The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

STEVENSON MCILVAINE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: September 23, 2003
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background
- Born in Pennsylvania, Foreign Service parents
- Raised in Washington, D.C. and abroad
- Harvard University
- Leopoldville, Congo; Son of the DCM
- Katanga, UN interpreter
- Peace keeping in Katanga
- Refugee problems
- Missionaries
- Environment
- Religious factions
- Dahomey
- US Army
- Entered the Foreign Service in1967

State Department, FSI; Vietnamese language training 1967-1968

Vietnam, Province Advisor in Camau 1968-1970
- Environment
- Dangers
- Viet Cong
- Government officials
- Team composition
- Local attitudes
- Likelihood of success
- Relations with embassy
- USAID
- Operations
- Vietnam Special Operations Group

State Department; Operation Center 1970
- Viet Cong Headquarters issue

Intelligence gathering and analysis
Cambodia invasion

Leave of absence and resignation 1970-1971

Washington, D.C. Government Service 1971-1981
Congressional Aide to Representative Robert Duncan
Department of Transportation, Congressional Relations
Carter Presidential Campaign

Reentered the Foreign Service 1981

Multinational Force and Observer in the Sinai 1982-1983
Egyptians
Israeli attitude
Egypt/Israel cooperation
Sadat and Begin

Kinshasa, Zaire; Political Officer 1983-1985
King Mobutu
Dissidents
Environment
Local standard of living
Reporting

Bissau, Guinea Bissau; Charge d' Affaires 1985-1986
Government
Environment
AID mission
Relations
Communist bloc
French embassy
Attempted coup

Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; 1986-1989
Julius Nyerere
Politics
Economy
Corruption
Scandinavian influence
AID
Socialist experiments

State Department; Zambia-Malawi Desk Officer 1989-1991
Zambia government

Malawi politics
South Africa
Washington scene

State Department; Labor Advisor, Africa Regional Affairs 1992-1993
African and Indian Labor Alliances
South African racial lines
Marxist influence
AFL-CIO
Cosatu
Somalia Task Force

United States Liaison Office in Somalia; DCM 1993-1994
US aid to Somalia
Non-Governmental Organizations
United Nations
United States Liaison Office
Military operations
Environment
Aideed
Ali Mahdi
Warlords
"Blackhawk Down"
US Policy
American press
Relations with Washington
Negotiations
Closing US Embassy

National War College 1994-1995

Lusaka, Zambia; Deputy Chief of Mission 1995-1998
President Fred Chiluba
Kaunda
Economy
Government
Belgians
South Africa
Environment
The "Breakfast Coup"
Communications
AIDS

State Department; Deputy, Office of West African Affairs 1998-2000
Responsible for Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia

Firefight at Embassy Monrovia
Liberian Government
US interests
Qadhafi
Nigerian elections
Fraud schemes
Nigerian military
The “Arc of Crisis”
“Operation Focus Relief”
Cote d’Ivoire
West African Peacekeeping Force

State Department; Congressional Affairs, African Affairs 2000-2003
Personalities
Sudan peace process
Ambassadors’ confirmation process
Congressional interest in Africa
The Black Caucus
Congressional staff
State/Congress relations
Sate/Defense relations
AIDS
Peace Corps

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is an interview with Stevenson McIlvaine.

MCILVAINE: My father was from Downingtown, PA. That’s where I became a lifelong fan of the Philadelphia Phillies, a cross I continue to bear not always in good humor. My father parlayed his Republican connections into a job with Henry Cabot Lodge, the New England chairman of the Eisenhower-Nixon campaign in ’52. Out of that he got a political appointment to the State Department, public affairs, and came down and was in Public Affairs in the Department right at the time of the McCarthy stuff and spent an awful lot of time explaining to the Senate why the third violinist in that orchestra the Department sent overseas was a card carrying member of the Communist Party.

Q: Focusing on you now, up to the time you were 10, you were a kid in Pennsylvania.

MCILVAINE: Yes, and then we moved here.

Q: You had 3 or 4 years of schooling up there. How did you find that?

MCILVAINE: That was fine. I started out in local Quaker schools and then in the public schools, which in central Pennsylvania at that time were integrated and that was all fine and understood. Then I came to Washington and the first segregated schools I'd ever seen and they were awful. Sixth grade in a Washington public school was a real eye opener. It was all white and it was terrible.

Q: At one point, the schools in-

MCILVAINE: Even I knew it was lousy as a sixth grader.

Q: Going back though, the Quaker school, how was that run?

MCILVAINE: This was kindergarten and first and second grade. We had to go to meeting and that's pretty hard when you're 4 and 5. You just sit there and be quiet. Of course, we would scurry around under the pews and that sort of thing. There was much suppressed giggling and whispering. We never quite absorbed the spiritual part of it.

Q: Where were you going to school when you first started in Washington?

MCILVAINE: East Ward Public School on Foxhall just below Reservoir and Foxhall.

Q: What would be so bad about it? At one point some of the schools like Central High were really quite good.

MCILVAINE: There must have been good schools. I had been in the public schools in Pennsylvania. I had felt challenged and pushed and interested, and as much as any kid enjoys school, had enjoyed it. In this school, there were no grades. There was just good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory. I got all goods except conduct, which was routinely unsatisfactory. I was on the safety patrol, which was a big honor. Then the teacher kicked me off and put me back on and kicked me off and put me back on. Maybe it was just that teacher, I don't know, but I found it a total waste. My parents ponied up the money and sent me off to a private school the next year.

Q: Where did you go?

MCILVAINE: I went to Landon for 2 years.

Q: How did you find that?

MCILVAINE: I enjoyed it. It was good. And then we went overseas. My father migrated through the Wriston Act into the Foreign Service.

Q: In '55, the Civil Service and the Foreign Service were amalgamated. At school and even before, were you much of a reader?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any books or authors that really grabbed you?

MCILVAINE: Yes. The one that I still remember vividly was Kenneth Roberts, the stories of the revolution. Most of all, Oliver Wiswell. Up to then, I had had the standard monochromatic view of American history: good guys, bad guys, no variations. Here was a story about a Tory. That was a bad guy. That was defined. Yet he was interesting, sympathetic, I began to understand what his problems were, and he didn't seem much like a bad guy. I suddenly at age 10 or 11 learned that history had gradations and these were real people out there.

Q: You hit on a book that was a book that really set me off on history.

MCILVAINE: I've been very interested in American history ever since then.

Q: Then they start saying, "You know, in the colonies, 1/3 were independents, 1/3 were against, and 1/3 were indifferent." But we only get really the for independence.

MCILVAINE: The irony of that is that I have since married a woman who ½ her family are loyalists who fled to Canada in 1776 and continued on to this day. We go up almost every year.

Q: I assume they live in Ontario?

MCILVAINE: Actually, New Brunswick, which is where Benedict Arnold and a lot of loyalists ended up for a time. We go up to this beautiful little port town that's all loyalists, still flying British flags and you have tea cups of Charles and Lady Di and all the trappings of Anglophilia are thick in this little town. As a Virginian, every time, it takes a little adjusting to get used to this. I consider myself a semi-native Virginian.

Q: Where did your father go first?

MCILVAINE: Lisbon, Portugal.

Q: How long were you there?

MCILVAINE: He was there 3 years. I went to school in Switzerland, which was a great experience. I really enjoyed it. It was fabulous.

Q: Tell me about the Swiss education. You were a teenager.

MCILVAINE: I was 13. I did 3 years there. It was an international school run without apologies for profit. It was called the School of Princes. While I was there, we had the Aga Khan. We had Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia. We had various Saudi sheiks. Just a

smattering of royalty. We had the Shah of Iran's heirs. In fact, my first year there, in the spring, the Shah came to visit with then Queen Soroya, his first wife, who was the star of most of the European pulp magazines. Every week or so, they'd have a picture of Soroya because she was beautiful and glamorous, the Elizabeth Taylor of the late '50s. I had the distinct pleasure of kicking her out of my room when I was stark naked. I had just come back from swimming. I had taken off my bathing suit when the door swung open and there was the headmistress and Queen Soroya and I took one step and slammed the door on both of them. I didn't know who they were. Then my neighbor said, "Do you know what you did?" I was not chastised for my rudeness. It turns out I was in the Shah's old room. It was being shown…

Q: Were you learning languages there?

MCILVAINE: Yes. It was conducted at least half in French. Of course, I learned Vaudoise French, which any Parisian will tell you is hardly adequate.

Q: How about the studies?

MCILVAINE: They ranged from excellent to awful. We had a chemistry class with the headmistress's wife that if you were serious about chemistry, which I wasn't, would probably have been hopeless. Fortunately, I wasn't and I didn't notice, didn't care. Just get through it. It was pretty basic. But we had a crazy little Italian who taught European history and geography who terrified most of the students and I realized afterwards was an excellent teacher, one of the best teachers I ever had. We were all scared of him, so we learned and we did it the way he told us to do it. We did elaborate maps with colored pencils in India ink and everything and I think learned a lot.

Q: Were you coming up short on American history?

MCILVAINE: I had none. All my American history was Kenneth Roberts. There was none whatsoever. But one great thing we did at that school is, the headmaster was one of the 2 or 3 colonels in the Swiss army. There were no generals. It meant that he had access to the government and to the army and he could arrange things in Switzerland. So, every fall, we had a concours, a competition, whereby the whole school was divided up into teams of 4 and we had a 5 day break over All Soul's Day or one of the Catholic holidays in late October. The whole school was divided up into teams of 4 and sent on what was a 4 or 5 day scavenger hunt or treasure hunt all over the country. We'd have a 5 day railpass and about 80 francs, which was $40, barely enough to buy food for 5 days. You couldn't go hole up in a hotel room and try to live off the allowance, although some tried. We just galloped all over the country deciphering these elaborate clues. "At 12:00 on Wednesday, there will be a teacher at the railroad station at Interlaken with the next clue." That's what the last clue would tell you. If you got there at 12:00, you got the next clue. If you got there 2 hours later, maybe he was gone and you didn't get the next clue and you had to track where everybody was going as soon as you saw any other students. So, I did that 3 years running. You couldn't do that today with terrorism and security concerns.

Nobody would let their kids run all over a country for 5 days completely unsupervised. But it was glorious.

Q: I imagine it was. Were you picking up at the school, what was being taught about America? Was America a distant power? Were people making remarks about America?

MCILVAINE: This was well before the… Nowadays, the American cultural presence is overwhelming wherever you are. In remote African villages, you'll find "Michael Jackson" painted on the side of a mud hut. How do they know about Michael Jackson? Where did that come from? It penetrates. Then, this was not the case. American movies were popular but not dominant. There were a lot of European movies. American magazines weren't around at all. TV was still fairly early. American sports were totally off the horizon because Europeans played soccer. That was what was important. And we didn't. We didn't have any idea. That was the 1958, the World Cup when Pele emerged as a 17 year old superstar from Brazil. This was a huge deal in Europe. In America, nobody knew anything about it. So, we were remote, not overpowering and not something that was much of a topic.

Q: Would you go back to Lisbon on vacations?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Did you get any impression of Portugal at the time?

MCILVAINE: Oh, very much so. That was the Portugal of Salazar, the dictator, and it was a very quiet, well behaved, orderly little country. In vivid contrast to Spain. You could drive across the border and in this dusty border town of Badajoz in Spain, all the houses and the street and everything else was dusty brown and the people were wildly colorful and carrying on and wearing very colorful clothes. You crossed the border into Portugal, there was no dust suddenly. The town was very neat and tidy. The houses were painted different colors. But the people wore black and were totally subdued. You immediately knew something had happened. It was a wonderful place to live as an outsider with money, which we were by definition as an American diplomat's kid. It must have been pretty stifling for the Portuguese and eventually 15 years later they overthrew Salazar.

Q: Did you make any international friends at school?

MCILVAINE: Lots. It was a totally international school.

Q: Did you go off with them?

MCILVAINE: Some. I visited a friend in Belgium and went to the World's Fair. And some friends in Geneva, that sort of thing. And then several of them I stayed in touch with in college.

Q: You were in Lisbon for 3 years. This would take you up to 1959. Did this take you up to college?

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: What was in the cards for you?

MCILVAINE: I went to Harvard. Geographic distribution, I like to think, was a big help. And I was coming from a school that had sent them Karen Agha Khan a year earlier and Charam Pahlavi. It was a pretty flashy group Harvard was getting. I was the unflashy one.

Q: Did you ever feel unflashy? Were you overwhelmed by these…

MCILVAINE: No, that was the strange thing about it. Because there were a lot of fancy folks at the school, it was assumed that everybody was sufficiently fancy even if you weren't and you were able to pass as fancy even if you were just a homespun American government employee's kid. God knows that's not fancy.

Q: You went to Harvard from when to when?

MCILVAINE: 1960, then took a year off, and then graduated in '64. I spent that year off in the Congo, my father's next assignment.

Q: At Harvard, were you caught up in the election of 1960?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. I was. I remember the Pogo riots. Pogo was a famous comic strip where the famous quote comes from "We have met the enemy and he is us." It was about animals in the Okefenokee swamps, but somehow they had politics as animals. Harvard would have "I Go Pogo" campaigns as a rejection of the political process. There was an I Go Pogo demonstration that turned into a mild riot and got a lot of attention. But by the time the election came around, which I guess was November 1960, I was in the Congo. We were watching the results on the USIS ticker all night and it wasn't resolved and then Kennedy won. Then a month or so later, we had a congressional delegation with a very young Senator Frank Church. The staff aide was one Ted Kennedy. Ted Kennedy drew all the attention and Frank Church didn't appreciate it.

Q: Harvard in 1959, what was it like?

MCILVAINE: It was still emerging from the Harvard of my father's era, the Harvard very much of the northeast establishment, where most of the kids had gone to prep school and most of the kids had come out of a pretty similar environment. There was much more diversity. It was by now at least 50% high school from all over. I remember vividly my first day talking to my neighbors in my dorm and there were several Jewish kids from the Bronx High School of Science who were frustrated because they hadn't gotten all 800s in

everything in the college boards. I'm thinking, "I hope they don't ask me what I got on the college boards." They had obviously been highly competitive in a highly competitive environment. I felt kind of like I had slid in through the back door when I found out about that. It was becoming the Harvard of today, a much more diverse, competitive institution. But it still had some of the flavor of the old, the final clubs and the old northeast elite establishment. I was somewhere in between. I did come from a boarding school, but it was an overseas boarding school, so it was weird. It didn't fit with their world and I didn't quite know their world, nor did I know really the American high school world.

Q: Did you have any feeling your freshman year about what you wanted to study?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. I absolutely knew I wanted to major in English until I found out what majoring in English meant. I thought it just meant you read good books, it meant you criticized good books endlessly. After one course, I thought this is not what I want to do. Then I stumbled back into history and that's where I ended up, modern European history.

Q: You went to the Congo when?

MCILVAINE: After freshman year, my grades were less than distinguished. In fact, I was on the edge of flunking out and the dean said it would be a good idea if I took a year off and thought about this and came back a little more serious. My father had just gone as DCM in Leopoldville, this brand new embassy that was opening up with independence June 30, 1960. So I decided I'd go spend some time with him and see. While we were working that out, Leopoldville blew up and I couldn't go until late August, by which point I had to make a decision about whether I was going back to school or not and decided to take a year off. I spent 3 months with him in Leopoldville working part-time with USIS doing things like a Louis Armstrong concert. That was great fun. And that visit with Senator Church and Ted Kennedy and company. And then USIS had run out of useful things for me to do and I was teaching English in one of those English… USIS used to have lots of English courses. I went over to the UN, which had by then set up, and asked them for a job and was hired immediately as an interpreter for the Third Nigerian Brigade in Albertville, North Katanga.

Q: This is where your French came in.

MCILVAINE: Yes. A little Lebanese guy named Shazoom or something like that said, "Do you speak French?" I said, "Yes." He spoke to me in French for 10 minutes and said, "You'll do. Can you leave the day after Christmas?" I said, "I guess." The day after Christmas, I was sent off to northern Katanga.

Q: Before we go there, let's talk about Leopoldville. I realize you were a college kid. What were you seeing there? One thinks about the chaos that continues to be in the Congo today. What was it like?

MCILVAINE: It was fascinating. That was where I developed my taste for African crises for lack of a better phrase – the adrenalin rush and the excitement. Some people are appalled by this. Some people hate it. Some people thrive on it. I thrived on it. I liked it. We had Lumumba in his house down the street under house arrest for a while. We had all sorts of characters around. I saw firsthand coup attempts and the press corps and all the correspondents. We had a firefight one night with a machine gunner in our backyard. I had to get by him through the drainage ditches over to the ambassador's house because the ambassador wasn't there and his children were. His German nanny spoke no French. So I got over there and spent the night with them to make sure they didn't get in any trouble. Throughout this firefight that went on all night over at the Ghanaian ambassador, who was next door to him. That was fun to me. I found that very exciting.

Q: What were they fighting about?

MCILVAINE: The Ghanaian ambassador working for Kwame Nkrumah had been very actively supporting and working with the Lumumba faction. The government was saying, "That's improper behavior for an ambassador. You must go." He was PNGed. He said, "I won't go unless my president tells me to go," which is a direct violation of traditional diplomatic discourse. When you're PNGed, you go. Well, he wouldn't go. That would have been all right. They would have just bundled him up and put him on a plane. But the UN then made what I still consider to be a very serious mistake of sending some Tunisian troops up there to protect him. That made it a challenge and the Congolese army deployed. Inevitably, somebody started shooting and they shot at each other all night long until in the morning they negotiated a settlement and the guy got on a plane and left. But in the process, 4 or 5 Tunisians and 4 or 5 Congolese got killed for no reason whatsoever other than just some bad judgment on all sides.

Q: Was this a place you could go around downtown?

MCILVAINE: You could still get around, yes. I remember going to a concert of the Okay Jazz, which was still a great Zairian band when I got there as a Foreign Service officer 25 years later. I remember there was a great restaurant at the zoo, some discussion over where the meat came from. Yes, you could get around some of the time. Some of the time it wasn't wise. But there would be spasms.

Q: Did you get any feel at that time that being white was a problem?

MCILVAINE: No, there was absolutely no racism. It was intriguing. There was anti-Belgium sentiment. If you could be mistaken for a Flamande, because they had been the overseers largely, the people most in contact with African labor and therefore the hated ones, and that was a great insult, "Sale Flamande." If in any way you were confused with the Flemish, you could be in trouble, get beaten up, but probably not killed. But I never felt the slightest bit of racial fear. Maybe I was just rather insensitive, but I never did. And I dealt with Congolese every day.

Q: Let's go to Katanga. You were there in '61?

MCILVAINE: Yes. I got to Albertville New Year's Eve 1960.

Q: Albertville was…

MCILVAINE: A little town on Lake Tanganyika, maybe 1,500 miles from Leopoldville. Congo's huge.

Q: What was the relationship between Albertville and Stanleyville?

MCILVAINE: None except that the later Stanleyville problems of '64 and all that with the sambas. It's where Kabila started. It was a wild rebel group that came from northern Tanganyika. They went to Stanleyville and set up briefly, the Simbas, and killed some people and eventually Belgian paratroopers went in and put it down. When I was there, Stanleyville had been set up by Gizenga as, the Marxist Lumumbist seceding province. Katanga was the conservative Belgian Union Miniere seceding province led by Tshombe. The Kasais were somewhere in between, also playing games. And the UN was trying to patch this Humpty Dumpty back together again and ignore all the secessions or end them. I was working for the UN as an interpreter in one part that was relatively… Well, it wasn't all that quiet. There was the UN force. When I arrived an Irish brigade was just leaving but I worked for the Nigerian brigade that was coming in to replace them. The Katangese with the gendarmerie, led by white mercenaries, some wild characters. They were in town. They were controlling the town and running around like cowboys in jeeps that had machineguns mounted in the back. Then outside of town, the Baluba, the tribesmen of northern Katanga, who were furious with this southern Katanga insurrection and did not support it at all but didn't have any weapons or much of anything, so whenever they got their hands on anybody, they tended to commit violence upon them. Eventually, they tore up the railroad. There were all these fights along the railroad. The Katangese were trying to keep it open to serve the mines. Gradually the Baluba closed it. A number of Old West fights were along the railroad line. With the UN trying to keep everybody from killing each other without much success.

Q: Was it the Irish brigade that had some problems?

MCILVAINE: They had their first combat casualties in the history of independent Ireland just before I arrived. As part of their sweeping up and moving out, they were burying what was left and sending the bodies home and that sort of thing. A patrol of 10 Irish soldiers had been taken by the Baluba, who didn't necessarily know the difference between the UN and the Katangese gendarmerie, and there was a fight and the most courageous of the Irish after the Balubas subdued them or killed them was at least partially eaten – that was a tradition to acquire the courage of your most esteemed opponent. This was a sensation in Europe. Private Anthony Brown was partially consumed, eaten in action as it were. That's black humor, very black humor. The Irish were stunned. They had missed World War II. They hadn't been in any wars. This was the

first time the Irish army had actually suffered wartime casualties, so it was a big deal. They packed up and left but not before Near Year's Eve. I had just arrived. I had come into this little town in northern Katanga in my madras jacket because my mother always told me to wear a jacket when you're traveling and that's the only jacket I had, and a tennis racket. I looked like I had just stepped out of space. They were polite enough not to fall all over the ground laughing at me. I was accepted in. That night, there was a Near Year's Eve party and some drinking. I was an 18 year old kid, trying to keep up. Naturally, at about 11:30, it was time to roust the piper. Somebody got the piper up. This fairly well lubricated band of mostly Irish and a few British officers with the Nigerian brigade marched through town behind the piper in his undershorts and the question was, who were the savages here? You know what bagpipes sound like in the middle of the night? I think we were the primitives. God knows what the local populace thought this was.

Q: Talk about the Nigerian brigade.

MCILVAINE: It was still semi-British, a British commander, a British brigadier, rosy cheeks. I can still remember, he would say, "Whacko" of things that he approved of. A British brigade major and a few British junior officers and then a Nigerian brigade major who sort of took on my godfather role. He really helped me out. He was really nice. He later became Nigerian ambassador to London and then died abruptly in the mid-'60s, I'm not sure what of. The Nigerian army at that point was the pride of the British colonial system. They were very good, very straight, very correct, and a lot of them, the officers I knew, I'm sure later got into politics. The Nigerian army is actively engaged in Nigerian politics until this day.

Q: How did they interface with the Congolese in that area?

MCILVAINE: Not well. They had no way to communicate, no common language. I was translating African French to African English and the African French was easy. It was the African English that I was struggling with. The Nigerian English is a challenge.

Q: You really have to work at it.

MCILVAINE: Yes. You have to listen carefully. If you're not used to the rhythms and sounds, it's quite creative and interesting English. There's nothing wrong with it, but you're not used to it. That was a challenge. They had virtually nothing in common. These were largely Sandhurst trained – I was dealing with the officers… The common soldiers might have had more village kinship. But I was dealing with the officers and they tended to be Sandhurst- (end of tape)

Q: What were they doing?

MCILVAINE: We, the UN force, were trying to manage this port town on the lake, keep the peace, keep the Katangese from doing anything terrible to the Baluba, keep the

Baluba from doing anything terrible to the Katangese, and not doing a great job at any of that because it was a problem that's still very much a problem today and one that interests me enormously: how do you peacekeep when you don't have clearly delineated lines and a setting where everybody understands the rules? And we didn't. There were these mercenaries running around town in these jeeps ready to shoot up anything they felt like shooting up, including us. This Nigerian force that wasn't really expecting to engage in outright combat. The Nigerians expect to present themselves, look good, and everybody would behave, and everybody didn't. So, it was awkward. The town was like a western movie. It was one long street of storefronts with the arcade in the front and all the rest of it. It had everything but the gunfighters swaggering down the sidewalk. Instead of horses, you had jeeps tied up with machineguns in the back. It was amazing.

Q: Michael Hoare was a well known professional soldier from South Africa?

MCILVAINE: I think he was British, but a lot of them were white South Africans. But the ones I had, I had a Belgian, I had a Scottish mercenary who had been in Malaysia, been with Castro in Cuba until, as he said it, he sold one of Raul's jeeps and Raul didn't take it well and he had to leave quickly.

Q: What were they doing?

MCILVAINE: They were running around and getting into fights with the Baluba over this rail line. They were trying to keep the rail line open. That was the key to Kabalo and the mines and central northern Katanga. The idea was, you get the ore out to the lake and you can ship it out, although in fact the rail line wasn't staying open, the Baluba were shutting that, and not much was going on in the port either.

Q: Rwanda and Burundi…

MCILVAINE: That was all quiet at the time. Tanganyika was still a British colony across the river, although I later became good friends with Jane Goodall, who was starting at exactly the same time across the lake in Gombe in her mountains with her chimpanzees just as I was over there with my Nigerian troops on the Congolese side.

Q: What would you do? Would there be an incident and then…

MCILVAINE: I spent most of my time working with the Katangese chief of police, who was constantly arresting the UN forces, workers, for various infractions. I'd have to go get them out of jail. That was a large part my job, and working with the soldiers to organize refugee things. Periodically there would be waves of Belgians and the like who would come in from somewhere else where things had gotten out of hand and we'd put them up in the railroad cars. We had this big railroad depot there.

Q: Did you get involved with missionaries? The Congo was full of missionaries.

MCILVAINE: It was full of missionaries and that was a big deal for the embassy trying to get them all evacuated. They had pretty much either gone or were off in the bush where nobody was ever going to see them. I didn't have much contact with them out there. The missionary thing had been earlier.

Q: I've interviewed Terry McNamara, who was in Stanleyville. He was number 2 in the consulate in '61.

