a country as gorgeous as Nepal, from that perspective. And as I mentioned you had a very well developed infrastructure of guides and Sherpas, human caravans who would carry everything with and for you, at every price range. People poured in to do this trekking. Most of them had a great time and left safely and there was no problem. But there were a number who were not as successful. So word would come to us that they had run into trouble and we would have to try to do our best, first of all, to find out what had happened and to mobilize support for them, in many cases. These also included people who had died while they were engaged in climbing, often of mountain sickness, which if I understand it correctly results from climbing high altitudes too quickly without a period of adaptation.

Q: Almost like the reverse of the bends?

THIBAUT: Yes, that's exactly it. It affects you in the cranial area. People would come having climbed in the Rockies or in South America and feel that they were experienced climbers. But there's a world of difference between climbing at the 12 to 14 or 15,000 foot level and climbing at the 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23,000 foot level. Having only a relatively short amount of time, they would push the envelope. Mountain sickness can strike you regardless of physical condition, regardless of age, regardless of gender. It's totally egalitarian, if you will. Not everyone is affected, most are not. But many are. And the only answer to it, and it's a very effective one, is to descend very rapidly. And it usually hits you at the 12 to 14,000 foot range. One of its hallmarks is to become disoriented. So others will see you reflecting the symptoms of it, which include confusion and irrationality and you can't be talked into doing what is the right thing. You don't recognize it. So we had a number of people who would die there and the embassy would try to make sure that, among other things, the remains could be shipped home.

We were perhaps the only embassy in the world, at least that I'm aware of, that had a little morgue of its own. We had, in the Recreation Association area, we had a refrigerating unit with

these coroner's shelves and you could stack people up. Of course, Americans were not the only victims of this and so you would get pleas from your colleagues at other missions, we have a Brit or Japanese or Norwegian or whatever and could you help store him there. Sometimes the units would be empty and you'd say, "Sure!" and then two days later an American would arrive and be stacked. I don't want to sound ghoulish about it but this is one of the realities. The other thing is that there were no embalming facilities because in Nepal, Hindu culture, you cremate within 24 hours. So there was a professor of anatomy in the medical school in Kathmandu who had been sent for technical training, not in his field, by one of the European countries, but in embalming techniques. That must have been a rather unique aid program, so that he could be called on if appropriate.

The most dramatic instance that I recall was getting word that a young American of Asian descent from San Francisco had died. He was only 21. Of course, one of the most distressing responsibilities of a consular officer anywhere is to inform a family in the event of death of an American citizen. So our consul called to tell them that he had received this news. Of course, the parents were heartbroken, this was their only child, but they very much wanted to have his remains sent home. Our consular officer, Charles Parrish, said he'd see what he could do. He and other consular officers would go out, sometimes for two to three weeks at a time, trekking in the Himalayas, to be in touch with police officials, with medical people, with the trekking companies, with the rest houses, the guesthouses, the restaurants and so forth that sort of populated the trail. Charles, a former Marine, set out with his FSN. He said, "I'm going in that area, I've got a trip scheduled. Let me see what I can do." He had been told that the body of the young man had been buried under rocks along the trail so as to protect the remains against animals who might prey on them. So he had an idea of where the body was. It was about 13 to 14,000 feet high altitude. He went to the nearest source of kerosene, bought a can of kerosene which he put on his back and carried up to the site where the young man's remains had been buried. And he uncovered them and cremated the body there; this was in a driving snowstorm, he told me later. When they had been cremated thoroughly he gathered up the ashes, he had a receptacle for those and brought them down again and was able to send them to the young man's family and of course they were very grateful for that. I remember writing this up in Charles' EER, reflecting the spirit of the consular section; he was the section head in Nepal.

But we had many accounts. A bus would fall off the trail and passengers would be killed and would include some Americans and their bodies would be retrieved, carried back to Kathmandu for storage in that refrigerated unit. So it was a challenge.

Unlike some other countries, where you were constantly dealing with largish numbers of visa seekers, young men, most of whom you had to be doubtful of their intention to return to their country, we had relatively few Nepalese visa seekers of that type, other than the normal flow of students and business people, government officials, people with families and so forth. And very few, virtually no, Nepalese overstayed their visas. So that was a pleasant change for me, having been in Lahore, in Pakistan, where we were flooded with dubious visa applicants. So American citizen services was really the core of the consular section's work.

Q: There were two major international events that happened during your time. One was the fall of the Berlin Wall and all the satellites, the changes there. The other one was the Gulf War. Did

either of those play much?

THIBAULT: I have to say that the fall of the Berlin Wall did not have much local effect, except, of course, for the German embassy, because the East Germans had a mission there as well, and it put the Communist Party, and the communists had always been a strong factor in Nepalese politics, put them on the defensive. Other than that, no, I would not say that the changes in Europe in a place as distant as Nepal with its own concerns, and a tremendously inward-looking focus on their own domestic upheavals, that that was really a major event for them, at least as I recall.