MCILVAINE: That must have been fascinating.

Q: They had Gurhkas there.

How did you find the Congolese officials?

MCILVAINE: See, I had Katangese officials. They were Tshombe's folks. I didn't really see it at the time, but looking back on it, it was pretty clear that it was a cardboard government pretty well set up by the Belgian mining interests to protect their interests for the mines of southern Katanga, which they did.

Q: Were the Belgians apparent there?

MCILVAINE: There were still a few. Not mining type. They were the hotel manager and the few people around town, business mainly. But gradually leaving as it became increasingly clear that this wasn't going to get over quickly and things were not going to go back to the way they were.

Q: Did the railroad run at all?

MCILVAINE: It did, gradually getting closed down until by the time I left after 6 months there, it was not running at all.

Q: This is a pretty heady experience.

MCILVAINE: For an 18 year old kid, it was great. I was paid real money. It was a real job. I was working with all these Nigerian and British officers and lots of Katangese officials in as remote a spot as you could probably find. It was fascinating. I was sharing a little house with a Colombian accountant and down the road was a Swiss accountant. They were doing the books for the thing. I remember vividly one day when we stopped to pick up the Swiss on our way to the office, which was in the old railroad station downtown, and he was outside his door screaming and pointing at the house. There was a snake in there. I think his servant and I went and dealt with the snake and restored peace. But the Swiss was totally undone. There are not so many snakes in Switzerland. I don't think he had ever been out of Switzerland before, so this was a shock to his system.

Q: What was the attitude of the Nigerian officer corps? Was it a plague on all your

houses? Were they having a good time?

MCILVAINE: They were kind of bewildered by this. It wasn't ideological. I do remember being very suspicious. The top civilian at the UN there, my boss, was a Czech named Berzac. I was enough of a Cold War kid to be very suspicious about what was he really up to? As far as I know, he was just doing the job. There was no indication he was up to much of anything. He worked with the British general.

Q: Were the Nigerians-

MCILVAINE: The striking thing about them was how proud they were - and it's still true – of Nigeria. They were just coming to independence. They were pulling the country together and this huge, disparate country was going to be the powerhouse of Africa and it was going to be great and all the rest of it. Sadly, it didn't turn out that way.

Q: It's really very sad, the things that have happened.

MCILVAINE: But at that point, they were the federal institution, the army, probably the only, and still the only real national institution.

Q: Did you get a feel for the fact that they had Christians, animists, Muslims?

MCILVAINE: Oh, definitely Christians and Muslims. The animist bit was pretty quiet if it was there. I learned all about the Yoruba and the Ibo and the Hausa-Fulani, the 3 main blocs.

Q: How about your parents? They must have been a little bit concerned about you?

MCILVAINE: Well, my father thought it would be a great experience and I guess he must have persuaded my mother. I was writing letters home. If they were worried or scared, they didn't tell me. That summer, at the end of 6 months in June, I left, went back to Leopoldville. By this time, my father had left Leopoldville and was in the confirmation process for the first ambassador to what was then Dahomey, now Benin. I was going to meet him there. I got a ticket on a French tramp steamer from Point Noire in the Congo to Dahomey, to Cotonou. I made my way across the river on the ferry and took the train from Brazzaville down to Point Noire, a great adventure, and got to Point Noire and presented myself at the dock, and I wasn't on the passenger list. What am I going to do? I said, "Can I look at that?" I looked over the list and I wasn't on there. I looked over it really carefully and found Mme. Ebaine. My "Mc" had turned into Mme. and the "Ilvaine" had turned into Ebaine and that was me. I finally persuaded the guy that that was it. "But you're not Madame." "Well, I think I am." I finally persuaded him and sure enough, I was seated on the captain's right as the only unaccompanied female on board. Boy, was the captain disappointed! I spent 4 days on this tramp steamer. I got to Dahomey and as it turned out my father got tangled up in a dispute between Senator Clark of Pennsylvania trying to get more appointees in the administration over something, so he

was holding up ambassadors and he held up my father for a few weeks and I got there before he did and found the embassy in ruins because there was an admin officer who had jaundice and there was a DCM who didn't know what to do and one or 2 others who were sort of flailing around. The DCM didn't speak French for some reason. He was in over his head. He hired me as a local employee. Everything was in customs. So my first job as a local employee was to go talk to customs. I did. I just went down and chatted with the African officials and they said, "Oh, okay, now we understand" and everything was released. So I was a miracle maker. I was a big hit. Then a couple of weeks later, my father showed up.

Q: What was your impression of Dahomey when you arrived there?

MCILVAINE: One of the Harvard professors who occasionally expounds on the world and insecurity of the world was pointing out that there are 2 reasons for failure in the world: location and government. Dahomey is location. There isn't anything. The one thing they grew and produced in abundance was palm oil, which everybody grew and produced in abundance. So, Dahomey is one of those places that is a nice little country that probably should be a province of somewhere else. It really doesn't have an economic raison d'etre. Despite that fact, it then went through 15 years of coups and counter-coups. They supplied all the French intellectuals, all the core "functionnaires" for French West Africa were Dahomian. If you were from Dahomey and you got out, you got an education, you got a job, you went to the French bureaucracy. You didn't stay in Dahomey because there was nothing to do. So, with independence, with De Gaulle's great pronouncement and everybody became independent at once in 1960/'61, all the Dahomian "functionnaires" were sent home from Cote d'Ivoire and Chad and Niger and Senegal and all the rest of it. So, suddenly, there's this little town on the coast with very little economy and lots of "French" intellectuals. Those that didn't get jobs with the UN spent the time overthrowing each other. So, Dahomey had a nice long history of bloodless coups. They didn't kill each other. They were very good about it until well into the '70s and '80s. Then it actually has been recently successfully democratic for the last 10 or 15 years, better than a lot of countries.

Q: What was living like for you when you got there?

MCILVAINE: I lived for 2 weeks at the Hotel de la Plage, which was a tiny French hotel with 10 rooms and "Rognons" on every Thursday, a fixed menu every day of the week. Rognons was kidneys. I remember that vividly. Very little to do. It was a sleepy little coastal backwater. It's where they filmed The Comedian, the Graham Greene book, because it was the classic sleepy backwater. My wife describes where I spent a large part of my life as "Graham Greenland" quite appropriately. The places Graham Greene wrote about were never on the mainstream.

Q: Did he write Journey Without Maps? I think it was Liberia going into the hinterland.

MCILVAINE: It might have been. He was in Sierra Leone also. He was there as a police

officer during World War II. He wrote about the Congo.

Q: Were the French there?

MCILVAINE: The French were very much there. This was one of the countries that had not said "No." Only Guinea had said "No" to De Gaulle. The other West African colonies that had said "Yes, with your guidance, we'll stay in the metropole" and it was still very much part of the French world and the French embassy was a big deal. To this day, an American embassy in most of those countries, you work as closely as you can with the French and try to stay out of their way and try to be helpful. They're the lead in most of those countries. It's fragmented a bit and there's some changes in some places where that's no longer true, but…

Q: Did your father finally get there?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. He did get there. He stayed 3 years, had a great time. I stayed a month or 2 and then went back to college.

Q: Were you ready for college then?

MCILVAINE: Much more ready.

Q: I would suspect that one goes through a certain amount of maturation.

MCILVAINE: My academic record did not improve enormously, but I realize now this was a good thing.

Q: You were the American equivalent of a remittance man for a year sent off to the colonies.

MCILVAINE: That thing the British had for several generations where they would send you off fresh out of university to be a district officer in some godforsaken place at the end of the world where you were king for 2 years. What an experience. There's hundreds of memoirs. What a fabulous experience. Talk about learning about life.

Q: Did you see Harvard with new eyes?

MCILVAINE: I certainly was much more ready to deal with it. When I had arrived there originally from a small European school where I had done very little writing in English and suddenly had papers due every time I turned around, I didn't know how to write them and I was overwhelmed. It took me a while even to realize that I was overwhelmed. But when I came back, I had a much clearer idea of how to do it, how to deal with it, and how to get something out of it. Mind you, this wasn't all put to what many would consider the most productive use in that I became a member of the Harvard Lampoon and spent an awful lot of my time doing that.

Q: You might explain what that was.

MCILVAINE: It's the oldest college humor magazine in the country. I had a great time working with that. We did 2 national issues where we took over the entire issue of Mademoiselle magazine in July. We'd go down in the spring and interview models and pose model shoots in the "Mademoiselle" offices just as college kids. This was a great deal. I got to escort Candy Bergen, who was then the hottest young model around on one big fashion show. We had a great time. It was a college kid's fantasy. We did a parody of Ian Fleming's James Bond books called Alligator. We did a record that sold nationally called The Harvard Lampoon Tabernacle Choir Sings at Leningrad Stadium. We had one guy who could turn any piece of music on the piano into rock-n-roll and did.

Q: Coming with this African experience, particularly at that time, Africa was pretty much the unknown continent.

MCILVAINE: This was the exciting new time when Africa was full of hope and promise and it was turning independent all over the place. The Congo was a great disaster.

Q: The names all rang up and down.

MCILVAINE: Did you see the Lumumba movie that was done a year or so ago?

Q: No.

MCILVAINE: It was excellent and it really caught the flavor of Kinshasa. They apparently filmed it in Harare, which still has the 1950s African colonial town look. It felt right. It looked right. It was very good. And they were careful not to take the… One of the things that happened with Lumumba was, immediately with his death or even before he became a great Soviet Bloc martyr and was made into an immediate cardboard character. The movie kept Lumumba as a real person who was as he really was, overwhelmed by events. Suddenly the postmaster's clerk got this huge, sprawling, disparate country to try and pull together and it's splitting up in every direction and he doesn't know how to do it, nor did anybody, nor could anybody figure that out. That comes through in the movie, that he was overwhelmed by this.

Q: Back to the university, in the best of all world's you would have been a source.

MCILVAINE: I remember when Kenneth Kaunda came through and I went to see him. This English lord had built this fantastic place way in northern Zambia. Then he spent his time getting to know all the independence movement crowd and promoting independence and being denounced by all his fellow settlers. The English lord came with Kaunda, the young African firebrand with hair that stood up straight like Don King's. That gave Kaunda a respectability and an acceptability to the West that he wouldn't have had otherwise. I remember him doing a lecture at one of the halls at Harvard. It was very well

attended, a big crowd. But I didn't use my African experience. Looking back on it, I could have made much more of it.

Q: Did you sense at the university there was much of an African studies movement?

MCILVAINE: No, there was nothing. That just didn't exist. In fact, I remember trying to twist things so I could derive a paper or 2 out of my African experiences. You really had to stretch and maneuver to do it. It was a bit of a reach. There was no African program whatsoever.

Q: In the academic world it takes a long while… It's pretty conservative. They don't take new experts lightly or at all if they can help it.

What were you taking at Harvard?

MCILVAINE: I migrated into modern European history – French Revolution to World War I. I got very fascinated, very interested, in the era of the late 1800s, the decadence that took over Europe and led straight to an era of total unreality. Barbara Tuchman wrote the book a few years later that I would have written had I been a true academic.

Q: The Guns of August?

MCILVAINE: Yes. It was an excellent book and I was noticing the same thing but wasn't smart enough or diligent enough or whatever it took to write a book and sell it – and she did. That was intriguing to me, the collective psyche in European government, the major powers all went off into Bunnyland for 10-15 years until the world came crashing down around them in 1914.

Q: Were there any professors who particularly stick out in your mind?

MCILVAINE: Yes. Crane Britton, one of the stars, perhaps the leading expert on the French Revolution. He was fascinating, all the intricacies and ins and outs of that 10 year extravagance that France went through. Marcus Cunliffe, an English history professor who was on an exchange and again did the same thing that Kenneth Roberts did. He was doing American history and he was suddenly talking about all these people – Lincoln, Washington – as human beings with real flaws and weaknesses and problems. That was still startling to me, that you could talk that way.

Q: These were icons.

MCILVAINE: Exactly. That very much caught my fancy.

Q: How about affairs of the world? Did the Cold War or American foreign policy intrude much into your sphere of observation?

MCILVAINE: I remember vividly the Cuban Missile Crisis, as I guess most of my generation do. I remember the progressive building of tension. I remember seeing guys shoving stuff in their car and taking off and going to Canada because "This place is going to blow up probably in a few hours." I somehow didn't get the right sense of panic. I didn't pack, I didn't run, I didn't go anywhere. But there definitely was a sense that the end might very well be nigh. That was 1962.

Q: Were you thinking of the Foreign Service?

MCILVAINE: I wasn't really. I'm embarrassed to say I don't think I was thinking very much of anything. I was having a good time. It was a time when it was understood that when you got out of college you dealt with the military. The Vietnam draft hadn't really started but the draft was there and you either were drafted and probably sent to Germany or you went to officers candidate school or you went to ROTC or you had a deferment and you went to graduate school. It was pretty clear that academia was not my natural environment and I wasn't going to go to graduate school, so I would have to deal with the military. I joined Army ROTC in order to get that done. I enjoyed that. One of my platoon mates and later friends was Lionel Rosenblatt, who created Refugees International.

Q: What was the attitude of a place like Harvard towards ROTC?

MCILVAINE: It was not at that point hostile, although I must have been pretty near the last known graduate of Harvard ROTC. A couple of years after I left, they had the big anti-war demonstrations and Harvard ROTC was closed. But at that point, Vietnam was still a cloud on the horizon, not a whole black sky. The buildup started the year after I got out of college, 1965. That's what really galvanized the anti-war movement. The anti-war movement existed. We had at that point the early days of the beatnik movement, not even hippies yet. I remember the room underneath mine freshman year was furnished by 2 cots and the pieces of a shattered 12 string guitar and slept anywhere from none to 25 people at any given night. It was a couple of kids very closely tied in to the local Beat community which at that point included the Club 24 Mount Auburn Street and a young coffeehouse singer named Joan Baez. Of course, 12 string guitars were a big part of it. So that was coming. Marijuana was just showing up. You began to hear about it and people were just beginning to experiment. No other drugs. The only other choice was still alcohol and beer.

Q: You mentioned ROTC shutting down, which was a sad thing that happened that now none of the major good schools other than state-run schools have ROTC.

MCILVAINE: I thought I saw or heard something indicating that there was a way to do it. For many kids, the navy particularly gave you a full scholarship. So, it was a really good way to get your college tuition paid. Of course, you had to give the navy 4 or 5 years in exchange. But even with the army, you got a little money and a little help. If you were going to have to deal with the military anyway, which in that generation you were, it was a relatively easy way to do it.

Q: You graduated in 1964.

MCILVAINE: I immediately went to summer camp at Fort Devins, Massachusetts and started in as a second lieutenant in the United States Army and went to Fort Benning, Georgia for infantry officers training, and then Fort Holabird, Baltimore in the slums of Baltimore – Dundalk – for intelligence school.

Q: Was this for your French?

MCILVAINE: I wanted to go overseas. In fact, I wanted to go to Vietnam. I learned from the Congo that what you read in the press didn't give you a very accurate picture of what was going on. I admit, I wasn't a very aware 21 year old. I seemed to have missed an awful lot of the civil rights movement, for example. But I did know that Vietnam by that point was going to be a defining event for my generation and I knew that reading the press accounts would give you a very garbled picture from my Congo experience. I still remember David Halbertstam, rookie New York Times reporter, writing one of these "Fear Stalks the Streets of Leopoldville" articles on the week when fear most definitely did not stalk the street. It was the one week where there was no fear and everybody was relaxed and decided to take a week off. But he had nothing to write. He had to write something, so it was "Fear Stalks the Streets of…" I wanted to see Vietnam for myself. I wanted to make my own judgment on what this was and whether this was the massive thing it was beginning to seem to be and how we should be dealing with it. So I was trying to go there. There was no way they were going to send a rookie second lieutenant to Vietnam. At this point they were sending advisors and they were only more seasoned officers. So, I was assigned to a military intelligence company at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which, as near as I could see, would be painting rocks white. So I talked to everybody I could find, prowled the Pentagon trying to get an assignment to Europe without success until just before it was time to go, I went in one of these huge personnel bays at Fort Holabird, a giant room with lots of desks and spec 4s and sergeants sitting there moving papers, and found the right sergeant and said, "Look, I speak French. I could be useful in Europe. Why can't I go to Europe?" He said, "You speak French? Go to this room and take the test." So I go upstairs to this room and take the test and they say, "Yes, he speaks French." I come back and he said, "Tell you what: I'll reassign you to Europe." I said, "Great! Where have you been all my life?" Sure enough, the sergeant reassigns me to Europe – to the Czech border of Germany. Go figure. Did I say I spoke German?

Q: I went to the army language school and took Russian. I ran across some of my people who took Bulgarian who were in Tokyo.

MCILVAINE: The army logic, it's inescapable.

But there was a French armored platoon patrolling with the Americans on that stretch of border, so I actually found some Frenchmen to talk to, but I'm not sure he knew that. It

worked. I got to Europe. I spent 6 months on the Czech border. Wonderful job. Basically you had these 3 young military intelligence officers in civilian clothes talking to the German security agencies. Our only real job was to screen the bad guys coming across the border so that those behind heard before we were swallowed. We were 5 miles from the border in this little farming town where in the spring the smell of manure was overpowering. Then we had a ready room in this little room in the basement, each one of us with our steel pot and our fatigues and our M14 rifle and all the rest of it. Of course, even we knew enough to know that would be useless. What we needed were lederhosen, Bavarian hats, and Czech flags to wave to the conquering heros as they came through. We weren't going to get out. So, 6 months there, and then I was pulled back to the headquarters in Stuttgart and I spent a year at the headquarters in Stuttgart. But it gave me a chance to drive all over Germany and a lot of Europe that I hadn't seen, a lot of Austria. I got up to Scandinavia and did a lot of tourism. Every weekend I took off to get out of Armyland and get into the real world. After 2 years, I got out as quickly as I could. Oh, and I also took the Foreign Service exam while I was in Munich. Somewhat to my surprise, I passed. When I got out, I came back to Washington.

Q: You got out in '66?

MCILVAINE: Yes. I came back and eventually took the orals.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions asked on the orals?

MCILVAINE: Not the first time I took them. I took them twice. I don't that time. I do remember that it was set up to intimidate you with a table, 3 glasses, 3 notebooks, 3 pencils, 3 chairs, and 3 grownups, and in front of them one little table, one notebook, one pencil, and the victim. The whole point was to see if they could fluster you and see how you handled it. That's all I really remember about it. That and sitting outside afterwards because they came out within 15 minutes and told you whether you were in or out. That was quite a 15 minutes. They told me I was in. Then I waited around. By then, the buildup had started. Everybody was going to Vietnam. There was no question. As soon as I finished the A100 course, I and most of my colleagues were going to Vietnamese language training and off to Vietnam.

Q: When you came in, was that the time when they were saying, "You realize that if you join, you have to go anywhere, including Vietnam?"

MCILVAINE: I wanted to go to Vietnam.

Q: You came in when?

MCILVAINE: 1967.

Q: What was you're A-100 group like?

MCILVAINE: Pretty homogenous. Very few women. I don't remember any blacks, Asians, nothing exotic. Pretty whitebread. The one thing I remember about it is, I may be one of the very few Foreign Service officers who has never been to ConGen Rosslyn and never issued a visa. When we'd finished the 6 weeks and were ready to do the 2 week visa course, the '67 war broke out. Lyndon Johnson called Dean Rusk and said, "Dean, what's this I see on ABC about Sadat said this?" Dean said, "Huh? What" and was deeply embarrassed. Then as soon as the President hung up, Rusk said get me somebody watching all 3 networks at all times and reporting directly to me so that I know what the President's talking about before he calls me up." And so they grabbed the 3 most junior officers in the entire Foreign Service, 3 of us out of the A-100 course, put us in a little room in the Department with 3 televisions and 4 radios. Fortunately, in those days, there were only three networks. We watched and reported 3 times a day directly to the Secretary what the news reports were on the Mideast. Abba Eban was speaking at the UN. There was stuff going on every minute. It was a fascinating start. We also watched The Dating Game and assorted other things. A very strange beginning to my Foreign Service career.

Then as soon as that was over, we went off to Vietnamese language training in what we called the "yellow submarine," the basement of Arlington Towers all painted yellow where we made these really weird sounds for days at a time. It felt very strange.

Q: How did you do with Vietnamese? You say "Hi" in 5 tones.

MCILVAINE: It took months and they understood this. It took months for everybody who comes out of our background, normal Western background, to get comfortable with the tones and get so you instinctively understood them and said them right, or close enough. Then once you got to that point, the language was quite straightforward. There was no complicated grammar or anything else. For the past tense, you just put in the little word that said it was past tense. For the future, you put in a little word that said it was future. You didn't change verbs or any of the rest of that stuff, thank God. But it was still hard because everything in vocabulary was totally alien. You really had to memorize every bit of it. Nothing was familiar. Nothing clicked. So, for a couple of months, you felt like a total idiot. You were in a room, 3 or 4 of you, with these little Vietnamese teachers drilling you, making these weird sounds in all different tones and correcting you. It was a strange experience. And then that lasted… I was in language course at the end of '67. After the Tet Offensive a group of others were pulled out and sent over early in 1968. Lionel Rosenblatt was my housemate at the time. We were sharing a house off Dupont Circle. That was interesting because of course in early '68 the whole world went to hell in a handbasket in a hurry. There was the Tet offensive, Bobby Kennedy's assassination, and then Martin Luther King's assassination. I can remember walking out of Arlington Towers on a clear day in the spring and looking over at Washington and seeing the smoke rising from my neighborhood. The Martin Luther King riots… I couldn't get home. There was a National Guard checkpoint blocking my house, wouldn't let me in. So, I retreated to rural Virginia until it was over. We were essentially one block from the bad zone where the rioting was bad. It was a truly awful year, 1968. Each time you thought it can't

get any worse, it did. The Prague Spring, the assassinations, everything.

Q: The Chicago convention.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Speaking of the Chicago convention, by this time, the anti-Vietnam movement was strong.

MCILVAINE: Most of my friends and acquaintances were in it.

Q: How did you deal with this?

MCILVAINE: I told them what I told myself, which is what I believed at the time, that I had to see it myself. I wanted to know what was going on. They would argue, "Yes, but you're actively supporting a dead policy." Well, I didn't buy the argument that everything we were doing was wrong. I thought the basic premise that we should help the country avoid being taken over by force was reasonable. Once I had been there nearly 2 years and come back, the first thing I was persuaded of is that the government we were backing had no credibility with the Vietnamese people whatsoever and therefore that would not work. That was never going to work. It would stay afloat only as long as we could prop it up and when we left it would collapse, and it did. I also, unlike most in the anti-war movement, came away even more persuaded than before that the other guys were also bad guys and that they had no virtue that I could see except that they were better organized and better disciplined than the guys on our side. I was in a province where I worked basically with villages, convinced that the victims in this were most of the Vietnamese people, particularly the rural people, who were being preyed on by both sides. I pretty well committed myself to doing whatever I could and finding whatever means I had to help protect them from both sides, not just the other side. I was working long and hard to protect my villages from predatory district chiefs and corruption and government abuse as much as I was from the VC. But it was a fascinating time.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MCILVAINE: I arrived right after the Tet offensive in June of '68. I left just before the Cambodian invasion in the spring of '70.

Q: What were you doing?

MCILVAINE: I was a province advisor in Camau, the southernmost province in the whole country in the Mekong delta. It was the province where the Viet Minh originally started, but it never really had the main force war. It was still very much a war of hamlet squad against hamlet guerrilla squad, and mortars, ambushes, not giant main force battles. We didn't have any of that.

Q: What sort of organization were you coming into in that area?

MCILVAINE: There were 2 American USAID civilians because I was detailed to the CORDS program, so I was essentially USAID detailed to the province advisory team, which was all American military. We were the only ones who spoke Vietnamese. There was a team of 30 or 40 American military outside the province headquarters in a little tented compound on raised flats. They had all these little walkways over the mud. Then they had district teams of 4 or 5 in each district, or each district we could get to. Some of the districts we could never get to. We were the only Vietnamese speakers, so we basically had a free hand to deal with the whole civilian side of government. They were just dealing with the military issues. We worked with all the province officials on land use, agriculture, school building, everything, development issues. We were given a free reign and no supervision. John Paul Vann was running things in the IV Corps at that time. That was very exciting. There was a senior official that you heard about and read about actually coming down and asking you what you thought. Unheard of in those days, that a senior official would actually ask you and listen to what you said. That was part of the legend of John Paul Vann, that he really did listen to people. So, it was again like my Congo experience. The intensity of a war environment where any mistake can get somebody killed. You do the wrong thing at the wrong time, it's not just a mistake, it could be fatal. I thrive on that. It seems to be something I really like – not all the time, but for spurts. So I very much enjoyed that.

In Vietnam a village would be up to 24 hamlets and 10-15,000 people. I worked with 3 villages that I could reach from the capital by sampan or whatever where I found village chiefs who seemed to be reasonably interested in actually helping their people rather than helping themselves. I would do whatever I could to help them.

I also got into all sorts of interesting adventures. I'd be very careful to take a sampan out without any advance warning, without telling anybody where I was going or when, and just go down to the market and pick at random one of the sampans and take off. You wouldn't tell them where you were going until you got out of town. All the precautions you had to take. I carried a Swedish submachine gun that I got from the CIA Phoenix Program, borrowed. It was a strange time. We'd get mortared 2-3 times a week. The town would get mortared.

Q: What were you picking up from your contacts about how they felt about things, the Vietnamese?