So far as the Gulf War was concerned, we went into overdrive, that is the mission did, in making sure that we explained to Nepalese public opinion the background and the response by the United States, leading the international community, to Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait. As you can imagine, there was no sympathy for Saddam and Iraq in a country like Nepal, which saw itself like Kuwait in the shadow of much larger neighbors. And the Muslim population there is miniscule, so that there wasn't an Islamic dimension to this. And then, of course, the British contingent included Gurkhas. The British maintain an active recruiting center in Kathmandu and ties between the Royal Nepalese Army and the British Army go back generations. So it was a very positive understanding, abetted by the support extended by the whole international community and the United Nations. There were no points of contention there over the Gulf War.

Q: At the embassy, what, obviously you're a Subcontinent hand, the Indian embassy, what were you getting from them on the Gulf War?

THIBAULT: I really, I find that a hard question to answer. My recollection is that the Indian position was not critical of the United States. We had some overflight issues and there were some elements in the Indian political environment who were critical. But I don't recall that these really intruded much into how the Indians conducted themselves in Nepal on this issue. It didn't register with me at the time, at least.

Q: Was there much contact with the Chinese?

THIBAULT: We were on friendly terms, we were on friendly terms. Tiananmen Square occurred during this period, June of '89, so for a time there was a lack of communication and contact with them. But we really didn't, I can't say that we really spent much time with them, but it wasn't a hostile relationship. I've already noted my encounters with the Chinese embassy.

Q: Were there any other issues that involved you or the ambassador or the embassy?

THIBAULT: None that come to mind, beyond the ones you always have in managing programs and the like. But in terms of the type that we've talked about here, no, I can't think of any.

Q: Did you find that the programs, between AID and what the embassy, sort of the State Department side of the embassy work, were they well coordinated?

THIBAULT: They occupied, the AID mission occupied, a building, a large building across town,

so it wasn't that they were on the same compound as we, but for that matter this was also the case with USIS which had its own office as did the Peace Corps. So we were scattered around, even the medical unit was elsewhere. But at the same time, I would say that there was excellent coordination. The ambassador, having been an assistant AID administrator, obviously had a terrific grasp of AID programs, not only as an AID administrator, but as AID administrator for Asia as a whole. So she knew the AID side very, very well. She handpicked the director, Kelly Kammerer. Both he and his deputy, Stacey Rhodes, and I were all on very positive terms, so there was no friction and the AID mission was very responsive in shifting to new priorities in response to the political situation. So I would say that AID was a key element of the ambassador's strategy and of intra-mission cooperation. The same was also true of Peace Corps which had a very large program. Very good interpersonal relationships among myself, the Ambassador, and agency reps also helped considerably.

Q: Right now there's a very nasty Marxist movement going on in Nepal. Was that around at all?

THIBAULT: Only in the portions of Nepal that bordered on the state of West Bengal in India. Now West Bengal was and is the center of the communist movement in India. There's no question that in its more virulent phases Maoism had a certain appeal in Bengal and the Communist Party there split, as it did in many parts of the world, between the pro-Soviet and the pro-Chinese Marxists. The pro-Chinese Marxists had a following in the border areas adjacent to, as I say, West Bengal. It was probably a precursor of what we've seen subsequently but landlords were targeted. Some of them were beheaded. Others were just gunned down. But these were very distant echoes and you would hear about them or you heard about incidents like these that had happened even before my arrival. But the main communist group was a much more tame movement which had strong ties with, if you will, the establishment Communist Parties in India and they were distracted for a long time by the collapse in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union itself. So they were really on the fringes at that point, although some of their leaders were politicians of substantial stature in Nepal. But, as I say, this was still a very small cloud on the horizon and at the time no one would have guessed that it would evolve to where we are now.

Q: 1991, where did you go?

THIBAULT: In 1991, after 12 years abroad, I returned to Washington and I became director of the Office for Europe, Near East, South Asia and Latin America, quite a mouthful, in what was then called the Directorate (not Bureau) for Refugee Programs (RP).

JULIA CHANG BLOCH
Ambassador
Nepal (1989-1992)

Ambassador Bloch was born in China and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1951. She was raised in San Francisco and attended the University of California at Berkeley. She later joined the Peace Corps and traveled to North Borneo as an English Instructor. Between 1971 and 1976 she worked under

Senator Percy in Washington and later joined AID as an assistant administrator in Africa (Sahil) Femnera, Asia, Gaza, and Israel. She was later appointed as ambassador to Nepal. Ambassador Bloch was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1993.

Q: To move, how did you get your appointment to Nepal?