MCILVAINE: "Please leave us alone. Everybody leave us alone." This was the Mekong delta, where the living was good in any kind of peace. It was all paddy land. The whole province, 2 feet above sea level was about the highest point. Going upstairs was a big deal. They had rice paddies and a cyclical life where you plant the rice, the rice grows, you harvest the rice, and then you have 3 months of drinking until it's time to plant the rice again. Because it was perfect rice growing country and there was always plenty of water in the Mekong, they always lived well until the war in these villages. Further up in

the bush, in the more jungle portions, there was real support for the Viet Cong, but there was no support for the Viet Cong in my area. Increasingly, there was no support for the government either. The government simply preyed on them. It took. It didn't give. It didn't provide anything except maybe through us.

Q: Did you get much feeling of dealing with the government officials about the problems you were mentioning?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. There were a few. There was a refugee chief who seemed to be trying to do his best. You always wonder afterwards who was really working for the VC who had another line out. Nobody posted a scorecard after it was all over saying, "Fooled you. This guy wasn't and this guy was." But some of them were obviously adventurers just making a buck. Those guys you tried to cut out and keep out of whatever you were doing. Some of them were trying to do the right thing within the limits of the system they worked in and you tried to figure that out. But it was an intense experience for a 23-25 year old to try and understand the pressures they were under.

Q: Did you get involved in any classic conflicts between calling a province chief "corrupt" and the people above you not being very happy with that?

MCILVAINE: No. The thing I remember as most interesting was the portable rice mills, a really vivid explanation of what was going on. One of the things that kept coming up in this village that I most enjoyed working with was that they had to take all their rice to the one rice mill in the province capital run by a Chinese businessman, pay the fixed price, and get their rice milled there. About the same time, I heard about these little Honda portable rice mills. I found out USAID had some, so I got them to send me one. I took it down to the village and said, "Let's try this." It was a smash success. The village set it up and everybody was bringing their rice and waiting in line hours to get their rice milled. They did it because they didn't have to take the rice to the province and pay the province price.

Well, in short order, the rice mill was confiscated by the province government and the national government issued an edict banning portable rice mills. I hit right at somebody's rice bowl. This was a national thing. Monopolies on rice mills were set up. It was bought, it was paid for, and it was not to be messed with. This kid had screwed it up and boy did they shut that down as fast as they could. That was illuminating.

Then after a year of working in the delta, I was pulled back to Saigon and spent 9 months working for a little office called the Pacification Studies Group in MACV headquarters that Colby had set up under Craig Johnston, who later became ambassador to Algeria and a few other things. He had about 8 or 10 Vietnamese speaking junior officers and 8 or 10 ex-Viet Minh Vietnamese, Chu Hoi, and the idea was that Colby would say to Craig: "Something's going wrong in Province Y, but the reporting's not giving a very clear picture and maybe they're covering something up. I don't know what's going on. Can you find out?" A team would be sent out. We would pair. We'd get to the province airstrip

and the Vietnamese Hoi Chan would disappear into the Vietnamese community and I'd go deal with all the American officials and then I'd deal with the Vietnamese officials. Two or 3 days later, we'd meet and compare notes and see what we figured out was really going on. I loved it. It was being an investigative reporter, which is something I've always liked. I was good at it.

Q: What sort of things were you finding?

MCILVAINE: There was always 3 levels of stories below the official story. I remember different trips. I would write these 2 page things to Colby that did explain what the real problem was. There was always something. Unfortunately, I can't remember a good example. You have to understand the relationship between the province chief and the senior American advisors and the province chief and his family and maybe the Chinese or whoever else. In one case it was the community of Catholic refugees that had come down and settled in my old province in Camau off in the corner and built their own little Catholic enclave and how they were dealing with the provincial government. Another one was in III CORPS in Ben Hua. I got all over the country. I got to see places I hadn't seen. I remember Street Without Joy that Bernard Fall wrote about. It was the first time I had ever gotten up into the north, into the big war country. It really expanded my understanding of Vietnam and the problem. Those people were so bitter. It was the delta taken 10 times worse. They had been tramped on and killed and shot at by both sides over and over and over again and they hated everybody. The hostility rang out at you from people along that stretch on the coast. They had just been through it too many times.

Q: Did you run across any problems of Americans getting involved in corruption?

MCILVAINE: I didn't. We always admired the wheeler-dealers. In Camau, we cornered the market in VC flags. We had most of them. They were very good trading material. I remember one NCO who managed to trade a VC flag for this giant generator that was too big and he couldn't get it into the province and if he had, we didn't know what to do with it. It would have electrified the whole province. But he couldn't pass up the deal.

Q: There you would have been part of the young FSO mafia.

MCILVAINE: Yes. I'd get up to Saigon for a weekend. Many of the future stars of the Foreign Service were there.

Q: As you were there, what feel did you get about whither Vietnam by the judgment of the young officers?

MCILVAINE: I think it was almost universal that this was going wrong. We were there…. After the Tet offensive, there was a lull. The VC had really been knocked back. So, for a while there, things looked like they were really moving. But if you were working at the grassroots level, you came away with the impression that the guys on our side are hopeless, that if this is what we've got to work with, it isn't going to work. I think that

was widespread with the guys who went to language class with me and went out to districts at the same time I did. We would meet back in Saigon. Higher up, those who went to the big jobs in MACV and provincial headquarters might have been a little more optimistic. The embassy seemed to be on a totally different plane. I had one friend from the A-100 course at the embassy for a while. It was like they weren't in the same country.

I don't think I ever even got in the door of the embassy. USAID I and II and all those places, yes, but I don't think I ever got in the door of the embassy.

Q: My consular section was an adjunct. I was consul general. It sounds fancy, but we were dealing with consular matters.

MCILVAINE: Which were plenty.

Q: Yes.

MCILVAINE: And they weren't interested in your views on policy. The embassy did have a reputation of being very closed to the outside world.

Q: I remember looking at the diplomatic list. Here I was, consul general, which sounds fancy. I made the upper half of the American diplomatic list by one. There was something like 80 people on that thing.

MCILVAINE: They had so many bigshots.

Q: Yes.

MCILVAINE: Double ambassadors and all the rest of it. That embassy did not serve our government well, I'm afraid.

Q: Well, the pressures on it were such that…

MCILVAINE: Well, nobody wanted to hear…

Q: From the presidents on down, it was sort of an impossible situation. I think this is a good place to stop. You left there in the spring of 1970.

MCILVAINE: I had been working with the Vietnam Special Studies Group, which was a little group of junior officers put together by Elliot Richardson's staff when he was Deputy Secretary. It included Lionel Rosenblatt and John Marks who later founded Search for Common Ground. They got to be friends. Lionel already was a friend because we had shared a house. John Lionel came out to Vietnam on this NSC study group to determine what would happen if there was a cease-fire, province by province, who would win, who would lose, who would go where, what would happen. Our little group took them around and I particularly had a lot to do with them. Then I went back to Washington

and, as my first Foreign Service officer job, got assigned to that, so again it wasn't a real Foreign Service job. We set up in a corner of the Operations Center and worked all hours of the day and night writing NSC papers on provinces in Vietnam and what we should do. We wrote papers for Richardson's staff on other issues and did a paper when the talk started about invading Cambodia. We did a paper on what would happen if you did invade Cambodia to accomplish these missions. We concluded that the missions would not be achieved. We wrote, "You will not get Viet Cong headquarters because it will move before you got there." We analyzed all the other U.S. military operations to get Viet Cong headquarters. We had done the research and we were very proud of it. We turned it in and about 2 days later the U.S. invaded Cambodia with exactly those missions (at least officially) and, of course, didn't achieve the missions and acquired a client state.

That pretty much did it for me. Tony Lake, who was then on the NSC staff, resigned. The 3 of us went to our boss and said, "We think we ought to resign over this. They obviously aren't paying any attention to us. This we think is a bad mistake." He said, "They'd be delighted if you resigned. They'd be pleased to get rid of you. I think you're of more use staying around and saying these things." Grump, grump, grump. So, we didn't resign. Basically we all went off. Lionel went off and later, when Saigon was falling, did his great rescue with Craig Johnston, where they got lots of Vietnamese they had worked with out of Saigon.

Q: ______________ Secretariat.

MCILVAINE: I took a year's leave of absence in 1971 which eventually turned into a resignation.

Q: Let's pick this up next time.

***

Today is October 8, 2003. Where were you getting stuff from?

MCILVAINE: There were 3 of us: Steve Cummings, Lionel Rosenblatt, and me. I left the Foreign Service and then came back 10 years later. We were working under Charlie Cook, Elliot Richardson's staff assistant. Elliot Richardson was Under Secretary of State. We were installed in a corner of the Ops Center. We were getting all the intelligence. That was fascinating. At least 2 of us – Cummings and I – spoke Vietnamese and had worked in the provinces. Lionel worked in the capital. The CIA agent reports, reading what Vietnamese said, were very useful. You knew where the Vietnamese was coming from and what biases he was likely to reflect. You could read it accordingly and make your own judgment as to how useful it was. The State analysis was less useful because we didn't agree or figured that the State analysts, who presumably were Saigon bound, just didn't have the same feel for the provinces. Cummings and I both traveled extensively all over Vietnam and thought we had a pretty good feel. Of course, we were also about 25/26 years old and knew everything. But it was an education into how valuable intelligence is

and how it can mislead you.

Q: What about the military intelligence?

MCILVAINE: I'm sure we got that, the DIA stuff. There were tons and tons of order of battle stuff. That's what they like. That's what they do, which we weren't interested in. I don't remember it being particularly useful.

Q: CIA?

MCILVAINE: The CIA reports that were unanalyzed we found the most useful. We could figure out roughly who the source was or what segment of society the source came out of and therefore what that source reflected.

Q: Were they coming to you unanalyzed? There is often the problem that stuff comes in and then it goes through the hands of an analyst, who is often just bringing their own biases and perspective into it, which sort of vitiates the whole…

MCILVAINE: Later when I was dealing with West Africa just 5 years ago, that was very much the case. We weren't getting much of the raw stuff and the analysis was poor. But it's a difficult field. Either you don't have enough information to really figure out what's going on or you have too much and you don't know what to pick from. I have a great deal of sympathy for the much beleaguered intelligence analysts who are always blamed for everything. "Why didn't you tell us?" The current Agency bias, at least it was before 9/11, was to warn you of everything often so it couldn't be said, "You didn't tell us something awful would happen." That proved almost as defeating as…

Q: When I was in Vietnam watching the news reports – ABC, NBC – they would point to whoever was the guy and there would be people going on about their business, and they said, "But who knows what they're really thinking," always leaving it open.

MCILVAINE: I told you the David Halbertstam story that I remember vividly from the Congo.

Q: How did you feel things were going when you left that particular job?

MCILVAINE: Are we talking about the Vietnam Special Studies Group?

Q: Yes.

MCILVAINE: It was fascinating and frustrating, fascinating in that we felt like we were on the edge of the policymaking process and at the center of what was going on, meeting with the NSC and young NSC staffers like Tony Lake. We felt like we were in the center and then we learned quite abruptly that we weren't. We were assembled to do a study of what would happen if there was a cease-fire, province by province, what would happen in

each province. Then once we did that, we recognized that there was increasing talk of an invasion of Cambodia. We thought that was a bad idea but we quickly did a study of 3 previous military efforts to capture Viet Cong headquarters. We were very proud of that. We proved definitively that you could capture the headquarters but you wouldn't capture any people; they'd be gone. You would get a lot of material and it would not seriously damage the North Vietnamese ability to prosecute the war. We finished the paper, sent it up the chain. A day or 2 later, the United States invaded Cambodia to go after Viet Cong headquarters. That was a profoundly disappointing and frustrating turn of events. We thought it was a big mistake. We thought that the only permanent result of it would be, we would acquire another client state. We were frustrated that nobody even thought to look at this paper before they did the job, or to ask. That was where our innocence was lost.

Q: Did you get any feel for where Elliot Richardson was in this whole business?

MCILVAINE: We felt certainly that he was listening to us. We don't know what he said at NSC meetings but we did certainly get the conclusion that Kissinger and maybe a few people at the Defense Department were making the policy decisions and the State Department was pushed out to one side, not in the mix.

Q: Was there an equivalent group over at the Pentagon?

MCILVAINE: Not that I know of. There may have been, but not that we dealt with.

Q: There wasn't a young Vietnam vet officer mafia of the CIA, State, and Defense getting together?

MCILVAINE: Later, some of that emerged. There was Sam Adams, the VC counter at the CIA who was later profiled in a big "60 Minutes" thing, made quite a fuss. There was discontent throughout the national security bureaucracy and a lot of questioning of this policy decision. But we weren't in contact. We weren't linked. We didn't know each other.

Q: Then what happened?

MCILVAINE: Then we separated and split up. Steve Cummings decided to go to medical school. I decided to take a year's leave of absence, instead of an assignment to be a proper junior officer in Cameroon. I decided I really needed to spend some time here to learn about my American roots rather than going back overseas. And I admit I didn't much want to be a junior officer going to the ambassador's receptions and serving the hors d'oeuvres, which is what I thought it would be. Actually, it probably would have been quite a good job. But I definitely wanted to spend some time at home, particularly in Virginia. So I took a year's leave.

Q: This was when?

MCILVAINE: From late ‘70/early /71. After the year’s leave without pay, I resigned.

Q: What caused you to resign?

MCILVAINE: I went out to an unheated cabin in the Virginia countryside with a friend of mine, also a Vietnam vet, and we attempted to write something that winter, sort of a Vietnam novel. It was good catharsis for us. It wasn’t much of a novel. We had lived a very intense experience in Vietnam. He was another guy who had been through the course, spoke Vietnamese, and worked at a district level. We had been involved in this life and death thing and we came back to find a country just sort of motoring on, not very interested in Vietnam, and we thought they should be more interested. So, we were definitely out of step with our peers, with the society we were in.

Q: Right now there are thousands of people your age who are going around living up their great moments which consisted of sitting in front of the Pentagon and chanting about LBJ. The anti-war movement… If worst came to worst, you might get doused with a water cannon. Here you were, out of this. In a way, you were being somewhat a subscriber to the cause, but there must have been a great gap.

MCILVAINE: There was a great gap. Many of my friends were at the demos, many of the people I grew up with. But I had a great deal of respect for those young men who faced the draft or went to Canada as opposed to those who took the easy way out, which was “I’ll just go to grad school and avoid the whole thing.”

Q: They are now our politicians.

MCILVAINE: Right. I recognize that.

Q: Some went into the National Guard and flew airplanes briefly in Texas.

MCILVAINE: Right. Those who really made a choice between jail, Canada, or the draft because they thought it was unconscionable, I had a good deal of respect for that. And there are a number who really disrupted their lives and went and lived overseas and started over because they didn’t want any part of that. That was fine. I didn’t have much respect for those who just used graduate school or the National Guard, as a way to slip by what was a decisive moment for my generation. In my generation, the men had to decide what to do about Vietnam. You had to make a decision, even if it was graduate school or the National Guard. You had to deal with it somehow.

Q: What did you do with yourself? Was your resignation acknowledged?

MCILVAINE: No press play. I didn’t tie it explicitly to Vietnam. I said I wanted to learn more about myself and my country, which was true. I was recovering from a case of hepatitis that I picked up in Mexico or Central America in 1972 and splitting wood at my

parent's farm in rural Virginia when my mother said, "I'm going to the nominating caucus for the state convention at the firehouse. Do you want to come?" I said, "Sure." Up to that point, I wasn't a registered anything. I was a Foreign Service officer politically neutral at least in theory. I went to the Plains firehouse and I was the 21st person to arrive and we were split evenly 10 to 10 between the Byrd Machine conservative Democrats and this new upstart National Democrat effort to take over the Virginia party and line it up with the National Democratic Party instead of the conservative Democratic Party that it had been. I aligned with the National Democrats. We carried the day. We elected the 3 delegates to the state convention. I was one of them. So, suddenly I found myself in politics. I spent that spring of '72 in the organizing effort to take over the state Democratic Party that was aligned with the McGovern people. I went to the state convention in Roanoke and indeed we won. We took over the state party and elected the McGovern delegates, whereupon most white Virginians left the Democratic Party and we lost elections for the next 10 years with me participating in a number of them. Then later I was actually the Virginian in the state McGovern-Shriver campaign headquarters. We had 2 guys from out of state sent in after me. We got 30% of the vote, which putting the best spin on it, was about what Hubert Humphrey had gotten in '68, so we didn't think that was too bad considering how McGovern did everywhere else.

I had become a political hack. I worked political campaigns for the next few years – a governor's race, a congressional.

Q: Do you make money?

MCILVAINE: No.

Q: How do you survive?

MCILVAINE: I had saved a lot of money from the Foreign Service. I wasn't married, didn't have any children, didn't have any expenses, and I lived largely at home getting my food and laundry and rent, so I didn't need much. You get expenses and put up. I did some freelancing for Virginia weekly newspapers. This lasted for 2 or 3 years. Then in 1975 I finally got a real paying job as a congressional aide to Robert Duncan of Oregon.

Q: How did that come about?

MCILVAINE: His son and campaign manager was one of my Vietnam friends and recommended me.

Q: Where did Robert Duncan come from?

MCILVAINE: He was a Democrat, very much a blue collar, labor union, snuff chewing, spitting in a paper cup, lumberjack boots Democrat. He had run twice against Wayne Morris. These were the great symbolic hawk versus dove race of the 1960s. Duncan was the hawk on Vietnam and Morris was the dove. Morris beat him each time by a narrow

margin. So Duncan stopped running for Senate. Then when Edith Green retired in the Portland suburbs he ran for that very democratic seat, won the primary, and was a shoe-in for the general election, and was looking for a staff, I worked for him even though he had been a hawk on Vietnam. We squabbled and argued over foreign policy. He didn't generally accept my views and I didn't generally accept his.

Q: By this time Vietnam was no longer an issue.

MCILVAINE: It wasn't a burning issue on the Hill. The Senate was still engaged, but the House really wasn't. Duncan was on appropriations. I learned about the real world of concrete and pork and that was fascinating, dealing with Interior and Transportation appropriations, highways and roads and subways and national parks and Indian tribes and Bureau of Land Management and all sorts of things that I knew nothing about. The wheeling dealing, trading, and this is real money and important to these guys.

Q: Did you wheel and deal or were you sort of a mechanic dealing with the problems afterwards?

MCILVAINE: I didn't do the wheeling and dealing. Duncan did.

Q: He enjoyed it?

MCILVAINE: He loved it. He was pretty good at it. Then I left and went to the Department of Transportation for 3 years and did congressional relations there after Jimmy Carter was elected. I worked the Carter campaign and supported him.

Q: What were you doing in the Department of Transportation?

MCILVAINE: Congressional relations. Political appointee. Then in 1981, I was fired when Reagan was elected.

Q: How did you find the Department of Transportation? What sort of a player was it?

MCILVAINE: That was the next step in this world of moving from the abstract foreign policy to the concrete, roads, subways, airports. So, it was fun learning about something that was quite different from what I had done all my life. There was nothing abstract about it. We had great fights over airline deregulation, waterway deregulation, safety issues, and always squabbles over how much money to put into highways.

Q: Did you see any problems with the Carter administration's relations with Congress?

MCILVAINE: Yes. We worked pretty well with Congress. The group I worked with were all Hill veterans. My boss was an ex-Udall staffer. We all knew how the Hill worked and worked well with it, whereas the WH was Ham Jordon, Jody Powell, the Georgians, and they came up with a certain contempt for Congress and it showed. They had a very bad

time. So, our transportation stuff worked pretty well. We were able to get what we needed to get, but the administration in general had a lot of trouble. It was just how you deal with those guys.

Q: In '81, you're out.

MCILVAINE: Now I've been out of the Foreign Service for 10 years. I'm unemployed. I look into getting back into the Foreign Service, see if I can go back and not be a junior officer. I looked and looked and lo and behold there was a way to do it. I applied. I didn't have to take the written exam, but I did have to take the oral exam again, so I did that and passed. I did probably a lot better than I did the first time around.

I waited for somebody to say, "But wait a minute, this guy was a democratic political hack." Nobody ever did. I was let back in. What I didn't know, and only later learned slowly, was that coming back in, I came back in as a Foreign Service-02 with absolutely no record, no file and no network and that that was a huge disadvantage. I didn't know how to get jobs. I didn't know the system. I didn't know the games. I didn't know the politics of it. It took me years to catch up. That was the negative of it. There were absolutely no jobs. The first job I got was a non-Foreign Service job, the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai. That was lots of fun because it was the first group right after the Camp David Accords. We were the first group to go in as part of the peace process when Israel tore town the settlements in Sinai and pulled out and turned it over to Egypt. It was great fun, but it wasn't Foreign Service.

Q: You were doing this from when to when? Tell me about how you set this up.

MCILVAINE: For one year, April '82 to roughly April '83.

Q: What were you doing?

MCILVAINE: I was one of the 10 or 11 observers. Part of the Camp David Accord was that Israel would give the Sinai back to Egypt only if there was some sort of US-heavy international force in between that was not controlled by the UN. No Soviet veto.

Q: And also the UN had pulled the UN observers out in '67, which allowed the Israelis to really mop up the Arabs. It left a bitter pill.

MCILVAINE: They viewed the UN as hostile and as a creature then with the Soviet veto and very much a creature of the Arabs. So, this was going to be a non-UN peacekeeping effort with 10 or so U.S. government observers who would be running around making sure that everybody was playing by the rules. There were 3 zones set up – 2 Egyptian, one Israeli – and each zone differed on what sort of military equipment you were allowed to have. So we were the police of the accord. It was a fascinating job. It was really fun because we had huge Chevy Blazers with great V8 engines. We had our own little helicopter air force to run all over the Sinai, this magnificent landscape. I had never seen

anything like it before. It was full of wrecked tanks and relics of 4 wars. It was our job to run all over it and make sure everybody was playing by the rules.

Q: Let's talk first on the Egyptian side, your observations of how they were working, and then on the Israeli side.

MCILVAINE: The Egyptian soldiers that we dealt with extensively going around to all these Egyptian outposts were always charming, welcoming, just as nice as they could be in an army that clearly was challenged on some of the efficiency and equipment fronts. It was, if not exactly Third World, it certainly wasn't First World. During Ramadan, we'd land in a little outpost of a couple of Egyptian soldiers and come up to chat and they would insist on offering us a tea when it was 100 degrees in the desert. They couldn't drink because it was Ramadan, but they would insist on us drinking because that was hospitality and it was right.

The Israelis, on the other hand, had a high tech, First World, very good army, and were just as obnoxious as they could possibly be about every bit of it. They didn't want us around. They didn't like this. Most of the Israeli soldiers were reservists doing their stints. It was really remarkable. The democracy in the Israeli army was spectacular. A private would tell off a colonel at the drop of a hat because maybe that private was probably the museum director and the colonel was just a baker. But it was real democracy within the army. For someone who had never dealt with the Mideast, it was a very interesting insight into that world and that conflict. Of course, the real news at that time was not the Sinai. It was Lebanon and the invasion of Lebanon and then later Ariel Sharon and the camps, Shatila and Sabra, when he endorsed and allowed the massacres in those 2 camps.

Q: Let's stick to the Sinai. I've talked to people who have served there who say that one of the problems was, the Israelis kept trying to push the boundaries all the time.

MCILVAINE: They were always pressing the rules. The only real serious violation I caught was an Israeli self-propelled 155 millimeter Howitzer in their border zone where they weren't supposed to have any artillery. It was fun to nail them because they were so busy constantly pressing us to nail the Egyptians for all sorts of petty Egyptian violations that weren't very serious. This guy had gone and done some target practice and been a little sloppy about where the border was. He was quite surprised when this orange helicopter landed beside him and I got out in my funny orange jumpsuit – that's so everybody would see us and not shoot at us – and said, "You know, you're in the wrong place." That was fun. They were constantly pressing it.

Q: Did this have any effect on the observers?

MCILVAINE: It meant you had to be careful. You had to make sure you were right. you couldn't be sloppy or the Israelis would be calling you on it.

Q: Did you get any pressure reflecting the political process back in the US, where Israeli

influence is profound?

MCILVAINE: Not at that… This was not politically charged. The only political question was, would this hold? Would the Israelis really withdraw? Would the Egyptians take it over and behave? Both were answered, yes. The Israelis really did withdraw. The Egyptians really did behave. To this day, 20 years later, the Sinai is-

Q: When you were first there, did you have the feeling that the 2 armies were on hair trigger?

MCILVAINE: That was fascinating. We got there a month before the accord was to go into effect. We started out at this camp that was right next to one of the passes, that had been a battleground. There had been an observer camp there as part of an earlier agreement and that was where we started and then we were moving with the agreement to the permanent camp, an Israeli air base near the Gaza Strip in the northeast corner of the Sinai. So, we were at that camp when they had the ceremony there at the camp for the accord in April 1982 with Egyptian army officers and Israeli army officers meeting for the first time. It was a revelation that the army officers understood each other and wanted peace. They were the peaceable ones. Later you see this in Israeli politics, the obvious exception being Sharon, but the peacemakers in Israeli politics usually were former generals. They had been there. They had seen their friends die. They had been through it 4 times on this front and they didn't want to do it again, either side. That was really clear. They understood each other. There was a kinship there that certainly wasn't there with the politicians. Obviously, Begin and Sadat had no kinship whatsoever and nothing in common. Jimmy Carter just sort of wrestled them together.

Q: What happened? You were there around the Israeli army… It's still astounding that you have the prime minister of Israel being Ariel Sharon when he conducted essentially… He took the Israeli army and moved it up to Beirut without authorization without hindrance from his political leaders.

MCILVAINE: Certainly without hindrance.

Q: What were you getting from the Israeli officer corps when they watched this go on?