BLOCH: Well I was again out of government, how many times has it been that I've tried to get out of government. I went back to Harvard and I was at the Center for International Affairs. I was on the US-Japan Relations Program. One of the major things I did at AID, which I did mention, was to establish a dialogue with the Japanese on aid. They were becoming the largest aid donor, supplanting us. And I thought the cooperation was to the good of both. I think worked out a very mechanism that still carries on today but without unfortunately the full support of top management. And so I got very interested in Japan. I had done Asian studies but in my day it was Chinese studies and I felt that anybody who was interested in Asia cannot know Japan in this day and age. So I went to the US-Japan Relations Program, it was a perfect fit. I had become somewhat an expert on US-Japan aid. And then one day, you know, I have a lot of friends in Washington, and I got an interview with Secretary Baker. And I wanted to stay in Washington. I thought I'd get an Assistant Secretary job, something like that, because my husband is in Washington. Well, he said, he went over the Assistant Secretaries jobs and either they were all taken or not suitable. The ones that I was suited for were no longer available. And he said, what about overseas. And I knew what he was after. Because there had never been an Asian-American Ambassador. I had been offered an Ambassadorship once before under Secretary Shultz, that was another saga, but at the time my husband said no. Then I got a call from the White House personnel office, after that maybe. And they asked me whether I'd be interested in Nepal. And frankly I said, is there any other choice? Because I felt Nepal might be boring. I was not interested in an Ambassadorial assignment even a historic one if I was going to be professionally bored. I'd always had meaningful jobs. I'm not interested in the status or what do you call it? The visibility. Two other countries were names but after a long deliberation with my husband, we decided on Nepal. And thank goodness. Of course it wasn't very boring because they had a revolution soon after I arrived.

Q: You were there from '89 to '92. What was the situation in Nepal when you arrived.

BLOCH: When I arrived it was an absolute monarchy, lovely country, beautiful scenery, and as far as Embassy work was concerned, it was a very sleepy little outpost. Nobody worked terribly hard with the exception of maybe one officer. Even had things not changed. I worked differently and even then my focus was on aid. Because that was the focus of our relationship. And there I had to make sure I didn't overstep my bounds as Ambassador and get into the responsibilities of the AID Director. At the same time, it was okay because I was learning my job as an Ambassador, but that was very easy. Because I think that I've been in training all my life.

Q: I was just going to say, once you're in the business, and you've been in it so long, and worked with so many Embassies.

BLOCH: The thing was in Nepal we had a Peace Corps, we had a USIA, I knew less about the State Department than the other agencies. We had a large AID, comparatively speaking. The only other agency I didn't know was Defense and CIA. And so I immediately set about to run a Mission and not the State Department. Not an Embassy. And that hadn't been done so that was interesting. That the whole Mission could work together for a national objective.

Q: What was our objective. What were American interests in Nepal.

BLOCH: Our American interest in Nepal when I first arrived was to support Nepal's sovereignty and to support Nepal's economic development. Those two.

Q: What sort of aid were we doing there?

BLOCH: It was minuscule. When I arrived I think it was about 12 or 15 million. But Nepal is a small country. That was a large sum for a country with the absorbed capacity of Nepal. We had at one time been the largest donor but as the years went by, certainly the Japanese, the Germans, even some of the Scandinavian countries supplanted us. But nevertheless we had influence because we were one of the few countries with a Mission on the ground.

Q: At the beginning with an absolute monarchy, how did you deal with the Monarch?

BLOCH: The Monarchy. In Nepal at that time, you could deal with maybe 6 people in Kathmandu. Because they made the decisions, so it was a very small community. You deal with it with respect. You try of course to have some dialogue, to have some relationship and it wasn't always easy. Because monarchies are very closed, by large. Lots of ceremony. For example, the custom was that when an Ambassador arrived, you waited 6 months for your first appointment with the King. I arrived in late September, I had to come back on some personal business in November. I went to the King's private secretary and I said, "Look, I'm going home, does the King want to give me any messages to take back." This is a good time for me to certainly make a case. And lo and behold, I got an appointment. Kathmandu was aflutter, the diplomatic community was aflutter. How did this happen? And my interview was, if you got 15 or 20 minutes you were lucky, I was told this by my staff. I was really prepped by everybody, even the Palace's secretary had said no more than 20 minutes or whatever and when he tells you to go, you get up and go. Well our meeting lasted for almost an hour and the Private Secretary was beside himself.

Q: There was a revolution there when you were there. When did this happen.

BLOCH: It happened in February.

Q: How did this impact on you and the Embassy.

BLOCH: We were working around the clock. We called our Emergency Action Committee together. From all that was coming out of Washington, my first priority was that all Americans in Nepal were safe. That is no easy matter because Nepal is a tourist destination. But our EAC committee worked very well. My Deputy at that time, Al Thibault, was really terrific. We

became the information central for all the western Embassies because most of my colleagues were out at Kathmandu. That's not so much February, everything came to a head in April.

Q: How did this develop. How did this revolution come about. Was it foreseen?