MCILVAINE: I remember hearing a lot of dismay within the Israeli body politic, the Jerusalem Post and other newspapers. But the army that we dealt with wasn't like our army. These were not career army folks. Particularly on our side then, we had the reservists because the shock troops were on the other side. And there was much complaining about it. Israel certainly has its faults, but it does have a vigorous debate amongst Israelis, amongst Jews. The Arab population of Israel doesn't seem to be able to get into that debate much or be accepted into that debate much. But in the Jewish community, they debate everything vigorously.

Q: You left there in '83. I take it you really weren't plugged into any jobs.

MCILVAINE: No, nothing. I started to go through the assignment process for the first time. I'd come in out of cycle. I was interested in Africa and the only thing out there was right back to where I'd been: Kinshasa, which was Leopoldville under a new name. I was assigned as number 2 in the political section in Kinshasa, Zaire.

Q: So you were there from '83 to when?

MCILVAINE: '85.

Q: What was Zaire and Kinshasa like at that time?

MCILVAINE: Again, I enjoyed it. It was the court of King Mobutu and political reporting was something I enjoyed very much. It was great fun to try and figure out what was going on and who was doing what to whom. There were no facts or hard evidence. It was all rumor and who would tell you what and sources and all the rest of it. I remember reading at the same time a biography of Mary Queen of Scots when she was in Scotland. It was the same thing. The court of Mary in the 1500s was very like the court of Mobutu in 1983. I did a report once on his family. This is hard to imagine with a head of state, but there was no consensus on how many children he had, who were children, who were full children, who were half, who were recognized, who were not, and who he had actually married. There were various anointed wives. There had been 2 anointed wives. But there were clearly others. A hard fact was impossible to find. To a true political reporter, what could be more fun?

Q: How open did you find the society?

MCILVAINE: The society was in theory very closed. It was very much a one man show. Everything was decided by Mobutu. In practice, Zairians loved to talk and everybody would talk. You had to figure out what to make of all the talk you heard, what was likely and what was not, which was what's fun about being a political reporter. That's the analysis of it. In terms of political reporting, it was great fun and really a challenge. In terms of working and the US relationship, it was very difficult. The station was huge. This was the time when we were doing a lot of stuff in Angola and doing it out of Zaire. We were endlessly confused with the station and frequently I would get in the way of the station and that would not sit well with the ambassador.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MCILVAINE: The first one was Peter Constable. The second one was Brandon Grove. I had more troubles with Peter Constable, not his fault, but his mission was basically to support the station and I was causing trouble. I didn't realize it, but I was doing what I thought I was supposed to do as a political officer: contacting dissidents and getting to know them. I knew all the so-called "bad guys."

Q: Was the problem that you were contacting the dissidents and reporting on it or was the problem that you were contacting the people who the station was playing with?

MCILVAINE: I was contacting the dissidents and Mobutu was complaining directly to the ambassador and the station, "Get this guy to stop talking to those people." The inclination of the embassy was, the relationship with Mobutu was so important that they didn't want it messed up.

Q: Why was it so important?

MCILVAINE: That was never fully explained to me but I assumed it was because of all the work through Zaire on Angola and maybe other things in support of Savimbi and UNITA. This was early Reagan.

Q: Within the embassy, was there…

MCILVAINE: The same arguments went round and round over the Congo for 30 years. Mobutu could hold it together; nobody else can. He's our ticket. We've got to stay with him. And a counter-argument saying, "Mobutu is the reason why it's a mess." Both arguments were true and are still true.

Q: Today-

MCILVAINE: It's a mess and it's a mess in part because of Mobutu. But he did help hold it together.

Q: Within the embassy officer corps, was there concern about Mobutu and our ties to him?

MCILVAINE: Not much that I detected. I was pretty much the only one that was following that line. I was certainly the only one talking to what was called the "13," the dissidents like Tschisked, who was thrown in jail, and Makanda.

Q: Were they just being dissidents?

MCILVAINE: No, they were providing something resembling an alternative. It was flawed, too, but they were trying to put together an alternative and getting a lot of attention because Mobutu kept throwing them in jail, having them beat up and stuff like that.

Q: Was the political life concentrated in Leopoldville? It's a huge country. What was happening elsewhere?

MCILVAINE: That's always a problem with that huge country, that there is Kinshasa and then there's what is going on in the rest of the country, and usually nobody knows.

Mobutu in many ways wanted it that way. Many analysts assumed that he neglected the infrastructure in part because he didn't want you to be able to get quickly from Katanga to Kinshasa because then you could cause trouble. In fact, what had been a fairly good infrastructure brought by the Belgians was reduced to… Zaire was the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. By the time I was there, it had the infrastructure of the United States east of the Mississippi in about 1820: dirt roads, not much else. My wife found this Spanish TV crew that was doing a TV show going across Zaire with this fancy truck. They had a driver and the driver didn't speak French, so they needed an interpreter, so she went with them and actually drove across Zaire, which nobody did. It took 10 days and a number of washed out bridges and things like that. But it was 10 days to drive 1,000 miles.

Q: When did you acquire a wife?

MCILVAINE: I acquired a wife before I came back into the Foreign Service in the late '70s.

Q: What's her background?

MCILVAINE: Her father and my father met in 1935 when they both took and both failed the Foreign Service exam. My father heard her father being called out, William Breese. He said, "Breese? That's my mother's maiden name." So he accosted him and asked who he was. It turned out his Breeses were from New York. So he went home that weekend and asked his mother, "There are Breeses from New York. Are we related somehow?" She said, "Oh, those Breeses. Yes. They're in trade." Our Breeses were all naval officers. They had actually made money, whereas ours didn't.

So, our parents met there. They kept in touch. Many years later, my father retired from the Foreign Service, came back to Washington and met t Breeses again somewhere on the Washington circuit and invited them and their daughter over for dinner. I was invited and I thought the daughter was terrific. She thought I was kind of a bore, but I pursued and persisted. Two years later, we got married.

Q: How did you find the diplomatic social life in Kinshasa?

MCILVAINE: With Zairians, it was either these over the top, too much money spent, too fancy villas, too fancy receptions for government elite figures, or it was the struggling middle class. They were lucky if they had a cement floor and if they had running water. Anyhow, it was manioc pounded into a concrete-like paste. Then you put some sauce or chicken on it. So, it was too much money on one side and too little money on the other side. The huge gap was really visible.

Q: Did you get out and around to the various provinces?

MCILVAINE: A little. I spent some time in my old Katanga, where I spent 6 months as a

kid, but that was in Lubumbashi where we had a consulate. And I got up to Stanleyville/Kisangani. I got up to Bukavu, one of those beautiful places.

Q: Is that on the lake?

MCILVAINE: Yes. That zone from Bujumbura, from the head of Lake Tanganyika up to the Sudan border of the volcanic mountains across the spine of Africa, it's Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and Zaire or Congo on the west side. It's just the most magnificent country. There are live volcanoes. Gorillas. Forests. Lakes. Stunningly beautiful.

The last 10 years have been very hard on that country. Millions of refugees. It's been deforested. Lava flows. Civil war. It's had no end to trouble. I don't know if it's still beautiful, but it certainly was.

Q: How did you find African hands? By this time I assume there was a solid corps of what you call African hands?

MCILVAINE: There weren't so much at the post because it was so politically charged at that point. It wasn't so much the traditional Africa hands.

Q: You wouldn't put them in there. you would use them elsewhere.

MCILVAINE: None of the guys I worked with… I don't think any of them did other Africa tours. Peter Constable wasn't a true Africa hand. Brandon Grove wasn't an Africa hand. The political counselor, who I worked for, was an alcoholic and later died just a couple years later. The inside the embassy part of it was not good. I was out of step and it wasn't a step I particularly was looking to be in.

Q: Was there a hold on reporting on corruption?

MCILVAINE: No formal hold. There was no vetoing of reporting. I did have a free hand on reporting. The assumption was, that's okay, nobody's reading it anyhow. But what I did run into friction on regularly from the station, and that got to the ambassador, was that I shouldn't be talking to the people I was talking to. I was also talking to some of the Mobutu folks, too, because it was important to have those contacts.

Q: We had this in Iran and other places where we were being called… After the Shah went down the tubes, one of the things was, we hadn't really been talking to the others. I would have thought that there would have been a certain tenderness on this point.

MCILVAINE: I think it's a chronic problem with embassies. Every ambassador wants to have good relations with the president or the head of state, particularly in countries where it is a one man show, because that's his or her meal ticket. He's got to be able to get the president on short notice to meet a senator or tell him what the government's going to do on X. He's got to be able to get to him. If you're too mean to him, the president wont let

you anywhere as near. Ambassadors learn the hard way. If access is cut off, they're ineffective. When it's a dictatorship, access means you've got to be careful how you criticize and when. Plus, there's just a whiff of Homerism: "This is my country for 3 years and we're going to get it right. We're going to need all the help we can get. I don't want anybody rocking that particular boat." Every embassy is prone to it. Some manage to avoid it. Some have situations where it's easy to avoid because you just don't get along with the government anyhow. But most have big problems with it.

Q: You left there in '85. whither?

MCILVAINE: Somebody had sent around a thing saying they were looking for temporary chargés in Guinea Bissau and I raised my hand, so I got what turned out to be 5 months of running a little embassy in a country so obscure that even Graham Greene never got there. Bissau was really… There is the end of the line and then there's 2 steps further. That's Bissau. There was one restaurant in town, but you had to bring the food. They'd cook it if you brought it. But nobody had any food. I remember going to the market for the first time and these women with 3 tiny tomatoes waiting for somebody to buy those 3 tiny tomatoes. It was pathetic.

Q: Let's look at this. Why did we have relations with the country?

MCILVAINE: This was where the revolution against Portuguese colonial power peaked. Amakar Cabral was a Bissauan, a leading figure, and he led a revolution of all these African intellectuals at the University of Lisbon against Portuguese rule that spread to Mozambique and Angola and much more important places than Bissau. Cabral was the original intellectual underpinning of that. In Bissau, the guerrillas actually defeated the Portuguese army, unlike Mozambique and Angola, where eventually the Portuguese just withdrew after their revolution in 1975. In Bissau, they were defeated. So, it was an interesting little country from that perspective. We had no particular interest there, but a new government, the revolutionary government, was strongly Marxist- (end of tape)

Who were largely from Cape Verde. There was a joint thing, one party for Cape Verde and Bissau. Then Ojoão Viera, who was one of the guerrilla commanders and was definitely a bush Bissaun and a fighter, not a Marxist from the University of Lisbon. He led a coup 5 years after independence in 1980 and took over the government and threw the Cape Verdean mulattos out. When I get there in '85, Marxism, as it did practically everywhere else, had totally destroyed what little economy there was. There was no economy at all. Viera and the country were beginning to look around for ways out of this. There was a French embassy, a Portuguese embassy, the Scandinavians (who always loved African socialists), and that was it. And the UN, UN agencies. It was pretty hard to argue that we really needed to have an embassy there. You could only argue on the basis of universalism, that it's a good idea because we are a preeminent superpower to have an embassy in every country because they all have votes at the UN. You can argue that case, but that was about it. If Bissau fell apart, it wouldn't make much difference. Bissau indeed later did fall apart and it didn't make much difference. The embassy was

evacuated and closed and there has been no push to re-open it.

Q: What did you do?

MCILVAINE: Oh, it was great fun. The people were very nice and friendly. The Portuguese had paid so little attention to it that after 400 years of Portuguese rule, only 5% of the population was Catholic. That was just a few people in the city and that was it. They hadn't bothered with any missionary thing or anything else. We built a little compound outside of town and I would go walking through the cashew groves that went for miles and miles beyond my house between me and the airport. It was traditional, pre-European, Africa with fetishes, drums in the night, villages, ladies didn't wear tops. This was before the Christians and missionaries and the bureaucrats and everybody else from Europe got to Africa. So that was kind of fun. Plus, they were, as so many Africans are, so welcoming. Despite the fact that it was a Marxist country, everybody was perfectly nice to me, the representative of a capitalist power.

What did we do there? We presented all the usual demarches that embassies present all over the world. Protect tropical mahogany, for example, to the poor bewildered Bissauan foreign minister who was trying to figure out if there was some way he could find the cash to keep his entire embassy in New York for another day in order to vote on some of these things. We had a little AID mission. We worried about trying to get them going on a path towards some sort of economic stability and economic reform, which they were eager to try.

Q: Did you talk to the president?

MCILVAINE: Yes, several times. He was quite accessible. I met him several times. In fact, one of the rituals I remember vividly is, they were doing, as so many African countries do, whenever the president leaves or arrives, the entire diplomatic corps was convoked to the airport to greet him or to send him off. It was a great ritual there. We would all get to bitch and whine as we stood out in the sun on the tarmac waiting to wave as the plane went by. Then the moment the chief of protocol gave the signal, there was this great duel amongst the embassy drivers as to who would get out first. My driver was the champion. It was touch and go as to whether he could get out ahead of the Cuban or not. Of course, I wasn't allowed to talk to the Cuban or even to acknowledge his existence, but our drivers were in constant combat.

Q: Were the Soviets there?

MCILVAINE: They were very much there. The Soviets and Cuba and all the East Bloc. The Palestinians. The only place you could get avocados was from the PLO-run farm. I wasn't allowed to talk to them either. This was shortly after Andy Young had been fired for talking to the PLO. I wasn't allowed to talk to the PLO. I had to go to the Egyptian ambassador and ask if he could smuggle me a few Palestinian avocados.

Q: The Scandinavians have this love affair with socialist countries in Africa, most of which are failing.

MCILVAINE: I later spent 3 years in Tanzania and saw lots of that.

Q: What were they doing there?

MCILVAINE: The same thing. All sorts of noble causes, good things, that probably never amounted to anything. It's been written about a number of times. I don't know anybody that's ever managed to get the whole story of 30-40 years of European aid in Africa and what it has accomplished. It's a hard one. All for the best of reasons… Well, not all of it. There were a few exceptions. Some of it was self-interest. But a lot of it, particularly the Scandinavians, was reasonably altruistic and accomplished so little. You could really see that in Tanzania, which had been one of the major recipients for many years and had so little to show for it.

Q: I take it on UN votes, this was hopeless?

MCILVAINE: They were trying to inch out of the Soviet Bloc. The Russian embassy – this was '85 – was not doing a very good job of defending its turf. The only way they could defend it was by bringing in assets and they weren't willing to spend much money on Bissau. So, the government was turning away from the Russians and looking to particularly the World Bank, us and the French. The French embassy was very active and big compared to mine.

Q: Your staff was what?

MCILVAINE: I had an admin officer, a junior officer who did everything – GSO, political officer, you name it – a communicator who drove a jeep, and an AID director and a couple of Americans in the AID mission.

Q: What was AID doing?

MCILVAINE: They were doing some village agricultural projects. It was a small AID mission just starting to see whether this was going to be a go or this was just a flirtation.

Q: Were there any dramatic events while you were there?

MCILVAINE: Yes. There was a coup attempt. I was quite pleased with myself in that I picked up reports of it 2 days before. I got the cable in, the sort of thing that I'm sure nobody ever noticed. But as a chargé and a political officer, you're doing your job. Locked the embassy down, made sure everybody was at home and in the right place and safe. I predicted that it would fail. Indeed it happened that night and it did fail.

Q: Against who?

MCILVAINE: Oh, it was some of the army officers going after Viera. Later, long after I left, they did it and they had a nice little civil war and they overthrew him. It was tribally based.

Q: Tribalism was a major…

MCILVAINE: It was really all most people had to rely on. The modern or developed world's presence was so light in Bissau. Because all the government figures had been in Guinea when they were fighting the war, Sekou Toure gave them a base, and most of them had learned French, so I was able to operate in French. My Portuguese was very limited. It was a charming little country that I suppose couldn't even feed itself unlike some other African basket cases, once it got rid of the Marxist trappings. I was in this huge cashew grove. Cashew is a very high value crop, but they weren't making a cent off it because it had all been nationalized and run into the ground. So, the local folks were just making cashew wine and having parties. There would be these big wooden troughs where they'd pound the cashew into juices of some sort and make wine out of it, ferment it, and have a good party.

Q: After this interlude as chargé, what happened? This would be late '85.

MCILVAINE: I got a job as political officer in Tanzania that wouldn't start until the following summer. Of course, I hadn't had my wife with me in Bissau. I came back in November and had 6 months of family life here in Washington. Now we had a baby, a son. Then we packed out and went to Tanzania in June. I spent 3 months learning Swahili.

Q: You were in Tanzania from when to when?

MCILVAINE: '86 to the summer of '89.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MCILVAINE: When I arrived, he was a USIA officer, Jock Shirley, who had been the candidate to take over USIA and then been not picked by Mr. Wick, so he was somewhat disgruntled and he got to Tanzania as a booby prize in the lottery. But he was a nice guy. He was there just briefly for a month or so when I arrived. The main reason I mention this is because his wife was also Foreign Service. She was going as consul general in Sicily and he was learning to sail so that he could go sailing in Sicily. So, he invited me on a boat he chartered and we sailed over to Zanzibar within a week of my arrival. That was great fun. Then he was succeeded by Don Petterson, who I still see occasionally, a veteran Foreign Service Africa hand. His first or second Foreign Service assignment as a junior officer was as the junior officer at Consulate Zanzibar working for Frank Carlucci, whom I had known in Leopoldville when I was 18 years old and he was the young junior officer hero.

Q: Describe the situation in Tanzania when you were there.

MCILVAINE: Julius Nyerere, God bless his honesty, had finally recognized that what he was doing wasn't working and had stepped down. This is almost unheard of in political figures in Africa or in the West. His anointed successor was Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Zanzibari Muslim, Tanzania's first Muslim president. Nyerere was a patent leather pump. He was flashy, demonstrative, and he pinched probably a little bit to the Tanzanian foot. He was much too flashy and he loved an argument and he strode the world stage as a major figure. Everybody had heard of him. Mwinyi was the tattered old slippers chewed by the dog, very comfortable and virtually invisible. You would find out weeks later, you'd see something had happened and trace it back – maybe Mwinyi actually did something to make that happen. But he wouldn't announce it. He'd take no credit for it. He was just invisible. He was the true Tanzanian. He fit the Tanzanian personality. Nyerere did not. Nyerere was much more the West African style – in your face.

Q: Was Nyerere a presence all the time?

MCILVAINE: Yes, very much so. He lived just down the beach from me. I lived away from most of the other embassy people on the bay outside of town. Nyerere had his house and Jane Goodall had her house next door. A few doors down was me.

Q: What were the politics?

MCILVAINE: It was again how can we do this differently? The socialist model had come unglued. The answer after my 3 years there was, it was so ingrained they didn't know how to do it any other way. Maybe by today, major changes have occurred 10-15 years later. But during my time, the first 3 years after Nyerere, they still had all the Scandinavian donors pushing the same approach. Their mindset was so government dominated and government must do it and the elite must do it and we're the elite that even though they gave lip service to trying new approaches, it was pretty much the same. The economy continued to stagger along. This was a country with a large land area, relatively light population, plenty of fertile soil, not much in terms of real resources but it ought to be able to feed itself easily. If Kenya with only 10-12% arable land could feed itself and export, have booming agricultural exports, there was no excuse for Tanzania failing, yet it failed year after year. It couldn't feed itself. It couldn't come up with any exports. The failure has to be laid at government's door.

Q: Was this acknowledged?

MCILVAINE: Yes, not in the terms I just put it in, but Tanzanians, there was this endless argument with Kenya over the approach, Kenya being at least semi-capitalist and Tanzania being avowedly socialist… Tanzanians were very aware of it and very self-conscious of it and frustrated that they couldn't seem to get it right. They knew they should be able to get it right.

In terms of people, it was a great country to explore. Of course, it had game parks and Kilimanjaro and the beach and Zanzibar. I spent a lot of time in Zanzibar. It was my job to report on Zanzibar and that was great fun and also very different than the mainland.

Q: They had gone through quite a difficult time between the Arabs and the Africans. How had things settled down?

MCILVAINE: This was 15 years after overthrow of the government. The Omani sheikh had fled to Muscat. The Chinese and the Russians moved in. They were still all there. There was a big Chinese embassy and a big Russian embassy or consulate. And the Omani sheikdom still had an embassy there. But it had become during my time a much gentler place. Everybody realized they had overdone it. There had been substantial bloodshed in '64/'65. I think they were a bit embarrassed over that. In my time, again like the mainland, they were looking cautiously around for ways out of the socialist mess they had put themselves in without abandoning the principles of it. How can we make a little money without giving up our ideas of what is equality and Third World solidarity and all the rest of it? There was some talk, most of which has now years later come true, Zanzibar now has a tourist industry, but when I was there, the only hotel was the government run Bwani and it was pretty awful. There had been a flood that had soaked all the industrial carpeting and it just stank. Plus, Zanzibaris have a tendency to bring in doriani, a spiky tropical fruit that has the most obnoxious smell. Zanzibaris like this. I never could stomach the stuff myself. But they liked it and so they would bring it into the lobby and the place would stink. The tourism industry was struggling when I was there. Since, I gather it's done a lot better.

Q: Was there a party system?

MCILVAINE: Very much so. The CCM, the Chama Cha Mapenduzi, the party of the revolution, ran everything. The next 10 years after I left, there were attempts to reform, modernize, and upgrade the CCM into something mildly democratic instead of an old Marxist style party.

Q: Were there any other parties?

MCILVAINE: Not then, but one of the guys I dealt with a lot, Sharif Hamad, is still a major opposition leader. He was the young rising star in the CCM. I guess he didn't rise fast enough for his satisfaction and broke ranks. Since then, he has been the leading dissident for the 10 or so years, leading the opposition and probably winning the election before last in Zanzibar and then having it stolen from him by the CCM and with international fussing.

Q: What was your impression of the government at that time? Was it corrupt? Was it responsive?

MCILVAINE: It was modestly corrupt compared to Zaire. Corruption didn't drive everything the way it did in Zaire. But there was corruption. It was basically just… There were a lot of bright, able, struggling government employees that I dealt with and a lot of Tanzanians gave up the fight and went off to the international bureaucracy – the World Bank, the IMF, the UN, and whatever – because they just couldn't handle the frustration of a government that didn't work very well. What I remember more vividly was the business side of it. We were trying to help Tanzania privatize and allow a little private enterprise because we thought that was important to their economic health. I particularly remember one American funded safari company coming in that was a professional company that was set up in Tanzania. They ran into the bank of Africa: the insider of the elite with excellent connections, a "businessman" who uses his political connections to grab the business, sees something that's a viable business out there that's brought in by outside money, and uses his political power to block it unless they pay him or turn it over to him. It was one of those things that was so insidious. Of course, once that happens and one business has it, the word gets out and American businesses don't come because they're not going to put up with that. The answer is, "We'll drop that country from the list." Does the government realize that? Yes, probably intellectually. But does that mean they stop it or deal with it? No.

Q: Did you ever get any talks with any of your Swedish colleagues there about how things were going? Had the bloom gone off the Scandinavian rose by this time?

MCILVAINE: Sure. I saw a lot of them. Tanzania was littered with Scandinavian-financed projects. Mbaya by itself was a little town on the Zambian border in the west. There was the pottery plant, the toy plant, slaughterhouse, some other things that had all been funded by Scandinavian aid programs. They were all things that were needed that were good ideas. But nobody had figured out how to actually implement them so that they endured. They set up the usual government parastatal to run them which immediately ran them into the ground, either looted the premises or out of greed or incompetence destroyed the business, so there they sat. There were all these buildings scattered around Mbaya that were once great projects that were needed and could have done good under some other scheme.

We still have lots of very handsome dinner plates from this one project that we got to know… There was a German couple. It was Swedish financed but the Swedes didn't have any potters, so they hired a German couple to be their potters, sent them to Mbaya with all the equipment and all the money they needed for this great new, high powered electric kiln. There was only one problem. There was no money to pay the electric bill, so the parastatal electric company cut off the electricity, made the whole place useless. So this German potter is up there every night hot-wiring the electricity so they can steal electricity and run the kilns at night and make their pottery. He showed initiative and entrepreneurial skill. They made lots of great pottery which we bought and a few other westerners in Dar es Salaam bought. Then I'm sure it went bankrupt with all these beautiful kilns hardly used.

Q: We had put quite a bit of money into projects there, too, hadn't we?

MCILVAINE: We did. Ours were more traditional agriculture. The big one that everybody always reminded us of was the Tanzam railway, which we took one look at when Nyerere first proposed it in the '60s and said, "No, this can't be built. It's too expensive." So, the Chinese said, "Yes, that can be done." They built it. Now, by the time I got there, the Chinese engines wouldn't pull the hills, so AID was working a deal to get some American locomotives that would pull it. But it was still there and it was still always pointed out to any American as "This is the railroad you said couldn't be built." We did some agricultural stuff. We had an AID mission.

Q: What happened to all these resettled villagers?

MCILVAINE: That was a classic case of what I'm talking about. This was Nyerere's great socialist dream that he would pull together villagers into villages that would have all the infrastructure – the school, the clinic, the well, everything else – and because they were concentrated, it would be economically feasible to put the school, the clinic, and the well there. So they would have government services. Then they would farm prosperously. Well, the villagers hated it because they wanted to be where the fields were. Villagers all over don't like being moved. So, all over the country, you would go through these Ujamaa villages that hardly anybody lived in anymore and have the ruins of a school, the clinic, and the well because, like the poverty project, it was a good idea in theory, but the practicality of it was going against instincts and there was no mechanism to make sure that the school was staffed and maintained, that the clinic got medicine, was maintained, and that the well was fixed when it broke. They all eventually were abandoned.