BLOCH: It was certainly not foreseen in terms of the results not even by the protagonists. The Congress Party had been in opposition for a long time, they were either in exile or banned. Many of them were in prison. But beginning of February they started marches and demonstrations. Most of the leaders were under house arrest. And things started sort of placidly. Nepalese are not violent people. The demonstrations gathered steam. Partly aggravated at that time by Indo-Nepal dispute. Where India cut off all but 2 access points or transit points. So goods were scarce, the middle class was getting somewhat disgruntled because of that. I think part of the problem was the way the government handled the protest cause they were making no concessions. And by the time they began to realize and talk to the opposition, to take the opposition more seriously, it was getting too late. And that's what happened. About 50 people were killed. And for Nepal that was a horrendous act, to have people killed. The momentum just built. I remember Solarz came in December, Congressman Solarz. And we had a breakfast with the Congress Party leaders. Certainly at that time none of us, including the Congress leaders, predicted that they would in fact, not just succeed but actually win. Because what the Congress Party, even as the momentum gathered, had sought was essentially participation in the upcoming election. They wanted to participate as a party in the coming election. They were not after taking over the government. Partly I think also what was happening around the world.

Q: We're talking about the fall of the Soviet Union.

BLOCH: Exactly. Word was getting into Nepal, even the Uhmara Kingdom of Nepal, and people wanted more say, because it was a very closed society. And the professional began to get involved. Professionals in the medical field, professionals at the Universities, professionals even in the civil service started demonstrating. And as more people were killed, more of the professionals came out.

Q: Was the Embassy taking sides?

BLOCH: We maintained a very clear dialogue with both sides. We were one of the few places where there was clear information because we talked to both sides. And we made sure that our message was: Minimize violation and open dialogue. We were perceived by the revolutionaries as having helped their movement. Congress sent a letter again espousing support for democracy.

Q: Our Congress.

BLOCH: Our Congress. But at the same time we never lost access to the government. So again it was a question of balance.

Q: How did it play out as far as American, your Embassy was concerned.

BLOCH: Tremendously. Because when the dust settled, the government really sent us all kinds of appreciation letters. And with the new government we had complete access, even with the communists.

Q: Did this help at all, I mean, United Nations votes are always a big problem, were you able to, how was Nepal united?

BLOCH: Nepal, of all South Asian countries, I think they supported us more than any others. But that's only one gauge. I think we were able to help them consolidate their democracy. Democracy is very fragile, it's still very new. Still a lot of work remains in the consolidation process. But I think we built probably a model democracy support program. I wrote a paper by the way and USIA commended us for doing that.

Q: Were they coming to you for advice.

BLOCH: Absolutely.

Q: I just came back, I spent the last month, 3 weeks, in Kyrgyzstan where I was one of the many people helping them, my thing was consultant on how to set-up a consular service. Many of these countries that are sort of coming out of a different era have found that we act as a sort of honest

BLOCH: Honest broker.

Q: A national Peace Corps.

BLOCH: More than a Peace Corps.

Q: We only give advice.

BLOCH: We developed and established a program for what we considered the transition phase and the move into the consolidation phase. We were there immediately because we started work, we had people on the ground helping with the constitutional reform process in May. The revolution succeeded in April, they came to us because we had complete access. They asked us for help. We helped with the constitutional reform phase, we then worked up a program to support the development of the parliament. And we looked at the judiciary because that's another anchor of democracy. We stepped up our exchanges. I got AID to fund USIA's International Visitors. Because we had to get the leadership out, to see the world and broaden their horizons. Because they had no experience, no experience in government.

Q: As the Mission goes, I take it that because we had a Mission in Kathmandu that we played a much greater role than many others.

BLOCH: Absolutely. Because I ran an integrated Mission. It was not easy to get AID to support USIA activities. I had to make them see that it was not an AID activity or a USIA activity. It was a democracy support program for Nepal. It was a US democracy support program for Nepal. And

we had a task force which I chaired, I think only the Ambassador can chair. Because you've got to make all your components work together.

Q: Were you getting good support from Washington on this nation building.

BLOCH: Fairly good, except of course Nepal was never a priority. We could never be considered in the same plateau as any other democracies. You know, money was no problem for Russia or the Soviet Republics or for Eastern Europe. I will never forget that the sort of quasi-governmental institutions that set-up to support democracy, what was it called now, the Democratic, it was a net, do you know what I mean?

Q: I know, there was one.

BLOCH: The Democratic side and the Republican one, right? The Democratic side wouldn't even give us the time of day. So a lot of it we did from the field. And we got AID, we persuaded AID to give us more priority on a regional basis. And we squeezed out monies when we needed it.

Q: It sounds like you're the right person on the spot. You had credentials in USIA and AID. So you kind of knew not only where the body was buried but where the money was buried.

BLOCH: Exactly, no question.

Q: When you left Nepal, how did you feel about your Mission there?