Q: When you left there in '89, what was your feeling about whither Tanzania?

MCILVAINE: I thought it would probably slumber along in the same half-life for a long time to come. I did not expect – and I'm still not sure it really has – for it to reform itself and become a functioning democracy. It at least tried more than I expected it to under a guy I worked with who was then the foreign minister and is now the president. But there is no indication that Tanzania is ready to join the front ranks of countries that are making…

Q: In '89, where did you go?

MCILVAINE: I came back to Washington to be a desk officer, the Zambia-Malawi desk officer, in Southern African Affairs.

Q: You did that for how long?

MCILVAINE: Also, I came back in part also because my mother was sick and dying.

Q: Zambia at that time…

MCILVAINE: Zambia at that time, President Kaunda was being challenged, the founding father. Unlike Nyerere, he was not willing to admit that socialism had failed and that he had failed and instead was maintaining everything was fine. That was being challenged by a unique alliance that was really promising – labor unions led by Fred Chiluba. The lawyers were fed up with corrupt judges and a failed legal system. Businessmen were tired of this half-assed socialism. And just good government people who were tired of bad government. There was a wonderful coalition, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, the MMD. They ended up with Chiluba as their candidate and Chiluba won. That happened after I left the desk. Pretty quickly he began getting rid of these guys, the reformers, so he could run things almost the way Kaunda had. Since then he has now been beaten in an election and indicted by his successor for corruption. That's another country, even more so than Tanzania, with plenty of arable land, low population, no major tribal fights or bitterness to deal with, resources, that can't get it together. The only excuse is bad government for Zambia not succeeding.

Q: Malawi?

MCILVAINE: Malawi differed. It was tiny, overpopulated, no resources, and one of those countries that, like Switzerland, exist only if they find some extraneous way to be of service to the rest of the world. Ruled for 30 years by the old Scottish headmaster, Hastings Banda, and the place was like an old fashioned puritanical boarding school. Hastings Banda was a stern, fire breathing Presbyterian who happened to be African. Everybody, no matter how threadbare, wore their jacket and tie and white shirt. The flowerbeds on the roadside were neatly trimmed and the roads were always perfectly maintained. There weren't very many of them. Everybody was precise and orderly and neat and tidy and nobody spoke out of turn or they got their knuckles rapped or worse. I spent those 2 years as desk officer. The Zambia part that was fun was the development of the MMD and the challenge to Kaunda, the real democratic challenge, genuine grassroots democracy emerging in Africa, in Zambia. On the Malawi side, nobody knew when it was going to end, but I was busy protecting a couple of dissidents from Banda's wrath. I spent a lot of time on that and got some nice "thank yous" from the one family. Aleke Banda had been Hastings Banda's finance minister and then had gone and disagreed and made his disagreements public. President Banda went after him and he fled into exile for a while. Then he had the courage to go back and was promptly thrown in jail. The question was keeping enough pressure on the regime so that they didn't kill him. Another was a labor union guy that I also had to keep pressure on the regime to make sure they didn't kill him.

Q: How do you put pressure on?

MCILVAINE: Well, demarches and you make it very clear that the US embassy is watching and paying attention. That makes it a little less easy to have this guy just disappear, which is what had been happening in Malawi. If they really wanted to disappear him, they still will, but we tried to make clear there would be a bit of a price.

Q: Did Kaunda make a trip to the US while you were there?

MCILVAINE: No. Chiluba did. That was after I was desk officer. In Malawi, there was a woman and there was a wonderful title for her – I cant remember what it was – who had been Hastings Banda's nurse and was his attendant, consort, whatever. She came and she didn't fit any of the protocol formats. She wasn't his wife. She wasn't the first lady. But she was essentially the first lady and a political power of considerable force. We had to figure out how to deal with her. Joseph Reed was the chief of protocol. I went to him and got him to put on the dog, all the dog he could put on without violating any of the rules. He loved doing that. A good chief of protocol has to love that stuff and he did. The visit was a success. She wasn't called the "presidential companion" but it was something like that, odd. "The official hostess?" But it was very important that she be happy with the visit or we would hear about it from Hastings. When I went out and visited Malawi and went with the ambassador on a call, one of the most senior ministers was with him when we went in. We watched the ministers were getting down on their knees and bowing to this little man – he was then in his 90s – before they left. We didn't get down on our knees. Fortunately, a few years later, Banda did finally die. There was much thought that maybe he really was immortal. Fortunately, that proved not to be the case. Malawi is struggling with its version of democracy.

Q: By this time you had become an African hand.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: What was your impression of the Africa Bureau?

MCILVAINE: I liked it. It was a camaraderie. This was when Hank Cohen was Assistant Secretary and Jeff Davidow was the PDAS. Davidow was always funny and always irreverent. He went on to be a real superstar. He was ambassador in Zambia, so I worked with him, and then he came back to be PDAS. Then he went on and was ambassador in Venezuela. Then he was ambassador in Mexico. Then he just made career ambassador and I think he's now been pensioned off. But a great guy, very funny. I was working in AF/S, which at that point had 60-70% of the bureau's business with South Africa still not settled, we had just gotten Namibia settled, and we were still wrestling with Angola. The whole time I was there, we had this Angolan peace process that I would back up occasionally, trying to get some kind of cease-fire going and some sort of agreement. This was the first Bush administration. The Reagan liberation struggle had been given up and they decided maybe it was time Savimbi just quit if we could find a graceful way for him to do it.

Q: What was the feeling about South Africa at that time, by '86 to '89?

MCILVAINE: Well, when I was in Tanzania, one of the most difficult parts of my job was defending constructive engagement. I was someone who didn't much believe in it,

but you're a Foreign Service officer; you have to say what your government's policy is… I took to saying, "My government believes… My government thinks… My government maintains that…," not "I think… I maintain that…"

One of the fun things about Dar es Salaam was dealing with the ANC and with the PAC, the Pan African Congress, mostly with the PAC because this was their headquarters. The ANC was based in Lusaka but they had a suboffice in Dar. That was a lot of fun and insight into what was going on in South Africa, which was something I didn't know much about and I had never been there. I went to a big ANC blowout – I forget what over… There was another one I went to in Arusha that was the 25th anniversary of Nelson Mandela's conviction and jailing where I met Thabo Mbeki. This one was in Dar. Chris Hani, the firebrand Marxist leader of the ANC, was the speaker. In the course of the speech he blasted US policy. I was the American embassy representative. "Is this where I get up and walk out?" I wondered. Is this strong enough for me to walk out? what's the magic trigger? I of course hadn't had any advice from the ambassador. Finally- (end of tape)

Q: You were saying after a series of insulting statements, it's time to leave?

MCILVAINE: I'm trying to decide as a U.S. diplomat how much is too much, where do I draw the line, and where do I walk out? I finally decide he has gone too far too much. Of course, I am in the middle of the row, in the big auditorium. I had to clamber over several ambassadors and other diplomats to get to the aisle. Very conspicuous, all by myself, walking up this empty aisle in the middle of the speech. I leave and get back and write the cable. Of course, in the cable, my mindset being "I've got to make sure this is justified," and being totally naive about the politics of Washington, I write the cable what he said and what I put up with and then when I walked out. Back comes a bullet immediately after the cable goes out saying, "Why didn't you walk out sooner?" Oh. I went back shortly thereafter to the States and Chas Freeman, who was then one of the DASes, called me in, or I asked to see him. I said, "What did I miss here? Please explain the political background." He said, "Oh, that's perfectly easy. Read all the cables from Zambia." I think it was Nick Platt who was the ambassador there. Of course, he was dealing with the ANC every day. This was still late Reagan administration and everything was being leaked to the Hill by conservatives to the Jessie Helms crowd, which was keeping watch on those State Department commies. So, what Nick Platt would do was list what the ANC said and then he would add a this paragraph, "Of course, I told those sons of bitches what a load of crap that was and I pounded the table," or something like that. Once he got that done, then he would do whatever reporting he had to do, what he thought we could do, how we should respond. But he had to have that paragraph. Freeman explained that that was essential because then if it was leaked, it didn't make us sound like a bunch of Marxist lap dogs. We stood up for the U.S. and we made it clear. Even if he didn't say it, he put it in there. In your case, Hani said those these things and the immediate response was, "You should have walked out after the first one."

Q: Of course, Washington politics and overseas politics are so different.

MCILVAINE: Exactly. I learned from that. It became very useful later on when I was dealing with some politically charged things.

Q: This is a good place to stop. We'll pick this up in 1989. Where did you go?

MCILVAINE: Two years Zambia-Malawi desk, and then I did 2 years as the labor advisor in the Africa Bureau Regional Affairs. The main thing I got into there was Somalia. I was kind of the bureau utility infielder.

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Q: Today is October 20, 2003. When was this?

MCILVAINE: Early '92 when the press and TV reports started to come in of people dying on the roadsides with pictures of stick figures walking down desert roads and toppling over.

Q: This was Somalia.

MCILVAINE: Yes.

Q: Let's talk about the labor side first. What were you doing?

MCILVAINE: I was the bureau labor advisor. Most bureaus had one. At that point we had still a small office or bureau for labor relations that dealt with the annual ILO [International Labor Organization] meeting and relations with the AFL-CIO. In fact they had been major players, the AFL-CIO had, in this brokerage in the fall of the Communist Bloc and the Wall with Solidarity in Poland, which the AFL-CIO strongly supported, and some of the other Eastern European labor unions that became part of the liberation of Eastern Europe. Then later it was just subsumed into DRL [Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor] and I'm not sure what remains of all that today.

Q: What were you doing?

MCILVAINE: I was doing Africa. I was in touch with that office. This was the time when we were beginning to push hard on democracy in Africa and having the first glimmerings - Zambia was one - of grassroots efforts to actually get rid of the one party rule of the '60s, '70s, and '80s and move to multiparty democracy and elections. Labor was a large part of that - often in a number of African countries, the only organized political body outside the party or even inside the party that wasn't completely owned by the party, so it was a potential power base and that made it very interesting. Of course, particularly it was a major player in South Africa. It was my job to keep in touch with all these people and be aware of what they were doing and make sure our people knew what the labor crowd was up to and make sure our word got to the labor crowd about coordination with this

nascent democracy movement that was beginning to pop up in Senegal, in Zambia, in Kenya, in other parts, and particularly in South Africa.

Q: Let's talk about South Africa first. At this time, had South Africa gone through its change?

MCILVAINE: No, this was '91/'92.

Q: What was the labor movement situation in South Africa?

MCILVAINE: It was the strongest internal political organization, but the ANC only saw it as a tripartite alliance. The ANC was mostly in exile at that point and based in Zambia led by Tabo Mbeki with Nelson Mandela still in jail. The Communist Party which was in South Africa and was considered a full ally of the ANC led by Chris Hani, the guy I walked out on Dar es Salaam. Then the third and maybe most powerful internal part of that tripartite alliance was the Cosatu, the labor alliance in South Africa. That included some very powerful unions - the Mine Workers that could and did occasionally shut down the whole setup...

Q: Were these all blacks?

MCILVAINE: These were African and Indian. Some of the Cosatu leadership was Asian, Indian.

Q: Were there white unions?

MCILVAINE: There were, but they were non-players. Everything in South Africa was divided on racial lines, so they were with the national party and not with the liberation movement. I had no dealings... If there were white unions, I had no dealings with them.

Q: Did we see the union movement being a positive force for change or did we see it as being a force that might lead to racial warfare?

MCILVAINE: We saw it as a force for change. We weren't sure whether it was positive or not. It was. There was great nervousness on this side about the alliance with the Communist Party. Most of these labor unions were certainly Marxist trained and many of them were Marxist. But this was also the time when that ideology was finally crashing in Europe and elsewhere and coming up bankrupt. As in the ANC, many of whom had at least started out as Marxists, there was a gradual wakening and moving away from a few remaining hardcore Marxists who still are to this day.

Q: Was your office more or less taking orders from the AFL-CIO? How was the relationship there?

MCILVAINE: While I was doing it, it was quite good because we were... This was Bush

I. There had been an alliance of convenience in international affairs based for some years at this point with the support for Solidarity. The AFL-CIO's history was building up as a strongly anti-communist labor movement opposing the largely Marxist influence in American unions of the '30s. So, communism within the union movement here had been a big issue 20-40 years earlier and largely been resolved. These were the survivors of those wars. So there was a strong anti-communist flavor to George Meanie's AFL-CIO. They thought what they were doing with Solidarity in Poland was extremely important and their way of pushing democratic unionism. The administration saw it as a great way to get out the underpinnings of a communist state. So there was an alliance of convenience that I just rode on the coattails of. We worked closely together. The AFL-CIO did have labor advisors in a few countries in Africa that had a little money, some through AID, and I worked with them. They had extensive contacts with the labor movement in those countries, so that was the window into making an assessment of what sort of players on the local political scene labor was in each country. In a number of countries, they weren't much of a player, but in a few, they were important. Labor was important, so it was good to keep an eye on those.

Q: Did you find you were getting pretty good information from our embassies?

MCILVAINE: Not much. It wasn't something our embassies generally followed. Part of what I did was to prod them. I did develop a cable newsletter that I would do every month or 2 weeks of what was going on in labor mainly to get the embassies aware that there was something going on here, this was part of the political scene and was worth keeping an eye on and in some cases was actually an important element of the political scene. It was more a sales job, me selling them on it than them telling me about it. But in a few cases... Certainly in South Africa the embassy recognized that Cosatu was a major player and the Johannesburg consulate saw that as probably their major reporting job. They had a full-time labor officer at the consulate who worked with Cosatu. They knew, we all knew, that was probably the most important political force inside the country against apartheid.

Q: What was your impression of how the South African government, at that time being a white government, dealt with the labor movement?

MCILVAINE: They hated it and were afraid of it because they recognized it had real economic power and it had demonstrated it in some tough strikes years before. I think there was one mine workers strike while I was there, but it was resolved pretty quickly because they had had their labor fights and the South African powers that were had recognized that they had to deal with organized labor, that organized labor was organized, did have the strength to shut them down, could shut them down, and therefore it was important to make accommodations. Many of the leaders in the anti-apartheid movement did come out of Cosatu.

Q: In a way it was the most significant black organization within the country.

MCILVAINE: Absolutely. In the country it was much more significant than the parties, which were underground, oppressed, or were in jail and were mostly in exile, including the Communist Party.

Q: Let's talk about Somalia. Give some background of how you got into it.

MCILVAINE: I'm in the Regional Affairs Office. That's always the office the Africa Bureau front offices uses for things that don't neatly fit into one of the regions. The Africa Bureau is divided into 4 regional offices: South, East, West, and Central, and an Economic Office and an Administrative Office and a Regional Affairs Office. The Regional Affairs Office is for everything that doesn't fit into one of the others. It does all the UN work, which is continent-wide. It does the theme works like democracy, whatever the theme of the moment is that we're pushing. And the staffers there are the pool that the assistant secretary and the deputy assistant secretaries draw on when they need to take something that isn't country specific or even region specific, like democracy. And when it came to Somalia, there was no Somalia desk because there was no government in Somalia. There had been no government for 2 years. Said Barre had been thrown out, and a civil war followed between the factions that threw him out. That civil war and a drought led to a massive famine in the Horn. It was an early example of what became known as the "CNN syndrome" where a humanitarian crisis is put on television so constantly that it builds up a constituency for doing something about it. That constituency developed inside the government as well as outside - the NGOs and political activists and others. Assistant Secretary Cohen was definitely interested in seeing if there was some way the U.S. government could usefully help solve this, particularly the famine. So we started working - this was '92 - first through AID - some emergency relief efforts, just getting food to starving Somalis.

Meeting after meeting was held in Washington. I was Cohen's note taker and report drafter for much of it. The logistics were daunting. This was a country in civil war. You couldn't find any airport. We managed to get some food in, but the frustrations built because the food kept being stolen by gunmen of various militia factions and you couldn't keep anybody on the ground safe without some sort of security. There was no security. You couldn't make sure the food got to where it was supposed to get to. That frustration built. Working with the Pentagon, we organized a humanitarian relief effort, flying out of Mombasa, Kenya, C130s onto Somali airstrips to unload food. But here, too, as soon as the food was unloaded, the gunmen rode in in their technicals, which are jeeps with machineguns mounted in the back, and stole the food.

Pictures continued to show the famine building. Film crews were able to get in and out. It was a national issue, a national debate going on, by mid to late 1992. That was also the election year. George Bush was defeated by Clinton in November. As a final shot, as he's going out the door, Bush decided that he would intervene to stop the famine and send in U.S. military to provide the security.

That was the key element. We had been debating and going through these policy meetings

over and over again. How do we do this without sending in the U.S. military? Nobody wanted to send them in. The answer was, we can't. So then the question became, do we send them in? That was debated round and round within the bureaucracy, particularly the State Department and the Pentagon. Finally, then President Bush decided that he was going to send them in to stop the famine.

I was deputy coordinator of the task force in the Operations Center a December night as we watched on TV as the first Marines started coming ashore to be met by the TV crews on the beaches of Mogadishu. It went very well the first few months. The troops came ashore. All the bad guys put down their weapons or hid them and behaved for a while in awe of American military power. A large military force secured Mogadishu and enough of Somalia to begin the food distribution. By April of '93, we had sent out a little mission. We had a big UN headquarters set up. The force had become largely UN. We began withdrawing the American troops and turning it over to the UN as a famine relief operation, but the building issue was, what do we leave behind? Do we just say, okay, we've stopped the famine and turn around and leave and the gunmen pick up where they left off? Or do we try to somehow settle the political problems? What became something of a dirty word, "nation building," do we get into nation building?

At about that time, the warlords had all been behaving, but Aideed, this one particular warlord who was powerful in south Mogadishu, which was where the UN and U.S. headquarters were, he had been running a radio station that was very important to him. He was probably the only warlord who had a radio station. It was Soviet-style propaganda and it had become increasingly harshly critical of the UN and the famine relief, imputing all sorts of evil designs to this effort, on Somali politics when in fact this effort had no particular designs on Somali politics other than to find something to leave behind that would be responsible. So, the UN started rumbling - and when I say the UN, it was really the U.S. because the UN senior special representative of the Secretary General was Admiral Howe, an American who had been on the Security Council staff, and the deputy commander of the UN forces was an American general and much of the muscle of the UN force was still American - the UN started considering and talking about doing something about this radio station.

Aideed saw that as a threat and in June his militiamen attacked a feeding station that was guarded by Pakistani UN troops. 24 Pakistanis were killed. Then their bodies were mutilated and eviscerated by Aideed's militiamen as a political statement that "We will not countenance this interference. If there is going to be feeding in my territory, I'll do it. You're not going to mess with my radio station." Aideed was beginning to see this mission as a threat to his chances of taking over Somalia.

The U.S. and the UN had to respond to that. The question was, how do we respond? The decision was that we could not countenance this. We had to respond forcibly. We would go after Aideed. This is June 1993. That's where the so-called "famine relief effort" stopped and the so-called "nation building" that was later considered a mistake began. From that came the decision, just as I was arriving in July, to try to forcibly hunt Aideed

down, as he obviously wasn't going to surrender, and remove him from the scene as a clear enemy to any sort of stability and any sort of new form of government. From that came the decision to bring in a U.S. Ranger force to do this nasty job. They arrived in July.

I was the deputy in our little imitation American embassy. It wasn't a real embassy because we didn't have a government, so it was called the "United States Liaison Office." Bob Gosende was the ambassador. I was the DCM. We had a couple of political officers and an AID officer and a few others. Our job was twofold. One was to be liaison with the UN mission and report back to Washington on what they were doing, what they needed, how that was going, and two, to see what we could do to establish some sort of Somali body politic that could carry on and provide a measure of stability and security, nation building.

What we were not consulted on was this Ranger force, where they should go, what they should do. They came in, set themselves up at the airport, attached a liaison officer to work with us, but made it clear that their security was so important and so based on intelligence that they would only tell us about missions after they happened. That was the case. In retrospect - and this is all the background to "Blackhawk Down," to the movie and to the events on October 3 when this force went in and tried to capture senior leadership of Aideed's faction, They got into an all-night firefight, 18 Americans were killed and the whole U.S. attitude towards humanitarian intervention changed. Our Somali policy changed dramatically and we began backing away from all this. "Nation building" became a dirty word.

Q: When you arrived, we had a policy which was... You came at a time when nation building was in the air.

MCILVAINE: I think the original thought of the Bush administration had been that this would be humanitarian relief, we'd bring in the food, and then we'd leave. But anybody who thought hard about it, including the Africa Bureau, who had to work out the parameters of this, you had to leave something behind or the same problem was going to come back within days of your leaving. You were going to have the same anarchy and the same gunmen running around stealing food.

Q: When you arrived, how did you find... We had forces on the ground and we had the State Department running a mini-embassy. How did you find relations between the military part of our presence in Somalia and the political side, which was our side?

MCILVAINE: There were some interesting differences. Working there on the ground was not a problem. We were all living in this fortified military camp with frequent firefights at night and mortars and tracer rounds and stuff like that - usually, Somali on Somali, and sometimes Somalis just making sure we knew they were around and didn't like us. So, it was a pretty terrible place in this city that had been absolutely ruined and gutted by more than 2 years of civil war, anarchy, and looting. On the ground we got along fine. I had

been in the military and had worked with the military, I understood that world and was not uncomfortable working with military officers.

CENTCOM command in Tampa was responsible for the mission -- remember Schwarzkopf had been the hero of CENTCOM just a year earlier when he led the first Iraq war effort... He had retired and been replaced by General Hoar, who viewed this whole Somalia thing with great disdain. He basically didn't want his soldiers in this messy, non-war footing, getting into things that were not combat. So he had very tight strings on the 2 star General Montgomery, the deputy commander of the UN force and the commander of the U.S. forces - he was the man on the ground - which violated the Powell Doctrine and Powell had just stepped down as Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Powell Doctrine said you give the man on the ground everything he needs and then you let him do it. Hoar was doing the opposite. He was giving the man on the ground the bare minimum, nipping at every bit of it, and placing strings on it. There weren't any heavy armor or any forces really able to go in and get those guys out of downtown Mogadishu when the Black Hawk went down because Hoar had not allowed them to have any. He also was calling 2 or 3 times a day, keeping all sorts of strings on his general. "If you want to do anything, you have to get it approved by me." He just didn't like this whole mission. He wanted to get out of it. He wanted to get out of it without any of his soldiers getting hurt. And he wanted it over with. He viewed our embassy with considerable distrust as part of the civilian crowd that had gotten us into this mess in the first place. So, there was a line of friction there.

In Mogadishu, in this walled compound that had been the old embassy compound where we were all camped out, I think relations were good. We were all in the same mess. We all understood each other. There was a very high level of professionalism. Everybody there had come there because they wanted to get this done. They were all volunteers. They all were away from wives and families and the normal comforts of civilian life or even garrison life. It was an impressive group.

Q: What about the NGOs? They were doing the feeding, weren't they?

MCILVAINE: There it was very interesting. Some of the NGOs, particularly some like Save the Children, had been operating before this intervention by making - and they had to - tacit alliances with warlords. So, they sometimes tended to take on the coloring of the warlords' attitude. In south Mogadishu, that meant Aideed. So some of them viewed us with distrust, which turned out to be from their point of view justified when indeed we went after Aideed. So there was some friction there. But they needed us. They needed our protection. They needed the food supplies if they were distributing food. In some ways, that relationship was difficult.

Q: How was Jonathan Howe perceived?

MCILVAINE: The thing I remember most about him was that for someone who had been an admiral in the Navy and commanded ships and even fleets, you expected a persona, a

forceful, decisive, commanding presence, and he wasn't like that at all. Maybe he had been like that. But in his UN hat and civilian role, he was almost indecisive. He had trouble making decisions. Of course, he was in a difficult position. The Americans wanted to do this. The UN bureaucracy wanted to do that. He had a number of competing clients, as you inevitably do in that situation. They don't all say quite the same thing. But he was not a forceful, dynamic leader.

Q: You were there at a time when you might say the communication revolution was really beginning to make itself felt as far as being able to... Communications from Washington, how did you find dealing with this, or was this much of a problem?

MCILVAINE: That was a big problem later after October 3rd. Everything changed with October 3rd.

Q: October 3rd being when 18 people were killed.

MCILVAINE: Yes. To get back to the narrative, it had become increasingly clear to us -- us being me, Ambassador Gosende, and a few others -- that this was not working, this effort to get Aideed, that they were getting bad intelligence. The vivid example I remember is, they decided they'd spotted a tall, bald, black man in a part of Mogadishu where they could get to him and they went in and took him down thinking they had Aideed, whereas if they had talked to us or anybody who knew anything about Mogadishu, they could have told him that where this man was Aideed couldn't live for 2 seconds. It was on the wrong side of town in Ali Mahdi territory, and obviously it wasn't Aideed. In fact, it was Said Barre's chief intelligence officer and chief torturer from the previous regime, who was then working with the warlord who opposed Aideed, Ali Mahdi. No tears shed that they took him down, trussed him up like a chicken, and hustled him off to be interrogated only to find they had entirely the wrong guy.

They also jumped into an NGO house and scared the hell out of the usual international staff of several people who hunkered down in a little house in Mogadishu and all these guys come in with helicopters in the middle of the night blowing doors down. They had great machinery, extremely well trained, the best trained soldiers you've ever seen, great technology, and poor intelligence. The intelligence never got good enough.