BLOCH: Great. I thought I left on a high.

TERESITA C. SCHAFFER
Deputy Assistant Secretary, NEA - South Asia
Washington, DC (1989-1992)

Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.

SCHAFFER: Let me turn now to Nepal. The major event there in the 1989-92 period was the end of the existing constitutional system, in which the king was very powerful and an electoral arrangement which permitted popular participation in village elections, but without party designation. Under pressure, largely from street demonstrations, the constitution was revised in the spring of 1990 to limit the king's powers. The ban on political parties was lifted allowing a real representative national assembly to be formed. This was Nepal's first effort to have a parliamentary democracy. It was a fascinating transition. Our ambassador, Julia Chang Bloch,

was a political appointee -- the first Chinese-American woman ambassador. She was a very enthusiastic and determined person. Previously she had served in both AID and USIA in Washington, so she knew her way around that bureaucracy. She went to Nepal full of enthusiasm for everything. She devoted all of her considerable energies in dealing with the new government. She figured out -- quite correctly in my mind -- that the people who were running the government were neophytes. Indeed, many had been in jail or exile or far from Kathmandu. To find themselves suddenly in charge came as a great shock to them; they didn't have a clue about a government's appropriate role in the new Nepalese democracy. They did have an absolutist view of politics; that resulted in a highly confrontational political system which unfortunately still exists today. This style not surprisingly has brought a series of government to power, with frequent elections.

Ambassador Bloch put a lot of effort in developing a program which would expose the new leadership to the outside world, including the U.S. She really emphasized the need to coordinate the USIA visitors program and the AID participant training program, despite the formidable bureaucratic hurdles that both agencies threw in her way. She managed somehow to overcome all the hurdles and brought some sense of rationality to both programs.

Kathmandu found it difficult to deal with the crisis. This was an embassy in a remote part of the world, in a Third World country, with mediocre communication facilities, even though the tourist industry in Nepal is a thriving one. The American community, which was rather large by Kathmandu standards -- several hundred --, was accustomed to a lot of "embassy hand-holding." It had an elaborate American Club. The American back-packers provided the embassy's consular section with a number of "challenging" cases -- e.g. "Flower children" left over from Woodstock or mountaineers who ran into trouble (and worse) on the mountain -- some of whom were seriously injured. The demonstrations, which eventually resulted in the government's overthrow, that took place in 1990 were a new phenomenon; if anything similar had taken place in Kathmandu, it was so many years earlier that no one could remember them.

So all of a sudden our Embassy had to go into a crisis mode. It had to deal with an American community that was widely scattered all over the Valley. At one point, an AID jeep was hijacked by one of the political groups. Neither the Ambassador or the DCM had had any experience with this kind of turmoil. To their misfortune, they were backstopped in Washington by myself and Jock Covey -- the latter particularly having had considerable experience with crises in the Middle East. As I said, he was a very, very organized individual. He had nervous breakdowns about the Embassy's behavior primarily because it did not communicate very well. Of course, the problems were Nepal-internal and there wasn't anything much that we could do to assist. The demonstrations had the potential of having some Americans injured, which is what puts Washington's teeth on edge. An experienced embassy compensates for the nervousness at home by sending frequent messages reassuring everyone that all was well -- known as "CYA" messages. But our inexperienced people in Kathmandu were not doing that. So it fell to me and the desk to urge the Embassy to say something; at least to report that the "Embassy's Emergency Action Committee" had met -- anything!!! Please!!!!

After the new government was installed, I was very supportive of Ambassador Bloch's efforts to "educate" the new government. Inevitably, when there is a new ambassador at a post, facing an

entirely new circumstance for an embassy, and an “old” hand in Washington, there are bound to be some tensions with Washington taking a jaded view of some of the ideas that the new team in the field brings forth. But basically, I thought the Ambassador was absolutely right. Of course, what an ambassador does or does not do in a crisis is in large measure a factor of that ambassador’s personality. Julia Chang Bloch is not going to have the same public persona as a Bob Oakley or a Nick Platt. My own view is that the U.S. is represented by an individual; we hope that that person reflects his or her individual strengths, hopefully tempered to fit the circumstances he or she encounters. That means that some personalities will not blossom in some situations and on the other hand, some will take hold and bring energy and enthusiasm to a situation which may have lacked those attributes. When that happens, Washington is often mystified by an ambassador’s behavior. It may well raise an eyebrow or two, but locally no one seems offended. In Bloch’s case, the fact that she wore smashing shocking pink jackets might not have sat well with the Washington traditionalists, but it flew well in Kathmandu; she was liked and heeded. Her advice to the new government was within the parameters of her assignment and I certainly supported her efforts. I don’t think that the events drew much attention of the Department’s leadership.

JANEY DEA COLE
Counselor for Public Affairs
Kathmandu (1990-1993)

Ms Cole was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and was educated at Hartwick College, the University of Hawaii and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. After working in New York City several years, she joined the United States Information Agency in 1980. During her career, Ms. Cole served in Dacca, Caracas, Katmandu, Calcutta, and in Islamabad, where she was District Public Affairs Officer. In Washington, she served in the East bureau of USIA and was a Congressional Fellow on Capitol Hill. Ms Cole was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

COLE: My next posting was three years in Nepal, right after the movement for democracy and the re-establishment of parliament and political parties. I was there for the promulgation of the constitution, the setting up of the parliamentary system. It was amazing how much more I knew than a lot of the other people there about how our government worked. Our ambassador was Julia Chang Bloch, who was very political. She started out as a Peace Corp volunteer and then had gone on to work for Senator Percy. The thing that she said she was most proud of in her government service was the passage of the bill that required that whenever we spent money on development, we had to evaluate the impact this would have on women.

Q: When were you there?

COLE: 1990 to 1993.

Q: What was your job?

COLE: I was the PAO, and the ambassador's counselor for public affairs. (That was kind of a reward for being effective on that international visitor from Russia.) At that time in USIS there was a PAO, an APAO (Assistant Public Affairs Officer) and an executive secretary and a sizeable number of FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals). I always said "après moi le deluge" (after me the deluge) because it was really severely cut after I left.

Q: Well, what was the situation in Nepal when you arrived in 1990?

COLE: Hopeful. They were trying to get the parliament up and running, getting political parties organized, dealing with a lot of underpinnings in a country that went from say the 14th century into about the 18th century in a couple of weeks. If you could dial back in a time machine it would be a lot like being with our founding fathers, at the end of the 18th century as they wrestled with the divine right of kings – deciding who would vote and how, how you would set up your congress, what would your institutions be like? They weren't starting from scratch, they had some models of their own. But creating national institutions and making them work was quite a challenge. And, that's about where the Nepalese were. They had some models from earlier periods of their history; they had conducted elections before but they were looking around for models; they were trying to make it work.

Q: Well then, what was it you were doing there? What defined your major activities?

COLE: PAOs always have to keep the ambassador informed about what's in the newspaper and I had to spend some time doing that but mainly I spent my time supporting democracy. The ambassador made USAID give us some money so we could support more IV grantees. So I had to negotiate that through, and then design the IV projects and help select the participants, get them oriented and on their way.

Q: I would think that if Nepal is moving towards democracy there would be tremendous pressure from the Indian government, say, look at us, don't look at those other people.

COLE: Well, I don't think the Indian government had to exert much pressure because indeed, that was what would naturally happen. The leading opposition, the leading party in support of democracy in Nepal was called the Congress Party. The role of India in Nepalese democracy was well acknowledged. But, it's also true that India is the local great power and everybody hates the local great power, so the Indians were wildly unpopular in Nepal. Nevertheless, their influence was enormous.

Q: Well, was there interest in American as opposed to, say, the British type of democracy?

COLE: The new leadership was looking in all directions. They were very impressed with the Japanese model because the Japanese had an emperor and they saw parallels with their king and in the way Japanese society worked. They spent some time in Norway looking at their hereditary monarchy. But, if there was any system that they would know beyond the Indian it was the British, so they were very interested in the British system. I had a lot of trouble with my colleagues in AID and I spent a lot of time saying that whether they adopt our political

modalities is not the issue. What they have to understand is how our government works so that their expectations of us are reasonable and their understanding of how we make policies that affect them, is based on reality, not on some sort of mythic image of the West. I said that's my number one priority. If they also learn how to set up and run a congressional committee system, all the better. And of course AID didn't see it that way. They were interested in practical outcomes. So we had to craft and compromise and negotiate.

Q: Nepal has had this sort of Maoist group going. Was there much in that line when you lived there?

COLE: They were there but at that point they were in the government. And there was a Marxist-Leninist party that was very much inside the government. So it was a period of relative peace, but there was always tension over whether we would work with those people or not. I thought we should work with them and others thought we shouldn't.

Q: Did you have much contact with them?

COLE: The embassy was not happy but we had a little contact with them. We brought in a Senate staffer to talk to MPs. The speaker of the house and I had to work out a system where he invited the Maoists and I could go to the ambassador and say, I couldn't stop him? But I think she understood perfectly what game was afoot. So we did bring them in that way and I did spend time talking to some of them and to some of the more leftist members of the mainstream Marxist-Leninist party.

Q: Did they have much feel for the United States?

COLE: No, no they didn't. The people who rose to leadership positions in the new democracy had either been in exile, usually in India, or underground, or in jail for any number of years. And what they knew about the outside world was really somewhat limited. They knew about India and they had an awareness of China and of Britain; if they knew any democracy it was Britain. But no, we were a surprise to them.

Q: How would you describe the royal family, their role, and our contacts with them?