We, Gosende and I, by mid-September were talking amongst ourselves and saying, "This is just not working." Then the second week in September, I drafted and Gosende worked on it and we sent in a cable to the Department saying, "We need to look at this. We need to change it. We need to try a different approach. Maybe we have to talk to Aideed. Maybe we have to start negotiating with him. This approach isn't going to work. We're not going to get him. We're just making more enemies than we are friends. We're wasting resources. Killing a few Somalis who get in the way is not going to work." Near as we can tell, that cable made no impact. Washington was diverted by other things. I don't know. We never got any comment. Nothing happened. And then October 3rd, 2-3 weeks later.

Q: Prior to October 3, were you able to function like an embassy, go out and talk to people?

MCILVAINE: No. By July, when the war against Aideed had started, his people started ambushing convoys and we could not go out without armed escorts. We had a company of FAST Marines. We would go out in an armored car with a HUM-V on either end with a grenade launcher or a heavy machinegun mounted on the HUM-V and a bunch of very heavily armed Marines as escorts. We would drive over to north Mogadishu to talk to Ali Mahdi or wherever to talk to various political figures and warlords. But it was a big production to go out. We had to basically intimidate. We had to make sure we were so fierce that no gunmen would take a try at us. You couldn't walk the streets. You couldn't go out...

Q: Could you negotiate with these people?

MCILVAINE: All with the exception of Aideed, as we later finally concluded, yes. But the exception was Aideed. He really believed that he had overthrown Siad Barre and therefore had a God-given right to rule Somalia. All his allies in the fight against Siad Barre disagreed with him on that. They were scared of him. He was the first amongst equals. He was the stronger but never - and that was the Somali conundrum - they had gone through 2 years of this; they went on through another... They're still at it. He was not strong enough to dominate everybody else, but he wasn't weak enough for anybody to overthrow him. So, you had a stalemate.

Q: What was happening out in the countryside by this time?

MCILVAINE: It was reverting quickly to medieval Europe where the regional dukes or warlords would control as far as they could control, as far as they had tribal allies from their clan and militiamen and money to keep the militiamen happy and armed and fed. Then there would be the next local warlord. There would be these areas that were in-between the no man's land and the borders would shift as one got stronger and one got weaker.

Q: Were people getting fed?

MCILVAINE: People were getting fed after the spring of '92. There were NGOs that had been able to operate. And then we had UN forces that would provide a measure of security. We had the Indians in the south in Kismayu and places like that. We had the Italians in the west along the Ethiopian border. We had UN forces scattered through the country. We got up to 25,000 UN troops and that was able to keep a measure of order, allow the NGOs to operate, and people were getting fed. So we broke the famine and that remains the accomplishment of the mission. The famine was stopped. To this day, there hasn't been a famine like that.

Q: At that time, were we seeing a separatist movement? I'm of an age when I remember British Somaliland. Was that a different kettle of fish?

MCILVAINE: It was. That had already established itself as... It had fought Siad Barre, too, on its own terms. When the civil war broke out in the south, Hargeisa and what became Somaliland became its own little enclave. Instead of a warlord, they had a president and a nominal country, but it was basically another warlord. It was clan based. The Isa clan was one clan that dominated that whole area. And they had reasonable peace and stability there.

Q: Did you go up there?

MCILVAINE: Yes. The president wanted recognition and we didn't want to recognize him because it would mean recognizing that Somalia had fragmented into many different pieces. To this day, we have not recognized Somalia for that reason. But we did recognize that he had at least established some measure of stability and that was important, so we did visit. There were NGOs that operated there. There were also some traditional Somali problems. People were occasionally taken hostage for ransom. Shootups.

Q: You were not informed of this Special Operation Force that went in to get Aideed, which became known as Blackhawk Down?

MCILVAINE: Right. That was the name of the kind of helicopter... In the early going of this, the Rangers were intent on taking down a meeting in the Olympia Hotel in a part of central Mogadishu. The troop carrying helicopters were called Blackhawks, still are. In the early going, one and then a second were shot down. So that came the cryback over the radio, that something had gone wrong: "Blackhawk down." That was what the movie was named after.

Q: What happened?

MCILVAINE: That afternoon, the Navy commander who was our liaison and was normally a cheery, infallibly optimistic sort, came... I was chargé at this point. Gosende had gone back on leave. I was chargé and he came to me and said, "We're doing an operation in this part of Mogadishu. We think there's a meeting there and there's some important Aideed folks that we can get. But it looks like trouble. We're having trouble. We're getting into a fight." This was late afternoon. I had seen helicopters going over and so I guessed that something was going on. This was about 2 miles from us and you could hear it. Later that night, I got up on the roof of the embassy. We had taken over the old USIA building, which was very heavily fortified, built back in the mid-'80s. We had taken that over as our embassy. I got up on the roof and I could see the firefight 2 miles away. It was fierce. This was after dark when they were pulling out all the stops trying to extract the people who had been shot down, the crews of those 2 helicopters and the bodies of the soldiers that had been hit. So, I knew we had big trouble. The next morning, the full story came out both to us and to the whole world. When they finally got them out

at dawn, 18 Americans had been killed. Something like 75-80 had been injured. But from our point of view, worst of all, one American, a pilot named Duran, had been taken hostage. Also, there was the famous footage of the bodies being dragged through the streets that really was political dynamite back here, understandably so.

A number of things happened very quickly. Gosende, who had been an advocate of the "go after Aideed" policy, was basically not going to be sent back. So, I lost my ambassador. The Clinton administration woke up and decided this had gotten much too nasty much too fast and wanted out. How do we get out? The State Department came up with retired Ambassador Bob Oakley and teamed him with a young, up and coming one or 2 star named Tony Zinni from the Pentagon, and sent them out to try and negotiate with the warlords, negotiate a new political arrangement with the warlords, particularly Aideed, and get the American pilot back. The American pilot was on the cover of "Time" magazine. So the next 10 days or so were just frenetic. At the end of those 10 days when we put Oakley on the plane... My embassy had also been drawn down in the course of this to the minimal staffing. It was my attaché, a colonel, and I doing most of the work. We just came back and collapsed in 2 chairs after putting him on the plane. The colonel fell asleep immediately. We had been watching CNN reports on what had happened. We were just exhausted. It was 10 days of intense negotiations and work and now suddenly we were talking to Aideed and Aideed's people. Oakley, who had been the ambassador there in the spring and had had something of a relationship with Aideed, comes across as a craggy West Virginian type. He looks and sounds tough. He and Aideed had some sort of... Aideed was impressed by him. So, he was able to persuade Aideed that basically if Aideed released the pilot, the hunt for Aideed would stop, he would be respected as a player on the Somali scene, they wouldn't be going after him anymore, and in exchange "Give us our guys back and behave."

Q: Stop ambushing.

MCILVAINE: Yes. "Stop shooting at us." That was the tradeoff. After a week or so of shuttling back and forth with Aideed and Ali Mahdi and others and in these convoys with the armored Suburban and the 2 HUM-Vs and all the rest and a number of meetings with Aideed and his people, we got it done.

Q: Were you sitting back in our...

MCILVAINE: No, I was with them on most of this. I was there in most of the meetings. Aideed was a remarkable figure. This was the first time I had seen him. Then I saw a lot of him in the next few months. What I remember most about him was his mouth. He was very dark and he didn't have much of a chin and he had a very wide mouth with very white teeth. It always reminded me of a shark. No apparent sense of humor. My way of dealing with Somalis, which generally was quite successful, was to joke and tease with them. They all had a sense of humor and they liked to do that. It's a very verbal society. That's the way they deal with each other.

Q: As a matter of fact, they didn't really have a written language for a long time.

MCILVAINE: No. It was like Vietnamese. It wasn't written until missionaries got there and put it down on paper.

So that was the tradeoff and that was a tradeoff the administration back in Washington was happy to accept. The other remarkable thing about that was, I pointed out to Oakley that there wasn't just the American that Aideed was holding but there was also one Nigerian soldier who had been grabbed in north Mogadishu by Aideed's folks. So, Oakley took that immediately and when we went to Aideed, he said, "Not only the American pilot, but I need that Nigerian soldier." We got the Nigerian soldier back when we got the pilot back. It took about 10 days. Nigeria was immensely grateful and the soldier was, too, obviously, that somehow he hadn't been forgotten in the geopolitical rush to deal with the headlines. To Oakley's credit, he picked up on that immediately and made sure we got that Nigerian, too.

Q: How did you find being in the eye of the hurricane? Was the press intrusive? Were people calling all the time from Washington, "Why aren't you doing something?"

MCILVAINE: All of that. The press was all over the place. I remember particularly Christiane Amanpour mainly because we had a young Marine captain commanding our FAST security platoon, 40 Marines living in the old ambassador's residence. He fell passionately in love with Christiane Amanpour and followed her around like a puppy dog. It was a little hard to separate him. But yes, there was press all over the place. Yes, but Oakley was the spokesman. He basically didn't deal with them much, gave them the bare minimum. That was what they got. But this was big news. I already had a good deal of experience of dealing with the press and learning quickly which reporters did a very serious job and really tried to find out what was happening and why and which reporters were reporting basically what they picked up at the hotel bar from other reporters. You view news organizations with those biases for your remaining years.

Q: What about Washington? Were communications of a nature where they had reached the point where they could call all the time?

MCILVAINE: Yes. There was a task force set up, of course. The great advantage we had was, we were 10 hours out of cycle with Washington, so basically we did everything in the middle of the night back here. That was our day. I remember that from when I was on the task force back in December. Of course, it was midnight when we watched everybody coming ashore at dawn in Mogadishu. But I would always have a phone call at 4:00 AM Washington time from whoever was on the task force that day and have to go over what we were doing that day and what was going on. I had Dick Moose, the then Under Secretary for Management, constantly on my back, as chargé managing this embassy, over how many people I had in-country, which was fine. It was his job and DS [Diplomatic Security] and the Washington establishment had to set the limits. I insisted it was my job to decide who within those limits I needed. That's where the squabbles came.

Moose would periodically try to get me to send somebody out and I'd say, "No, I've got to have that somebody. I'll send So and So out because I can spare that person for the time being. But that one I needed." I insisted that was my prerogative. He always backed down, but Washington was not a bit averse to trying to run the embassy from 10,000 miles away.

Q: What about reporting? Was there much time to sit down and write cables?

MCILVAINE: Well, we had to - at least we felt we had to, being dutiful Foreign Service officers. This was still when... The big peril now is, so much of it goes into e-mail. But this was still a bit pre-e-mail. I think we had the old green WANGs. In the end, we had computers, so I guess we must have had e-mail, but we weren't doing it as a major means of communication. We didn't use the Internet, that's true.

Q: Did you have any feel that this was the Clinton administration, which had come into office saying, "It's the economy, stupid" and did not want to get involved in foreign affairs?

MCILVAINE: They were appalled that this had all happened and embarrassed that they hadn't been paying attention, that this had snuck up on them. Of course, the lesson there is that if you've got American troops deployed anywhere overseas, pay attention because it's a big domestic political issue immediately if anything happens. Every administration should understand that. Most do, but the Clinton administration started off a bit naive, as many do, on foreign policy. This bit them. It was their first real political embarrassment. So, the mop-up brigades were out in strength and that was Oakley's job, to "Tidy this up, get that guy off the headlines out of Aideed's jail back to Walter Reed, that pilot, and get things neat and tidy and no more Americans get shot." That was basically his informal marching orders, and that's what we did.

Q: We're talking about 18 Americans killed and 40-50 or more wounded. A hell of a lot of Somalis were killed, weren't they?

MCILVAINE: Oh, some 300. One of the things Aideed learned very quickly was that if he killed Americans, he won with the press and the political war, and if he got Americans to kill Somalis, he won the political war. Both of those were wins. So, it was to his advantage to get as many Somalis killed as he could because he would display the bodies to the press corps, he would say, "Look what those Americans did" and make the most of it. And he had a very good Soviet-style propaganda operation. That was why the radio was so important to him. The main press corps hotel was controlled by him in his territory. He made sure they were safe, secure, and got his version of every event that happened. This all became important later on in another event.

Q: How about the UN during this time?

MCILVAINE: I think the UN was traumatized. First of all, this Aideed thing was not

something... The UN was very uncomfortable with it. It's not the kind of thing the UN did or understood. It was being done by Americans. The UN wasn't being kept informed. They were very uncomfortable with it. Then all this happened and the UN mission was in danger of going up in smoke in the process.

After Oakley left, I was chargé for another 2-3 months before they rounded up Dick Bogosian and sent him out as the new ambassador. In that time, we had Oakley for a few more visits with General Zinni and Randy Beers of the NSC... Footnote: one of the intriguing things about General Zinni and about America was that he told me his father had been an Italian soldier in Somalia in World War II. He was a first generation immigrant back in Somalia as a one star and later a 4 star general and commander of CENTCOM himself. He was a very interesting guy. After it was over, I had a new mission.

Q: Let's talk about these 3 or 4 months that you were chargé after Oakley left.

MCILVAINE: My new mission was, what can we do to patch together some kind of political arrangement that will allow us to get out of here gracefully? I think it was even announced that U.S. troops would withdraw in 6 months, which meant the following March. So, we started working on putting together a conference. As it ended up, the conference was in early December in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Several things involved there. One was getting all the warlords to one place. These guys had been trying to kill each other for 2 or 3 years. They naturally weren't very trusting. Getting them all to the same place was quite a challenge. We finally did get them all to Addis except Aideed. Of course, it wasn't going to work without Aideed. He was the key. We had to get him. So, we went back and forth trying to persuade Aideed. I rounded up an attaché plane that could come down, pick him up in Mogadishu, and fly him to Addis so he could join the party. He was very suspicious of the whole idea, thought we were going to take him up - I can't imagine why - and throw him out of the plane.

Q: Mussolini did that in Ethiopia during the Italian-Ethiopian war. Nobody of that era wouldn't know that, particularly from the Horn of Africa.

MCILVAINE: He was very suspicious. It took everything we could do to persuade him and even then I was at the airstrip by the plane. He came down with 2 truckloads of gunmen. I have never seen him look so uncomfortable. He was scared. But as we told him over and over again, "The U.S. can't get rid of you. Even if we want to, we can't do it that way." Sure enough, he got on the plane and went. Then I flew up to Addis and spent a wild night... Of course, Mogadishu was 105 degrees in the shade. There was a ride going up on very short notice, so I went basically in the clothes I was wearing. Addis Ababa is at 8,000 feet. At night, it's very cool. The Ghion Hotel, the old hotel in Addis, is jam-packed with Somali warlords and I'm up there and we had Senator Warner from Virginia and Senator Levin from Michigan there on a CODEL. The UN was running these talks trying to get these guys to come to an agreement. I'm bouncing from hotel room to hotel room most of the night from the Butcher of Hargeisa to the Murderer of

Kisamayu, from one thug to another, one warlord to another, as they wheel and deal.

Q: How did you communicate with them?

MCILVAINE: In English. All of them either spoke English or had somebody with them who spoke English. Language was never a problem, oddly enough. For southern Somalia, Kenya was the way out and the economics and everything else. They had all learned some English. Some of them - the Butcher of Hargeisa, for example, General Morgan, who had been a general in Siad Barre's forces, married Siad Barre's daughter and had been commanding Siad Barre's effort to absolutely level Hargeisa for being uppity and disagreeing with him - looked like a college professor. He wore a tweed jacket and smoked a pipe. He had this long beard. The one Somali touch was, the end of the beard was a little twiddle of henna, of red, which he would twiddle nervously. That indicated you had done the hajj. He had a very quiet manner. This was a guy who was a feared fighter, a warlord and atrocity committer in the first order, acting like he was doing a literature seminar on the poets of the Lake District. "What do you think of Wordsworth?" I remember another one, too, who always whipped out a bottle of scotch from a particularly obscure corner of Somalia. You wondered, "How did he get that scotch?"

Q: What about qat?

MCILVAINE: It's a narcotic leaf. That, too, was a big part of the Kenya connection. Although it's grown in Ethiopia and Yemen, it's a highland bush. It has to get there fresh, so there was a major industry in Kenya that would cut it on the slopes of Mount Kenya at 6-8,000 feet, put it in trucks, truck it to Wilson Airport, the small private plane airport outside Nairobi. They would cut it at midnight, load the trucks, get them to Wilson by dawn, load them on the twin Cessnas and these planes would just take off like a carrier flight every day flying up to Somalia. That always worked no matter what was going on. Nobody interfered with the qat trade. They'd land at various points around Somalia, cash on the barrel, issue the qat, and by midmorning in Mogadishu, the Morane, the gunmen, would have their qat.

Q: I talked to somebody who was in Yemen who said that the afternoon was...

MCILVAINE: Usually they'd get it by lunchtime. You'd have a fight in the morning and then everybody'd call it off in the afternoon to chew their qat. Then maybe they'd resume at suppertime. It was a routine schedule.

Q: What was coming out of this conference?

MCILVAINE: It was an attempt to get them to all agree on some sort of arrangement that would lead to a government. They eventually did. They wouldn't let them out of the hotel until they agreed. Then they all went back and within days it dissolved. Then we went at it again more seriously in February and we got them all to Nairobi and did it in Nairobi with Lansana Kuyate, the UN deputy, who was a Guinean, a very gifted diplomat, and

who had been quite critical of our approach to Aideed, saying, “We’ve got to include him. He’s got to be part of the deal or it won’t work.” We tried that. We had another longer conference in Nairobi in February and this time got another deal. They came back and generally behaved waiting for the last 2 weeks of March when the U.S. troops withdrew. As soon as the U.S. troops were gone, Aideed grabbed somebody else’s town south of Mogadishu and it all broke down. That was the killer. When that happened and we began to get rounds of daily interclan fighting again within the city... Our corner of the compound was the boundary between the Medina District, which a new warlord, Musa Sudi, had established himself in, and Aideed’s folks above us. At one point we had the firefights going on right around the corner of our wall, guys waving at our Marines in the sentry boxes on the wall, “Hi,” and then they’d fire off a burst, poke around the wall... If it hadn’t been so lethal and so sad, it was comical. I think one of the things that particularly affected us, the folks working at the embassy and a couple of young political reporters - 3, in fact - and aid workers and everybody else was that we had gotten to know a lot of Somalis who were and saw themselves as the victims of this, desperate to get on with something resembling a normal life, and they just couldn’t get rid of these guys. You couldn’t take all the warlords, put them in a bag, and throw them in the ocean. That’s ultimately what you needed to do, but nobody could do that, nobody was willing to do that for obvious reasons.

At the end of March, a big fleet offshore, all the U.S. troops withdraw. So now it’s just the UN troops and me and Ambassador Bogosian and our Marines in this compound. And then the fighting starts again, but not with us. It’s between them. At that point, we’re seeing this and deciding we can’t fix this. Bogosian finally leaves, having agreed to do 6 months, period. Dan Simpson comes as the last of my 4 ambassadors in my brief year in Mogadishu. He comes out having talked to everybody in Washington and he doesn’t tell me this but his mission is pretty clearly to shut this down. Even I, as the last champion of somehow saving Somalia, have to agree that basically we made two determined efforts to get these guys to reach some kind of agreement. Each time it’s broken down. They’re not going to do it. There’s no point in keeping our people at risk in what’s getting to be an increasingly dangerous environment not targeted against us but just the loose fire around. So, in August, we closed the embassy and left.

I went to Washington.

Q: By the way, what did we do with our local employees?

MCILVAINE: Tough one. You give them money and try to help them with visas wherever we can, those that want them. But a number of them stayed and to this day I’m not sure what happened to them.

Q: Was there much of a Somali community in the U.S. at that point?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. A lot had fled the civil war in ‘90/’91. Aideed’s son... One of Aideed’s wives was in San Diego with her son. Her son was of age, became a Marine,

and went over in the first batch of Marines to Somalia until somebody realized, "Wait a minute. This isn't a good idea." So they sent him back to garrison duty and he finished out his Marine tour. Two years after I left, Aideed was killed and now Aideed's son has replaced him back in Mogadishu as head of the Habir Gedr clan.

So we decide in June that this is hopeless. We're going to get the U.S. out. I leave at the end of July. I go back to Washington and go into the bureau as Somalia coordinator and spend my first bit there closing down the embassy and getting all the assets out and getting all the people out and making sure all of that's tidied up and the lights are turned off.

Then, we've still got 15,000 UN troops there on a mission we created, we pushed the UN to do, and they don't know how to get out. They don't have any way of getting out. They don't have ships or planes or anything that can get them out. So I formed a cabal with the Political-Military Bureau, a couple of people in there, and some people at Defense, and we started putting together a group to persuade Defense particularly and the U.S. government in general that we, the U.S., need to make the UN's departure possible. That took about 2 or 3 months of bureaucratic maneuvering. The Pentagon really didn't want anything more to do with Somalia. The whole idea was a dirty word in the Pentagon. From their point of view, all they had done was gotten some people killed and there was major embarrassment. But eventually we were able to persuade the policymakers - and General Zinni was a major hand in this - that this was something that we had to do. We had gotten them in and we had to get them out. Zinni, by then a 3 star, went up fast, commanded it, and I went over and in just about a year later in March we sent in a large Powell-style overwhelming U.S. force offshore and into the beach to secure the beach, evacuate all the UN troops, and then leave. That was the final step.

Q: Were people involved with the UN able to go out at that time, too?

MCILVAINE: Part of the problem with Somalis is, they are extremely tough desert nomads and they are survivors. Those that thought they had no way of surviving in Mogadishu without the UN did indeed find ways to go out. Some of them became UN staff. Some of them became refugees. Some of them got visas to here and are probably here.

Q: While you were working with this group to get the UN out, the UN must have been pounding on the United States to do something about it. At that point, they knew they were leaving, too.

MCILVAINE: Well, yes, they had recognized also that the political reconciliation process was going nowhere, that they weren't able to solve this political problem. And they simply... The UN has no navy. Other than the U.S., there is no country with the naval resources able to do a major offshore evacuation. The other possibility was by air with cargo air but that's very expensive and the airport is right in Mogadishu and a political football that the clans love to fight over, so if you've got nobody on the ground securing

it, the planes can't come in. So how do you get the last contingent that's holding the fort out if you do it by air? The answer was to do it by sea. We also did a diplomatic thing. Again Oakley... We went out and talked to all the warlords and said, "Don't mess with this. You'll get what you want. It's over. We're gone. But if we have any trouble with this, anybody shoots at us as we're going out the door, we'll hit you with everything we've got." That might have been an empty threat. I'm not sure we would have. But they didn't and we got out.

Q: When you came back from Mogadishu, did anybody debrief you?

MCILVAINE: I had been talking to them on the phone every day. A lot of insecurity. Washington was infinitely nervous they were going to get somebody hurt. I admit, that was my major... I remember the sense of relief when I finally did leave Mogadishu for the last time and got on the little plane down to Nairobi. As we lifted off, I realized that now it's not on my head if somebody gets hurt after a year of being responsible for this group that went from 5 or 6 to 80 to back to 5 or 6 to 80, that was constantly expanding and contracting depending on whether the climate was good or not. It was a constant concern to get my folks through that without getting anybody hurt.

Q: When you came back, did you find that Somalia had become in the State Department and in the Department of Defense a really bad word signifying "Let's not get involved in any of these foreign..."

MCILVAINE: In the policy level, yes, and then it was immediately reaffirmed because we're talking now spring of '94. I got a couple of weeks leave. I went to Nairobi, where I had my family. I managed to find through Kenyan friends a house and rented a house in Kenya and had my family there because I knew I'd never see them if they were in the States. I'd never get back to the States. I was able to get out of Somalia every month or 6 weeks for a weekend or so and see them in Kenya. I came back and had a couple of weeks off and we went on a safari. As we were driving back from the south towards Nairobi where the international airport is, I see this giant C5A going in and I know immediately that they're evacuating Rwanda because that's what they would be bringing the plane in for and I'd read that the two presidents had been shot down and killed and that the emergency had started in Rwanda. There was just no question that the U.S. would not intervene in that no matter how bad it got at that point because it was so fresh after Somalia and political wounds were such that neither the White House nor the Pentagon would countenance it. It was a political non-starter even though in retrospect it probably would have been relatively cheap and easy to do.

Q: Then where did you go? This was '94.

MCILVAINE: For the '95 summer cycle... I could go to the War College for a year, which sounded like great fun, write a paper, travel around, and all that. Then I got a shot at being DCM in Lusaka, Zambia, and I thought I'd better take that because it might not be around a year later, so I took that.

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

MCILVAINE: Summer of '95 to summer of '98.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MCILVAINE: When I arrived, the ambassador was Roland Kuchel, who had done some African service but also a lot of European service and had been DCM in Stockholm. He got this post and then he retired from that while I was there. Very nice guy.

Q: Where is he now?

MCILVAINE: He retired in Vermont. He worked hard... The job in Zambia was to try and keep one of Africa's first elected democracies democratic. The guy who was elected as president, Fred Chiluba, two things: one, he was absolutely paranoid about his predecessor, Kenneth Kaunda, and convinced that Kaunda was somehow going to, even though he had defeated Kaunda rather handily in the election, contrive to come back.

Q: How old was Kaunda by this point?

MCILVAINE: Kaunda was in his late 60s. He had been president for 29 years. By the time I left - I used to see him every now and then - his attention span would wander after about 20 minutes. Maybe that's normal. (end of tape)

Chiluba was not rational... If Kaunda said anything, Chiluba could be guaranteed to overreact and Kaunda knew it, so of course he'd go out of his way to talk about "that little man." Chiluba was very small, very short. Chiluba hated that. At one point it became illegal to have any short jokes. Kaunda just knew how to needle him and Chiluba would overreact. In the first elections after Chiluba was elected - he was elected in '91 - it was '96, and the big issue for our embassy and for Ambassador Kuchel and for me was to keep Chiluba from somehow ruling Kaunda out of the election. If it was a free and fair election and Kaunda ran and was defeated free and fair, democracy was established. If the opposite happened, if Kaunda was somehow ruled out of the election instead of defeated squarely at the ballot box, as we firmly believed he would have been, then democracy had been subverted, it's not moving forward, and Zambia is backtracking from what had been something of a landmark step in '91. Unfortunately we were not able to persuade Chiluba to allow Kaunda to run. He couldn't bring himself to believe that Kaunda was a spent force, although later results indicated that. So they maneuvered... They declared the former president of the country, who had been president for 21 years, not a Zambian. He was a "foreigner." Not he but one or both of his parents had been born outside the country. Of course, nobody had birth papers and yes, they might very well have been born outside the country in pre-colonial Africa. But it was unprovable. On those grounds, Kaunda was pushed out of the race. He was declared an illegal candidate.