COLE: That was handled mainly by the ambassador so I never met the king, the queen or the crown prince. The princess royal was accessible but I never met her. Those I met were sort of secondary royals like my next door neighbors, who rented me my house. Once a year they'd come for a Christmas party and once a year I'd go to their house. I didn't get to meet various rebellious members of the royal family who were leading human rights movements or some of the Rana families who were smart and active.

Q: How about the crown prince who went out and killed everybody?

COLE: Yes, wasn't that terrible? No, I had never met him although I had a good friend who was a Rana and the most senior woman in the civil service as the permanent undersecretary of the supreme court. She knew him, but I don't think anybody foresaw what was coming. I also met

the young woman he wanted to marry and understood who she was and who her family was and why he would want to marry her; she was lovely. And I was very surprised to learn of the queen mother's opposition to this match. So no, his behavior came as quite a surprise to me.

Q: Would Rana, what was that?

COLE: They were the hereditary ministers of Nepal in the period when for many generations the king was sort of a captive inside his palace while the country was run by the Rana family. But, of course, the Ranas had all married into the royal family because they were of the same caste so it was very hard sometimes to sort them out.

Q: What was the human rights situation when you were there?

COLE: Oh, it was certainly improving and I thought actually it was fairly good, all things considered. When Tom Korologos, the Republican lobbyist visited us, the ambassador and I went with him, a Nepalese journalist, and the speaker of the house, on a helicopter trip up to the high country in the winter to watch the yaks being herded down and visit a Sherpa village. As we flew, the speaker of the house looked down and said, that's where I was in prison. And he pointed to a little village in the foothills of a really high mountain. He told us this story and in a way it was a symbol of how bad things had been. He said he had been a worker for democracy and was told to resist being arrested. He said some five or six really big guys came down and grabbed him on the front steps of the courthouse – he was a lawyer – and hauled him just like he was a load of laundry into the paddy wagon and pitched him in the back and closed the door. And he thought, oh my God, this is it. I'm going to disappear. They drove for what seemed to him to be days (probably actually 24 miserable hours) and then they dumped him like a load of laundry in this really remote prison. Initially he had no way to tell his family where he was; he was scared to death they were going to come for him some night. But eventually he made friends with the warden who was not a stupid man and figured things might change and got word out to his family where he was.

He was so high up his heart was pounding, and it was very cold. He had a little money in his pocket that he used to buy a knitted cap from a local woman. He put it on, he said, immediately his head was warm; it was the first time he was warm. He said it was the first time he felt safe or decent or comfortable in the whole experience was when he paid her five rupees and she left ecstatic to have this money and he got this wonderful hand knit hat he was wearing when we took this ride. So the human rights situation had been very, very, very bad.

Q: How about the role of women when you were there?

COLE: Nepal at that time was still governed by the code of Manu, the traditional Hindu code which was very, very hard on women. But, we were seeing more and more women politicians and the ambassador did special outreach to them and we did everything we could to be supportive of their situations as well as women academics and other women.

Q: Were the Gurkha a force?

COLE: The royal family were from the Gurkha nobility. I was always surprised that the Gurkha were not much of a force but maybe that was because we knew less about what went on in rural areas where a lot of them settled when they retired.

Q: How effective did you find our Peace Corps there?

COLE: They seemed to be very effective. I traveled with the ambassador a bit because I was her spokesperson and I used to joke and say it was because she could send me into the ladies room to check on the toilet paper. We did visit several of the Peace Corps sites. In terms of their relationships with people, my guess is that they were very happy. But they were less happy with their professional achievements. The educational system, although improving, was still very bad and people didn't work hard and didn't take their job seriously and this was hard for Americans.

Q: A public affairs officer always has to deal with the media. What was the media like?

COLE: They were typical of the Third World, where you became a journalist so you could express your opinions not so that you could report the truth. So the media was very opinionated and very personalized. I spent a lot of time saying to journalists: in our country you put your opinions on the editorial page; you separate what's news from what's opinion. I was concerned for accuracy, and I spent a lot of time talking to the men who ran the Marxist Leninist party newspapers saying, you know, this is not helping things. Do you believe what's written down here? And they'd squirm and they'd say, well, it does seem sort of farfetched, doesn't it. And I said, well, does it help things? Does it promote democracy? Does it promote good international understanding? Does it help to solve the problem that you're writing about? So, we would spend a lot of time on this. But how helpful it was I can't say.

Q: What about TV? Was it all Indian, or did they get TV from anywhere else?

COLE: Everybody loved watching TV. They had a Nepalese television studio that was run by one of the competent Ranas. When they were good they were really good; you can see how they ran the country for so long. And they showed a fair mixture of things including American soap operas.

I used to be invited over for dinner and to watch television at people's houses. I used to say, this describes your families; it's not accurate on ours. All of these illegitimate children and multiple marriages and scandals, I said, sounds like some of your nobility, not like us.

Q: Was the nobility the jet set type?