Q: Other than trying to make this a cradle of democracy, what were our interests in Zambia during this '95-'98 period?

MCILVAINE: Much the same as they are in most sub-Saharan countries, to see the country get on a solid footing and move forward, be reasonably self-sustaining economically and have a reasonably democratic political process. That's our goal in most of Africa where we're not actively worried about either a natural disaster or a human made disaster or stability and security. Zambia is a country with lots of room, lots of arable land, some resources - major copper deposits in the copper mines in the north - some hydropower potential and resources and a relatively small population without major tribal animosities. It has no good excuse for not succeeding except that it never has. The reason it never has has always been human frailty, a failure of government. You can blame the colonial powers, the West, the debt, all that, but ultimately Zambians have failed to effectively govern themselves. Sadly, that continues to be the case. I spent 3 years where we were trying to establish democracy. The other major goal of the mission during that time was to get the country to privatize the copper mines before they crashed. The government couldn't sustain them, couldn't keep them operating as a government industry. They were rapidly losing value. We got very close, within an inch, and at the last minute somebody whispered in Chiluba's ear and he decided he could get a better deal and he canceled the deal we had that was available. He ended up 2 years later selling to the lowest bidder at a knocked-down price because they were crashing. So, we failed on both those fronts. In terms of the work, it was a frustrating 3 years that we didn't accomplish either goal. In terms of the living, it's a wonderful part of the world.

Q: How did you find dealing with Zambian officials?

MCILVAINE: Like many Africans, very welcoming, easy to get to know, and that's always been to me the charm of working in Africa, that it contrasted with Asia, where I spoke Vietnamese and spent a very intense year and a half in Vietnam and never felt I got much beyond the second level of about 10 levels of understanding and getting to know the Vietnamese even though basically I worked with Vietnamese all the time. In Africa, there isn't that layer after layer of cultural defenses. They're much more welcoming, much more open and tolerant and forgiving on a personal level. Africans put up with astonishing things from their own governments and everything else and just soldier on. But tolerance on a political level almost doesn't make sense. That's the problem in country after country where the government cannot accept opposition of any sort and feels it has to be crushed and crushes it until it is overthrown. That's the cycle that we're seeing now in Zimbabwe.

Q: What about events in the Congo? Were they intruding?

MCILVAINE: Yes. It's the whole northern border. It was the fall of Mobutu and the rebels were sweeping down along the Zambian border. The rebel movement that came originally from the east swept down along the border towards us and across the country and heading to Kinshasa. So, we followed that very closely, did a lot of refugee work, a

fair bit of reporting on how the Zambians were responding, and a certain amount of... Part of our concern was, we were going to be the base for evacuation of those Americans who were in the southern half of the country and setting all that up, being in touch with the missionaries and all that, but in fact, in the Congo, it didn't amount to much for us. The missionaries that were still there knew how to get out, knew how to take care of themselves, and they had been through a lot of trouble before. They did a pretty good job of taking care of themselves.

But one small anecdote from that time. We had a young Belgian officer up from Harare. The Belgians had closed their embassy in Lusaka and made it a regional embassy in Harare, but of course the Belgians still had a large number of nationals in Zaire and he was up trying to organize, get permission from the Zambian government to bring in a Belgian plane to Zambia and bring maybe some paratroopers in to guard it and to help the Belgians evacuate any of their nationals. He basically operated out of our embassy for a couple of weeks trying to get this through the Zambian government. I remember him coming to my office one day and sitting down with a heavy sigh and saying, "Just once I'd like to know what it's like to be an American diplomat." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because then people return your phone calls. They make decisions. They talk to you." He had been going 2 weeks with the Zambian bureaucracy and gotten nothing. Nobody would make a decision or even talk to him. It was an insight... With the fall of the Soviet Union when we became preeminent, we were the big player. In every country, no matter how obscure... I remember back even in '85 in Guinea Bissau, which had to be the most obscure country and I had to be the least important embassy there - I wasn't giving them any aid and I wasn't doing anything for them - they still would listen to me. The foreign minister would hear me, would give me an appointment whenever I asked for it. Being an American diplomat was indeed different. No matter how trivial the issue or how little we had to do with it, we were a player. Many other embassies were always scrambling to get into those meetings.

Q: Was it Burundi or Rwanda that was going on at the time?

MCILVAINE: First it was Rwanda in '94. Then the Tutsi-led military took over Rwanda and still rule it today. Then when they decided Kabila, the new president of Zaire/Congo had been getting a little too friendly with the Hutus, the "Hutu Genocidaires" as they called them, they organized with Uganda and others the effort to overthrow Kabila. That military effort succeeded.

Q: But Zambia was off to one side?

MCILVAINE: That was the one that produced the refugees and all the rest of it. Meanwhile, Burundi was simmering along in semi-civil war with a beleaguered Tutsi-led government that just this past year has through a peace agreement kind of stumbled on. Now there's a Hutu prime minister as part of the peace agreement. But it's still teetering on the balance as to whether Burundi's going to succeed. I follow that closely because my sister is the CARE director in Bujumbura in Burundi.

Q: Did events in South Africa play any role?

MCILVAINE: That was interesting. When I had worked in AF/S in the early '90s before Mandela was released, before the end of apartheid, South Africa dominated not only that office but the bureau. As much as 60% of the bureau's, including the Assistant Secretary's, time was spent on South Africa and what I considered related, which was Angola and Namibia. South Africa was a major player in both of those. In the back of my mind, I remembered that. I get to Zambia and now it's the new millennia. Mandela's released. He's president of the post-apartheid government. South Africa really isn't a player. First of all, the ANC had been very closely tied to Kaunda, so Chiluba saw them as the enemy. He didn't like them. So, Zambian-South African relations under Chiluba were very frosty. That made a difference.

Economically, South Africa was important. South African businessmen were showing up. A brewery came in and bought up a Zambian brewery. I was chairman of the school board and increasingly at the international school we would be getting more and more South African kids from representatives of South African companies coming in. There was a growing economic presence, but the political presence for a while there was stymied. That may have changed now with Mbeki in South Africa and Manawasa as president of Zambia.

Q: How about with Tanzania? There was a road that was built by the Chinese.

MCILVAINE: There was a railroad. We built the road but refused to build the railroad, said it couldn't be done. So the Chinese came in and did it.

Q: How was that working?

MCILVAINE: That was another place where I thought one thing and found it really wasn't the case. I had assumed those two ex-British Southern Africa socialist legends of the first wave of independence Nyerere and Kaunda and the countries actually touched each other that there would be a lot of kinship and a lot of similarities and to-ing and fro-ing. There wasn't. Tanzania is basically politically Dar es Salaam on the coast and that's a long way from the western border and the western border is an even longer way from Lusaka, where the Zambian political life is. Politically, Zambia is very much in southern Africa. It deals with Zimbabwe hugely. What happens in Zimbabwe is very important to Zambia both economically and politically and to some degree with Botswana and Namibia and Angola, always worried about Angola and Malawi. That's the world Zambia lives in. It doesn't pay much attention to Tanzania, although its oil comes through Tanzania on the pipeline, the train, and similarly in Tanzania you never hear much about Zambia.

Q: How about Mugabe and Zimbabwe? Was this an influence or not?

MCILVAINE: This was a tragedy. I talked about how Zambia had no excuse for failing yet had. Zimbabwe on the other hand had plenty of excuses for failing - no real natural resources except arable land, no deposits of much of anything, and a bitter civil war for independence. Yet when I was there, Zimbabwe was a shining success. The infrastructure was in great shape and maintained by the African government. The roads, the rail, everything all worked. Harare was an attractive city. The economy was solid. People had work, had jobs. And people had a feistiness that came out of fighting for their independence. They would object when they thought they were being taken advantage of. We were very impressed by Zimbabwe. Then Mugabe was challenged and his response was oppression rather than "I'm in my mid-70s. It's time to step down." He has basically almost single-handedly destroyed the country in the 5 years since I left. It's a tragedy.

Q: This is a good place to stop. In '98, where did you go?

MCILVAINE: I came back and did 2 years as crisis coordinator, a title Howard Jeeter devised for me, being one of the deputies in the Office of West African Affairs with principal responsibility for Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, the 3 troublemakers in the office. The other deputy did everything else.

Q: We'll pick this up then.

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Today is October 27, 2003. We want to talk about the breakfast coup and the Kaunda Christmas arrest before we move on.

But I want to go back to Somalia. When you were in Somalia, did you ever run across a military man named Boykin?

MCILVAINE: General Boykin... I'm wondering if he was one of the deputies in command of the Ranger Force. I think he was. The commander was a cigar chewing general named Garrison who in my personal opinion had seen far too many John Wayne movies. He was always ready to charge in, guns blazing, and then think about it afterwards. The results of the mission show that. I think that was the last of General Garrison, October 3rd. Boykin may have been one of his deputies, but I don't remember him specifically.

Q: The reason I ask is, Boykin made quite a name for himself. He was in quite a responsible position being responsible for terrorism in the Department of Defense and yet he's been going out talking about-

MCILVAINE: "My god's better than your god." That's what he supposedly told Aideed and company.

Q: He has pictures taken over Mogadishu with certain black that shows the "wings of

Satan" over Somalia.

MCILVAINE: Oh, really? I missed that.

Q: To put it in diplomatic terms, he sounds like a religious nutcase.

MCILVAINE: This is a guy whose political opinion should have been kept very much to himself.

Q: He shouldn't have been put in that job if he had-

MCILVAINE: If he had those opinions and couldn't resist talking about them. Absolutely. It confirms everything the Muslim world has thought about this, all their worst fantasies about us, that we are indeed on some sort of religious crusade to wipe out Islam, forgetting that we went to a lot of trouble to save Islam in Bosnia and Kosovo and some other places.

Q: I must say that Bush right from the beginning was quite sour on...

MCILVAINE: Yes, Bush was very good on that.

Q: Anyway, let's go back to the breakfast coup.

MCILVAINE: The breakfast coup... We're in Lusaka, Zambia. The morning routine is, you get up at 6:00. We had 3 children all going to school on the school bus to the American International School. The bus wanders around the Kabalonga area of Lusaka, picking up American kids and taking them out to the school out on the outer fringes of town by Leopard's Hill. You go past the giant graveyard where five funerals are going on every minute of every day because of AIDS. The kids get a little introduction to that on their way to school every day.

Anyhow, we wake up and I'm just getting up and I hear a burst of machinegun fire outside somewhere, not immediately close but outside. That was followed by more. It's pretty clear that something bad is going on. I get into my shorts and go into the kitchen, where I've got 2 phones, an embassy phone and an outside line. I turn on the radio and sure enough, some disgruntled army officers have taken over the radio station and declared a coup. The military establishment from the state house not very far from my house is beginning to respond. In quick order, I alert the ambassador, talk to the security officer and the Marines at the embassy to make sure the embassy's fine. Nothing's happened there. They are intact. Nobody's leaving or coming in. I then talk to the security officer. We decide to close the school, turn off the school bus so the school bus will not be running around town picking up kids while this is going on. We then talk to the consular officer to make sure that he in his house in touch through the warden net with all the American citizens to make sure they're safe and stay home and stay low while we wait to find out what this is. Keep the ambassador informed, who is about a mile from my

house at her residence, talking to Washington.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MCILVAINE: Arlene Render. Then get with the political officer on the phone again. Nobody's leaving their house. That's my rules. I try and figure out what's going on. Meanwhile, I get some visitors from an old friend who had been one of Kaunda's stalwarts but was now somewhat on the outs with Kaunda but also on the outs with the government because he was of the old UNIP elite from Kaunda's party. His son and several children arrive at my door figuring that somebody might go after them and they'd be much safer at my house. We let them in.

By this point, my kids are up and everybody's having breakfast. My kids are really excited because this is like a snow day in Washington. School's canceled. This is great. So it became forever after "having a coup day" when the busses were canceled and school was canceled. This is terrific. They play with the Zambian kids. That's fine. I spend the next 3 hours in the kitchen on those phones keeping the ambassador informed, who's talking to Washington and managing the embassy community until we determine that the danger is over when around lunchtime the coup is suppressed, the coup plotters are captured by the government, and the gunfire has stopped. Business goes back to normal. But it was a pretty exciting morning, particularly for the kids.

Christmas morning, my wife and I are stalling as long as possible because all the presents are by the tree in the living room and that's our family tradition to delay it and build up the anticipation. The kids are knocking on the door and saying, "It's time to get up." Finally we start to get up and the phone rings. It's the political officer informing me that the government has surrounded Kaunda's house and is about to arrest him. This is not a big surprise. We knew Chiluba was obsessed with Kaunda and had been threatening to arrest him on various dubious treason plots and that sort of thing. He just couldn't stand the idea of Kaunda out there making critical and snide remarks about Chiluba, which Kaunda was quite given to doing. So indeed he was arrested, but Chiluba had to pick Christmas morning to do it, to arrest the former president of the country and an internationally known figure. Nothing could have served Kaunda's political purposes better. This gets him back into the headlines. It makes him a player again when he had basically been forgotten. A gross miscalculation on Chiluba's part.

Two days before, I sought out a meeting with a contact of mine who lived a couple of doors away who was Chiluba's Mr. Inside, his lawyer and minor cabinet minister with an office at State House and definitely Chiluba's confidant. I had said to him, "Don't do this." Rumors were flying. "This will hurt you in all sorts of ways. It can't possibly do you any good." He was very uncomfortable answering. It was clear that he understood what I was saying, probably agreed, but that something was going on. So, we had thought this might happen. We hadn't thought he'd be so clumsy as to do it Christmas morning, but indeed he was. So, instead of going under the tree and opening up the presents, I spent the next hour or so with the political officer talking to a few people and then reporting

back to Washington and talking to some poor deputy assistant secretary of State for African affairs who's been called by the Operations Center to tell them all what's going on and what has happened and whether we think this will be a threat to the embassy. The answer to that was, "No." Indeed there wasn't any. But it did make an unusual Christmas morning. I called the Ambassador who was on vacation in Botswana.

Q: Oh, yes. Let's talk about communications. The world is changing. How did you report back when you had these quick breaking things?

MCILVAINE: We didn't have classified e-mail, which I think now many embassies do have - maybe all. So, we didn't do any of this in e-mail. That's the plague of embassy life now. It gets into e-mail and therefore it's not really documented. You don't have files of e-mail. It was already then a major problem with AID. So much of the decision making was being done... They operate unclassified, so much of their decision making was being done in e-mails. There was no record of it. We were constantly forcing the reluctant AID to actually write a cable about that so that we had a record. Everything that required a decision, everything that was a major policy, had to be a cable.

Q: But e-mail is technically the same as a cable.

MCILVAINE: Well, the cables were encrypted and everything else. E-mail wasn't then. It was accessible.

Q: But be that as it may-

MCILVAINE: Hackers can get into your e-mail.

Q: But if a coup was going on...

MCILVAINE: You're not talking about classified things. You're talking about a security threat to the mission and the people in the mission. That you deal straight with the Operations Center over the telephone and you issue warnings to American citizens. It's part of every one of these things. Whenever something like this happens, you have to do one of these warnings that go out to the whole world.

Q: But with e-mail, you can keep records.

MCILVAINE: You can. Maybe now they do, but in my time nobody did except when there was an investigation like Oliver North and they'd go back and they'd dig out all his e-mails out of the computer. You can find them if you know what you're doing.

Q: And you can also print out e-mail.

MCILVAINE: But people don't usually do that. I'm sure this is all changing. It's going to have to change because, yes, more and more business, it's much easier to do it by e-mail

than the cumbersome machinery of you put a cable together, you take it, you have a couple of people whose whole job is to run all that fancy coded machinery in a windowless room in the embassy and send all these cables out and get in Washington's traffic, most of which we could have done without, as any embassy will tell you.

Q: Yes. But the problem with e-mail is that it often brings things down to the unvetted area where people are working at a lower level but it does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ambassador.

MCILVAINE: Right. It raises control issues that makes any ambassador nervous, particularly when you're talking about the management of U.S. policy, which is his or her job. You don't want everybody in the embassy just chiming in. You want something of a coherent... That's understandable. And the cable process allows that. E-mail does not. So, I would think, yes, classified e-mail presents a number of management challenges that I did not have to face because we didn't have it. We still basically communicated by cable. In a crisis, yes, it's by telephone to the Operations Center or if the telephones aren't working you would set up radio links. Many a time in the Operations Center we would set up an open line to the embassy in countries with bad telephone communications and you'd have over in the corner on the table an open telephone so that whenever we wanted to ask the embassy a question, there would be somebody there monitoring it. We'd go over and ask them.

Q: We'll move on to '98 to 2000. You were in African Affairs.

MCILVAINE: I had arrived in the Office of West African Affairs. Something like 10 days after I arrived, there was a firefight at the embassy gate in Monrovia. This was September of 1998. A Liberian dissident is shot and dies inside. He gets through the gate and into the embassy. We have on our hands President Taylor's noisiest local critic who has escaped into the embassy. We have outside the embassy with Taylor's not very well disciplined troops ready to shoot at us or him or anybody who comes out the door. They had gone to his house to shut him down and he had gotten wind of it, fled to the embassy with several stalwarts got into the embassy gate about the same time that all their guys, the government's soldiers, showed up. There had been a standoff for a while as he cowered behind a little shield. The embassy gate had been shut and we refused to let him in. We didn't want any part of what was a domestic political fight. Then, somebody, one of the government soldiers or police or militia or something like that, reached around this little barrier and fired a couple of rounds. Well, that did it. The gate guards opened the gate. The guy they were after rushed in with several of his colleagues. The last guy to rush in was the one who was shot and he died as the gate was slammed behind him on our grounds. As far as I know, to this day, he is buried on the grounds of Embassy Monrovia. So, we had a crisis. We went to the Ops Center and we had one of those open lines to the embassy over in the corner. The question was, we had to get this guy out of our embassy and out of Liberia and if we pushed him out the door obviously he was going to be killed on the spot right in front of the embassy, so we couldn't do that. We had to get him out. We finally, after much rapid fire negotiation mainly done by Howard Jeeter, the Nigerians

agreed to take him.

Q: The Nigerians had a force there?

MCILVAINE: The Nigerians had an ECOWAS force there that had gotten more involved in local politics and was no longer seen as neutral. They had brought this guy back, so they bore some responsibility for him even being there. He had been in exile. They had brought him back. Taylor had decided this was a threat to him - and probably rightly so. Taylor went after him. He ran to the embassy gate. So, the Nigerians agreed to take him, but we had to figure out a way to get him out. It was about ten days of hectic negotiations with the Taylor government, the standoff at the embassy gate, the embassy shut down, the police and soldiers outside the gate, guns leveled, threatening periodically to fire on the embassy. Then in the middle of all that, some 20 of this guy's followers snuck up one night and climbed over the fence and landed in the embassy. So we had an additional 20 that nobody knew about. We finally got agreement to get them all out from the Taylor government. We helicoptered them out. We had another very uneasy 6 to 8 months getting beyond that. It had been very clear shortly after he was elected in '97 in a fairly democratic election but he had been elected mainly by assuring the Liberian people that if they didn't elect him, he'd raise hell and kill a lot of people, so they might as well elect him. That was a successful campaign for him. He did win a vote. He was elected and proceeded to run the country like the warlord he is and was.

Nothing whatsoever was done for poor destroyed Monrovia. No water. No power. Ruined buildings and refugees living in them. It actually even looked worse than Mogadishu when I saw it in '98. He went about supporting the RUF and the war in Sierra Leone and extracting diamonds and doing things like that rather than trying to rebuild and govern his country. We weren't on good terms to begin with. This made it even worse. We had a very stiff 6 to 8 months, part of which I went out with Deputy Assistant Secretary Vicki Huddleston and we delivered one messages and we had this surreal 3 hour interview with Taylor. You'd come in from Roberts Field from the airport through this ruined town. "City" is a bit much. It was a big town where refugees are living in the ruins. Then you go on one end of town up on this point, and there is the embassy behind this huge fence. This embassy, the residence, the houses, are all in one compact unit which was actually very handy with all the security problems. It was very defensible. It had ocean front. You could get to it from the ocean or by helicopter. It was very useful for all the problems we had.

Then, we go to meet with Taylor and we go to this building, the presidential offices, which is a big 7 story high rise with a big park in front that was sort of semi-mowed. We drive in and there is this open air breezeway. You can see right through the building where you go in. There's the ocean on the other side. You walk a long set of stairs to this quite impressive place. There is a Liberian soldier sound asleep on his back. You step over him and go into the offices of the presidency. Of course, the offices were decorated in the fashion that in Somalia I had taken to calling "Abdi XIV," would-be Louis XIV gilt, incredible armchairs that look like they might do well for Halloween but you wouldn't want to have them in any house you ever owned. We had this long meeting with

this guy who is a wily, ruthless, Third World warlord and not a president at all. He wasn't even making much of a pretense of it. He would sort of make a run at it and then decide it was too boring and no fun and wasn't getting him anywhere.

Q: What was the subject of the conversation?

MCILVAINE: It was the post-shootout at the embassy gate and an attempt to establish with him what our concerns were, that basically he wasn't making any progress on governance, on helping Liberia, and how he was continuing to mess in his neighbors' countries and we didn't like that and would he please stop? He listened to all that, argued with it, and didn't. Five years later, he was finally pushed out this past summer.

Q: What were we doing about the American interests in Liberia? Were we looking for ways of getting out and drawing down?

MCILVAINE: The American interests had long since been ruined in the years of Sam Doe and then the 10 years of civil war after Sam Doe. The big Firestone rubber plantation had been sold to Bridgestone to the Japanese. Even that had been pretty well shut down by civil war and anarchy. There were a few odd investments. Towards the end, Pat Robertson, the Virginia cable evangelical crusader, supposedly bought this gold mining franchise. Of course, he never got to mine the gold. It was some deal with Taylor and that meant that Robertson ended up defending Taylor a few times as a reasonable sort, something along the lines of "Here we are off coddling Muslims around the world and here's a good Christian president and we're not treating him nicely." Well, Taylor is Pat Robertson's idea of a good Christian- (end of tape)

Q: We had communications facilities. Were they gone by this time?

MCILVAINE: We did. VOA had a major transmitting center. That had been destroyed in the civil war and we had established a new one in Botswana and one in Sao Tome, Principe, the little islands off Gabon. I saw the ruins outside Mogadishu. We also had some intercept facilities which were also ruined.

Q: Did we have any American government interests there anymore?

MCILVAINE: We don't really. The interest - and this was particularly hard to grapple with - is that the United States essentially created Liberia. We were there at the founding. It was our idea. This was going to be the home for returned slaves. It was a fashionable idea in the 1820s-1840s. Indeed they did return and they set up... There is a county named Maryland. There is all sorts of American echoes in Liberia, including the flag, which looks like our flag except it has one star. Liberians believe that they have this kinship with the U.S. and the U.S. somehow will be there when they need it. Unfortunately, we usually aren't. But the belief holds firm and many Liberians have dual citizenship. Many live here. Many have relatives here. There is a large Liberian community in Rhode Island and several other parts of the country. There's one near Washington. There is a very

special relationship with Liberia that was always difficult to grapple with. Liberians were always appealing to us in an almost paternalistic fashion. We on the frontlines of West African affairs didn't have the resources or the intention or the interest of hardly anybody to put serious resources in there to fix the problems, so we would cobble together these West African peacekeeping forces and try to keep them in the field with a little help. That was about the best we could do.

Q: Taylor was raising hell in the region.

MCILVAINE: He was.

Q: Did we have any control over him?

MCILVAINE: Ultimately no. We didn't have any resources to throw at this and obviously the U.S. government was not going to use U.S. military power in Liberia... That was out. There was no serious money to pay for anybody else to go into Liberia or to do anything. So, we hoped to appeal to Taylor's desire to be a world statesman, to be treated like a world statesman, and to be welcomed to the UN and things like that, play the scene. That had a little leverage. He would behave for bits. Sometimes he actually helped out - which was telling - like when we had problems with the RUF in Sierra Leone, who Taylor had largely created and supported but denied he had anything to do with them. When they had taken a sizeable UN peacekeeping contingent hostage, Taylor basically got them to free them, which did several things. One, it showed from Taylor's point of view that he's a major league player in the region. He can deliver. He really is somebody to talk to, somebody we should be dealing with all the time. Two, it confirmed all our worse fears that indeed he was pulling all the strings for the RUF anyhow and if he said "Go," they went. If he said "Stop," they stopped. So it was a double edged sword. The RUF are the people who chopped off forearms of little girls and committed horrific atrocities with no apparent ideology other than loot. They terrorized Sierra Leone for a decade. That was another one of my problems.

Q: Sticking to Liberia, was Qadhafi playing a role there?

MCILVAINE: Well, yes. He was Taylor's one consistent outside friend. Taylor and the RUF leader, had gone to one of Qadhafi's training camps in the '80s with several other African troublemakers, so there was a link there and that was probably where he was getting his arms through another Qadhafi friend, Blaise Compaoré, the president of Burkina Faso. Right to the end, Taylor was able to get arms through that channel even despite UN arms embargos and everything else.