COLE: No. There were a few people like that but for the most part no.

Q: What about Americans? Did you have a problem with both ends of the spectrum? From the hippies at one end of the spectrum coming overnight to get drugs, and at the other end the wealthy mountaineer types who are used to getting their own way.

COLE: There were no hippies or very few when I got there in the 1990s. Freak Street was a thing

of the past and those people were gone. It was mainly backpackers and trekkers and every climbing season we would get the mountaineering groups. There were always parties for them and you always went because you knew some of them weren't going to come back; the mountain would take them. But since I wasn't doing consular work I didn't have trouble or didn't encounter these people much or have trouble with them. Our consular officers used to have to go and try and find the bodies, but I didn't have to deal with any of that.

Q: Did you get any high level or medium level visits from Washington?

COLE: Oh, yes. Sichan Siv, who was the deputy assistant secretary, came. He was an Asian American; he knew the ambassador. Oh, there were others too. Korologos came as did former Senator Percy.

Q: How did you find Ambassador Bloch? How effective was she and how did she operate?

COLE: She was excellent. She understood politics. The chief justification for political appointees is that they can do politics. She understood politics and politicians and she could sit down at a breakfast with some group of what I thought of as particularly slimy politicians and I'd be there to pass the coffee. She'd have them passionately engaged in explaining what their strategies were. That was a great plus; it gave us great insights into what was going on. It would be nice to think that there are people there who are that skillful now.

I was later to see that same thing in India with Ambassador Richard Celeste who had been governor of Ohio and he understood exactly how politics worked.

DONALD A. CAMP
Chargé d'Affaires
Kathmandu (2010)

Donald Camp was born in New York in 1948. He received his BA from Carleton College and an ND from University of Chicago. He joined the Foreign Service in 1974. His overseas assignments include Colombo, Bridgetown, Beijing, Chengdu, and Kathmandu. His sister, Beatrice Camp, is also a Foreign Service Officer. Mr. Camp was interviewed by David Reuther in 2012.

Q: Now, your formal retirement comes on December 31, 2009. But given your talents and background, you have stayed close to Mother State ever since. In fact, shortly thereafter you're in Kathmandu.

CAMP: Yes. That was an unexpected opportunity that I was very happy to take advantage of. The Department had assigned our ambassador to Nepal to the important domestic position of Director General of the Foreign Service. Someone once said that Nancy Powell has never completed an assignment because she was always in demand for a more senior job somewhere else. And that seems to be true. She is a fantastic officer and in this case they really wanted her

back in Washington. Our embassy in Nepal had a perfectly good DCM who could have served as Chargé d'Affaires until the arrival of a new ambassador. But the DCM took that moment to retire unexpectedly from the Foreign Service to take a job in the commercial sector. So suddenly there were vacancies in Nepal in both the ambassador and DCM job at a time when Nepal continued to be in crisis. So we had to fill that gap and the Department sent me as Chargé for about three months until the arrival of Scott DeLisi as our new ambassador in April of 2010.

Again, an opportunity to run a mission for a short time without responsibility for the long term. It was a well-run mission to start with, thanks primarily to Nancy Powell. But there was a lot happening with the Maoists and their role in government and our role in designating them as terrorists, even at a time when we were trying to cooperate with them. So it was a busy and productive three and a half months in Kathmandu.

Q: What would your reporting have looked like from that time?

CAMP: The civil war was over at this point and the big issue was how the Maoists -- now part of the government -- would adapt to the new situation. I had a wonderful Political Counselor -- Tim Trenkle. We would go out to the Maoist cantonments and talk to the commanders about their plans for integration into the Nepal Army. We were encouraging the Maoists to give up their private army, which they were loath to do. I would talk to the commander of the army who was an old school guy who had no intention of letting Maoists into his army because he'd been fighting them for years. So it was a tension filled time. Gradually, the Maoists and the army came to an understanding, partly through our active involvement -- but also because of encouragement from the Indians. India is enormously important in Kathmandu, as is China. And I had a very good relationship with the Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood whom I had known years ago in Washington. He suffered a lot from the slings and arrows of Nepalis who saw India as the puppet master. I told him that his problem was analogous to those who, years earlier, had called our ambassador in Pakistan the American viceroy. In fact he got a bum rap.

The Indian goal was very similar to ours -- to move Nepal toward a peaceful, prosperous and democratic future. India has a much bigger stake in Nepal than do we. If Nepal descended into chaos India would have millions of refugees flowing across the borders. So I found it a very productive relationship.

I also tried to develop a relationship with the Chinese Ambassador, helped by my (rusty) Mandarin language abilities. I think that relationship is really important in a place like Kathmandu. I hope we've gotten well beyond the idea that we coordinate with the French and the Brits and we run the world. We don't! Particularly in a place like Nepal. The Indians and the Chinese are crucial. And we have to have good relationships.

End of reader