Q: What about the diamond trade? Were we working that?

MCILVAINE: Yes, we were. I spent an awful lot of time... In my later job... A little bit in West African Affairs because I had started with my then boss, Howard Jeter. The effort to do something about so-called "conflict diamonds..." The poster child for that were the

little girls in Sierra Leone who were having their arms cut off so that Taylor and the RUF could control the diamond trade and the terrorized populace would not interfere with them. Then when I was working Congressional Affairs, I worked long and hard on the legislation there to get a bill through that the administration agreed with that did not punish legitimate African diamond producers like Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana while doing something to impede as realistically - we were never going to totally stop the trade in diamonds – the trade in illegal diamonds from Zaire, Congo, and from Sierra Leone. In the end, a bill was passed, signed by the President into law in 2002 and is in force now and I think that has done some good. It hasn't solved the problem entirely. You can't do that by-

Q: It also was run in conjunction with the diamond trade, the De Beers and others, who... The whole idea is to make this a scarce commodity.

MCILVAINE: But it also scared the diamond industry here and the diamond industry in Antwerp, scared them to the bones, because the American market is about 50% of the world market and they envisioned - the Global Witness and some of the other NGOs that were talking about it - that the campaign would show little girls with their arms cut off saying "Diamonds are not a girl's best friend" and horrific public relations and a taint put on all diamonds, a boycott on all diamonds of any kind-

Q: Like fur coats.

MCILVAINE: Like fur coats had done in the past. That was the nightmare scenario. That was a nightmare for us, too, because it meant that a few countries that were managing their diamonds very well and relying heavily on the revenues - Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia - would be badly hurt also. So we were trying to protect them yet deal with the problem. It took a lot of working with Ways and Means Committee, with the U.S. Trade Representative, and Treasury, Customs, and the Department of State to keep this team from going off in different direction and keep it together for a couple of years to get that bill through. We did get something reasonably good at the end of that line.

Taylor was buying his weapons and fueling his run as a warlord and keeping the RUF going on the diamond trade.

Q: Let's turn to Nigeria. What was happening there?

MCILVAINE: In the spring of 1998, Sani Abacha suddenly died, the military dictator. That meant that for the first time in 16 years, there was a chance to bring Nigeria back into the family of nations and maybe build something new. So, we worked long and hard with General Abubakar, who took command and who committed himself to elections the following year and a transition to civilian government. We worked long and hard with him to make that transition stick. We spent a lot of time on that. There, we could muster some government resources and visitors... Jesse Jackson took several trips out to cajole all the players and get everybody on the team, something Jesse's very good at. In the

spring of ‘99, Nigeria did hold a chaotic election and there was a fair bit of fraud and vote buying and intimidation and all the rest, but the end result was something democratic. Obasanjo was elected president. He was just reelected last year to his second term.

It’s still a long way from being fixed, Nigeria. The problems are still enormous. Corruption is still a major problem. The police, the judiciary are broken. Years of military rule and corruption and they’re not fixed yet. It’s a long way to go before Nigeria is a fully functioning, normal country. But anybody who deals with West Africa, Nigeria is so big and the influence is so overwhelming that... It has something like 120 million people, something like a fourth of the total population of Africa. It has the Muslim-Christian-animist splits in spades. It has the ethnic divisions in spades. It has all the problems of everywhere in Africa. Plus, it has resources - the oil - misused in many cases, stolen and what have you. If it fails, it can pull down the whole region. The chaos that can come out of Nigeria is appalling to consider. There are all those people... As it is, Nigerians are inventive, entrepreneurial, and too much of that is spent on criminal activities-

Q: All of us know about the “Spanish prisoner” ploy.

MCILVAINE: Or “I happen to have Mrs. Abacho’s ten million dollars. Can I park it in your bank account? Just send me the number.”

Q: I have a friend who is a banker in Baltimore-

MCILVAINE: The Secret Service has an office that collects those because there are so many of them.

Q: I have a friend who is a banker in Baltimore who said that if a Nigerian walks into a bank, you shut down the bank and close the teller windows because, as he put it, “They can outthink us.”

MCILVAINE: They are very clever. Jails all over the world are full of Nigerians. There are Nigerian communities all over the world that find the niche. In Kenya, they kite checks because there is no penalty on overdrawing a check, so they’ve got a whole check kiting industry and they’ve done all sorts of damage there. Other places, they run the drug trade. They don’t manufacture the drugs or produce them, but they move them. If that enterprise could ever be turned to a productive thing, Nigeria would be unbelievable.

Q: What about using Nigeria as a military international force?

MCILVAINE: I had a lot to do with that. Very interesting.

Let me add one thing about Nigerians. I first worked with the Nigerian military in the Congo in 1961. Then I worked extensively with the Nigerians in this period, ‘98-2000. without reservation, they are the most interesting, charming, and at the same time obnoxious and frustrating people in the world. One shouldn’t draw national stereotypes,

but Nigerians are something else. That criminal activity is just a reflection of this creativity gone wrong. It gets channeled off. There's no productive way to use it in Nigerian society.

The military. One of the things anybody who thinks about Africa in the last 20 years has been looking at is ways for Africans to solve their own problems because clearly the outer world's attention span is limited, resources are limited, willingness to fix African problems are limited. And Nigeria has been in the forefront of the "We should take care of our own problems. We don't need you" a healthy attitude. The Nigerian military is large. It once was very professional, British trained, and excellent and started in all the UN peacekeeping roles of the '60s. It has actually fought a civil war, the Biafra war. It has more combat experience than any army in Africa. Under Abacha - this was the one thing Abacha did that was actually positive - he committed the Nigerian military to West African run peacekeeping operations in Liberia first and then in Sierra Leone. The results were mixed. By this point, Abacha himself had pillaged the military. They weren't getting any new equipment or training or much of anything. The example that was being established in northern Nigeria was, everybody for himself, grab whatever you can. So, the Nigerian military both in Sierra Leone and Liberia had a reputation for meddling and for corruption and for bad business deals and for getting involved in all sorts of things they shouldn't have, but they also suffered casualties and did fight, unlike anybody else western or African or anybody else, who tended to avoid conflict completely. They took casualties. A lot of Nigerians died so that there would-be some semblance of peace and order in the so-called "Arc of Crisis" of West Africa, which is Sierra Leone-Liberia-Guinea.

We spent a lot of time... Again, because the resources and the attention were so limited, it is not something the Clinton administration was going to put a lot of money into. We spent a lot of time cobbling together this peacekeeping force to hold the peace particularly in Sierra Leone once we had gotten negotiations started between the government and the RUF to come to some kind of settlement. That settlement did come in the infamous Lome Accord of 1999, infamous because we had no real military backup for it. We just had the Nigerian peacekeepers in Sierra Leone and were having trouble keeping them in the field because Nigeria couldn't support it. We had been providing through contractors logistical support for it. Every couple of months, we had to get some new money. Senate Appropriations hated it and always gave us a hard time. The administration was unwilling to make much of a fight for it. Finally, the Nigerians said they were leaving and did. They just weren't being supported. The RUF, when it came to the crunch where they would actually have to disarm, decided there was nobody in the way, they'd make a run at it. In June of 2000, they did. There was a great panic. It looked like Freetown would go under for the second time. RUF got right up into town and burned the Nigerian embassy next door to our embassy. I evacuated our embassy 2 weeks earlier in Christmas '99. I had a problem with Christmas. Three Christmases in a row went completely awry with first Kaunda's arrest, then evacuating the embassy in Freetown, and then Cote d'Ivoire's coup on Christmas Day the next year. So, for those who are planning to be Foreign Service officers, your holidays are not sacrosanct. Anyhow, the RUF nearly came in. We had to

cobble together a whole new arrangement.

But this time, the disaster got everyone's attention and we had some senior policymaking attention and we had some resources. So, then Under Secretary for Political Affairs Pickering went out to talk to Obasanjo, the president of Nigeria. We got some Pentagon backing. They agreed - this was late Clinton administration - that they would provide training. So, Obasanjo agreed he would provide 3 battalions. We would send in the Special Forces. We would train them in lethal operations. This was called "Operation Focus Relief." We did this in the summer and fall of 2000.

Q: Why weren't the British doing this?

MCILVAINE: The British meanwhile, this was their former colony, so they had first response, they were training the Sierra Leone military and sending in SAS, their own troops. That stabilized the situation for the moment and stopped the RUF advance. Put the RUF back into the bush. Meanwhile, we were building this Nigerian force that would be the centerpiece of a UN peacekeeping force to hold the peace. That worked. We did train 3 battalions and they loved it. The Nigerian soldiers really enjoyed being treated and trained as real professionals for the first time in decades and they performed very well. Some of those troops this summer were back in Liberia 10 years later and are there now to the transition from Taylor to some sort of democratic government. But the end result of all that was, after the crisis of 2000, a UN peacekeeping force, did establish a peace that lasted. The RUF collapsed, fell apart, into bickering factions, and an election was held. The RUF lost disastrously. Now, we have a pretty solid peace and a shaky democracy in Sierra Leone. We have finally Charles Taylor out of Liberia and a transition started there towards some post-Taylor government. Maybe we can get something more positive there.

The next problem in that neighborhood is Guinea, where Comte, who has been president for a long time, is in not very good health. There is no clear idea of what the transition is going to be there.

Meanwhile, Nigeria is still struggling along, hasn't fallen apart yet, that's the good news. The bad news is, it hasn't fixed most of its problems either.

Q: Was there an implied agreement that we're talking about the problems in Anglophone West Africa... The francophone West Africa, the French, that was their baby?

MCILVAINE: In the course of all this, my third Christmas was the coup in Cote d'Ivoire, francophone. There, I found myself in the Operations Center on Christmas Day. This was 2000. General Geue led a military coup that had taken over the government. I remember 2 things. One, we called Lannon Walker, the former ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire who was retired, and said, "What do you know about this guy?" He knew lots about him and had some very definite opinions about him. Then the rest of the time, we were in touch with the Elysees in Paris. The real question was, what are the French going to do? The French had 20,000 French citizens in the country and they had 400 French troops at the airport,

something of a base. It was clear that the French were going to take the lead. This was their baby. They had citizens at risk. We were going to maybe try and nudge them in what we thought was the right direction but we were going to be the caboose on that train, and we were, and we are today. The rebellion renewed this past summer. There are now French troops holding a cease-fire line across the middle of the country between the northern rebels and the southern government. The French made it clear that Cote d'Ivoire was their problem. The British took the responsibility for Sierra Leone. Liberia everybody said was ours.

That came to a focus this summer when Taylor was besieged and his government was collapsing. A West African peacekeeping force was being put together. Would the U.S. lead it and participate? We temporized and we fussed and we ended up sending a Marine expeditionary unit to hover offshore in their ships. A couple of hundred went ashore briefly, which was a response that did not satisfy the West African and the Liberian demand for intervention nor the neocons and the conservative view here that we should never intervene in a messy thing like that in Africa, we shouldn't risk American lives. So, I don't know that the administration won any points but they got away with it. The transition went through. Taylor did leave. Nothing terrible happened. No Americans got shot.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about during this '98 to 2000 very active time?

MCILVAINE: It was very busy. There were an awful lot of evenings when I got home after everyone in my family had gone to bed to a dark house. That wasn't real popular on the home front.

Q: What happened in 2000?

MCILVAINE: Then, I moved to Congressional Affairs and the African portfolio in H.

Q: You did that from when to when?

MCILVAINE: I did that for 3 years. I started right in the last few months of the Clinton-Gore administration. Congressional Affairs inevitably is very heavily political and a lot of Schedule Cs. Everybody left. The few survivors had to pick up the pieces. It was kind of like a game of Risk where you conquer the world. At one point, I had Africa, South Asia, and Asia. I had at least 2/3 of the world's land mass and most of its population that I was responsible for. I did South Asia and Africa for a good 8 months. That was the 8 months that included 9/11. So, I was doing South Asia, which includes Afghanistan, when that blew up. I was kept busy.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the transition. Did you have the feeling that here was the Bush II administration was coming in - you were dealing with it at the political level, dealing with Congress - that it sure as hell didn't want to get involved in anything when it came in?

MCILVAINE: Yes. The difference between the 2 parties on foreign affairs is considerable. Many Republicans' view foreign affairs with suspicion and distrust as something that is dangerous, messy, untidy, and potentially expensive. Democrats on the other hand, are foreign policy buffs and are activists from the NGO world and all that and think there's all sorts of things we should do overseas that may not always be wise. So, there is a clear division in attitudes towards foreign affairs between parties. The people who left, the democratic political appointees, were 30-somethings that had come to Washington to do politics and gotten into foreign affairs and they were political junkies. The folks who came in, the new Schedule Cs from the Bush administration, the low level guys, were campaign kids, who had been advance men and campaign functionaries and they wanted to work in Washington for the first time. Foreign affairs sounded kind of interesting, might be fun. Most of them had no experience at all and not much information. They were bright kids. They quickly learned. It was not brain surgery. They quickly became useful. But it was different.

Q: What was your impression of Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Susan Rice? What was her presence like?

MCILVAINE: Very considerable. Susan was very young then, in her early 30s, extremely bright, very knowledgeable, but she had never worked in an embassy. As far as I know, she'd never lived overseas. In my personal opinion, she was too quick to jump on things and not terribly wise. Maybe that's an old man talking, but she didn't stop sometimes to think about the repercussions. One example of this "action at all costs" approach was that she was constantly outrunning the resources and the political will behind her, doing things that the resources weren't there for and the political will wasn't there for. One case where the resources and the political will were there, but I think we did overplay it was with Nigeria and with Obasanjo, where at her direction, this was going to succeed and we were going to do everything. In his first year as president of Nigeria, we had something like 9 Cabinet officers, including the Secretary of State, visiting. No African president gets that kind of attention. It tarnished him. It meant that this clammy embrace of the U.S. government - every time you turned around there was another big U.S. official visiting Abuja and proclaiming democracy in Nigeria - we overdid it. As a result, Obasanjo felt he didn't have to take some of the tough decisions he probably should have taken. As the end result, the process has not moved as far and as fast as it could have. Then with the change of administration, we probably went to the other extreme, totally ignoring Nigeria.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary when the new administration came in?

MCILVAINE: Walter Kansteiner. I worked with him extensively. I knew him before. I knew him when he was in the first Bush administration National Security Council working on Africa. He then worked with Brent Scowcroft, who had been his boss at the NSC. During the Clinton years, he worked for Scowcroft doing African venture capital and trade and investment consulting, apparently quite successfully, particularly in Southern Africa. I like him. I think he's a good hand and he's very much of the Powell

camp, a moderate, thoughtful Republican, not of the neocon Wolfowitz-Rumsfeld camp. In fact, I've heard him voice his frustrations over that and what that's doing to policy. He is leaving in another month, resigning. I took him through the confirmation process in my job as the congressional liaison. He lives in Virginia Piedmont near where I'm from, so I'd known him out there. He has movie star looks - 6'2", wavy blond hair, blue eyes, this sort of thing - and lots of charm. Plus, he's very bright. He does have a good understanding of Africa.

If this Sudan peace process gets through, that will be his monument. He has worked that long and hard from the start in what looked impossible 3 years ago. How can you possibly get these 2 sides with the levels of mistrust to ever talk to each other and ever agree on anything? This is the Muslim north and the Christian south, the rebellion that's been going on off and on for 50 years. He almost has that settled. They've got a couple more tough issues to work out. Secretary Powell was just there in the last week. He wouldn't have been going there if it didn't look like it could work. He was there to put the final shove into the participants. So, Kansteiner has done very well on that.

Probably his biggest frustration has been Zimbabwe and Mugabe, this country he knew and cared about and had been to many times. I voiced some of my frustrations. It was just such a tragedy to see a country that worked so well under Mugabe fall apart when Mugabe just refuses to move on and starts taking policies designed only to perpetuate himself and ruins the country in the process.

Q: During this time, 2001-2003, what were your major involvements?

MCILVAINE: I've talked about the conflict dimension. That took a lot of effort and time. That was mainly working with the Economic Bureau and this weird amalgam of other departments and agencies - Customs, Treasury, U.S. Trade Representative. That was a world that I haven't done a whole lot with, the economic world. That was interesting.

Africa has 47 posts. They closed one recently. I spent a lot of time taking ambassadors through the confirmation process, working closely with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Legislation... There was the Zimbabwe Democracy Act and the Sudan Peace Act, the Zimbabwe one being pushed by Senator Frist, who was concerned about Zimbabwe. He is a senator from Tennessee and now majority leader in the Senate. He was then the ranking member - this was during the brief democratic control of the Senate - of the African Affairs Subcommittee of Senate Foreign Relations. Several members of the House African Affairs Subcommittee cared about Zimbabwe... Sudan, the one African issue that really has a domestic constituency because a lot of American religious organizations have been running missions for many years in southern Sudan, particularly Franklin Graham, Billy Graham's son. They have built up a constituency amongst Republicans for action in the Sudan. They heavily support the southerners and see the southerners as oppressed by the Muslim north, which is true. That put a constituency in

both the House and the Senate. Frank Wolf and some others were very interested in that issue. Plus some Democrats who had always paid attention to Africa like Russ Feingold from Wisconsin, who was chairman of the Subcommittee and now ranking minority member on the Senate side. Don Payne of New Jersey. Some of the Black Caucus members.

But there are very few members of Congress who pay attention to Africa, know where it is, know what's going on, and care. You're always looking to build that pool. We encourage every CODEL. Some parts of the world consider CODELs a curse. In Africa, we consider them a blessing. We need to educate as many members of Congress as we possibly can about Africa and U.S. policy there and why it's important. So, one of the great disappointments was the Congressional Black Caucus, which in the days of apartheid was very active on African affairs. I have never succeeded in getting them very engaged. Don Payne was the ranking member of the Subcommittee. He would pay attention. But hardly anyone else from the congressional Black Caucus. It was always surprising to discover how little they knew about what was going on in Africa or cared. Like most members of Congress, they have domestic concerns that are more pressing, particularly on the House side. So that was frustrating. There wasn't much of a constituency and I didn't get very far in building it. I was dealing with a few key members and the staffs of the 2 African affairs committees.

Q: What was your impression of the staff both in the Senate and the House?

MCILVAINE: Generally very good. I started this working with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when Jesse Helms was the ranking minority members of the committee. The Republican staff were his staffers. The Helms staff had terrorized the Foreign Service for years. But by the time I got there, Helms was mellowed somewhat and his staff was quite professional and they weren't, with a few exceptions, the horrible ideologues of legend who would hold up ambassadors for years at a time just because they didn't like something they'd done domestically, or because the ambassador once said something nice about something Helms didn't like. They were quite professional. I worked surprisingly well with them. They weren't a real problem.

The democratic staff, some of the people I worked with were extremely knowledgeable and like me shared the frustration that they couldn't get more attention paid to what they thought were important African issues particularly Senator Feingold and his staff. He has spent, by his choice, nine years on the Africa Subcommittee, something most people avoid because they go to something sexier, something that gets better press. He's chosen to stay there. He's traveled extensively in Africa. His staff has traveled extensively. They know what they're talking about. He goes out of his way in each confirmation hearing to make sure he holds the hearing, make sure he has a list of thoughtful questions that really probe and test the ambassador just to make sure he's done his homework and knows what he's talking about, and he feels it's important to do that. I agree with him. Confirmation hearings can be an empty ritual if there's no controversy over the nominee. But Senator Feingold always made sure that he had some serious questions, the hearing was serious,

and the ambassador candidate was probed.

Q: You weren't just working with ambassadors to African countries. You were working with ambassadors to other...

MCILVAINE: I also did South Asia for about 9 months. That was quite different. There, there is a constituency and there is a lobby, the Indian lobby, usually trying to bash Pakistan any way they can. There is a fair bit of interest on the Hill because there are large Indian communities in many congressional districts and they make their influence felt. They contribute and they write their congressmen. So, that was quite different. In terms of confirmation, I had the new Bush Assistant Secretary for South Asia, who was a Hill staffer. She had been a staffer for Senator Brownback from Kansas. Very nice. Christina Rocca. There was so much more interest than there were on my African issues and so much more of a rambunctious, not always well informed, but a lot more members paying attention, particularly misinformed because there were some active lobbyists and the lobbyists weren't always telling the whole story. And of course, Afghanistan was headline stuff.

Q: How did the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001 affect- (end of tape)

MCILVAINE: Suddenly I was doing almost exclusively Afghanistan at a much higher level. Instead of me and the Assistant Secretary and a few office directors doing briefings, I was organizing briefings for the Deputy Secretary and the biggest shots in the Department in the classified briefing room in the Capitol. That was a good deal higher profile than I had been dealing with before. This time, instead of staff, I was getting all the senators and lots of them. This was hot stuff and there was a lot of interest. So, in a crisis like that, one of the challenges is, the Foreign Service tends to think, "Let us manage the crisis." The Embassy always thinks, "Let us manage the crisis. We know what to do here" and has to keep Washington at bay. Washington, the Department, has to keep Congress at bay or managed.

If it is headline stuff, Congress, particularly the foreign relations committees, want to know what's going on. They want to be briefed because they want to be able to answer constituencies and press conferences and go on "Meet the Press" on Sunday and so forth and talk intelligently about it. So, you have all this time when you should be working on the crisis where you're pulled away to brief, constantly keep the Hill informed. One of the challenges right up to the highest level is how to manage that so that they feel they're being kept briefed but you aren't spending all your time briefing them individually. So, you organize specific briefings. The Bush administration is quite good about this with Iraq where they have a ritual. Wednesday afternoon at 4:00, Rumsfeld and Powell will be here. Show up and don't complain if you miss it. This is your chance. They had a thing like that that was fixed into the schedule where they would commit a couple of hours to go talk to the senior senators and the members of the House who needed to be briefed. Congress is always jealous of that, always afraid they're going to be shut out of the policymaking process, with some reason - frequently, they are. They are eager to keep

informed because they want to sound informed to their constituents and to the press. If you're in the Congressional Relations office, it's very important that you manage that successfully so that the guys you need will be there when you need them and your relationship with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is very important. Sometimes you have to ask him for favors, like, "Don't hold that hearing just now" or "Can we move this bill this week?"

Q: When you were with Congressional Relations dealing after the 9/11 business, did you find that the Pentagon, the Department of Defense, was selling a somewhat different line?

MCILVAINE: There is always an element of competition between Defense and State because you have different approaches and you're frequently in the same arena, and particularly where you get to something where U.S. troops are being committed. But basically on that note, I think State and Defense worked very well together. I wasn't directly involved in this, in vivid contrast to the Iraq thing, where there has obviously been considerable bureaucratic trench warfare. But on Afghanistan, I didn't see any serious friction. It may have come later on in the post-war phase where Defense reluctance to commit to the stabilization force, peacekeeping force, and all that, I think has probably damaged and delayed the establishment of an Afghani government that can survive on its own. This ideological reluctance or horror at so-called nation building has gotten us into a lot of trouble. Things that we should have been done with more gusto, enthusiasm, and resources, and commitment from the start.

Q: Was it apparent right after this terrorist attack that certainly on the part of the civilian head of the Department of Defense they were gearing up and looking for reason to go into Iraq? Did State and you get involved in this?

MCILVAINE: No, not at my level. I had had lots of dealings with DOD when I was working West African affairs because of the need for military training, for support, for the West Africans for peacekeepers, all that. I had worked very closely with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and knew those guys quite well during that period. Then, when I moved to Congressional Relations, I had very little to do with DOD from there because they have the Arms Services Committees that they work with and I don't mess with those. I have the Foreign Relations Committees and they don't mess with those. I would work with the DOD congressional liaison, talk to them periodically, and we would say, "Okay, that's your turf. I'll stay out of your way. Tell me if you need anything." And they'd do the same with me. It was very useful for both of us to keep that division. It may have seemed a bit artificial but you're in that job of congressional affairs representing a department and an administration. Your most valuable currency is your relationship at my level, with the staffers; at my boss' level his relationship with the key senators and members, because frequently you're asking for favors, you need something to be moved, you need something to be delayed for whatever political reason, you need something to happen now or to not happen now, and they can do that. That means frequently they need favors and you have to help them. They need information, a briefing, to be able to talk to

their constituents about something. They need their letter answered. You have to be able to deliver that, too. It's a give and take but that give and take is critical to your success in that job. If you can call those guys up in the middle of the night and ask for a favor and they'll respond, you're doing well. If you can't...

Q: As a professional Foreign Service officer and dealing with foreign affairs, did you experience among yourself or with your colleagues any disquiet over the thrust of the Bush administration's foreign policy before and after 9/11 towards relations with Europe and elsewhere?

MCILVAINE: A little. The liberal democratic side was always frustrated, that cared about Africa. And here I'm talking about Biden's staff and Feingold's staff. They were politely frustrated that the administration wouldn't spend more time. They were very good about not complaining heavily about it. They understood that the bureau was working hard on Africa but that the administration would not be spending more time on and committing more resources to some of the problems they were very aware of. But that's normal. It probably went the other way in the previous Administration where the Republicans claimed that we were spending too much time on Africa. "Why is Clinton going to Africa again?" That's normal.

I don't deserve any credit but the working relationship on the Senate Africa Subcommittee between Feingold and Frist kept the partisan peace and we didn't get into any serious partisan wrangling. They got along with each other. They agreed that Africa was important. Early on, there was a Malian president who had a West African initiative to ban individual weapons, the AK-47, easily available throughout Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Helms' staff decided this was gun control and somehow connected this to their domestic horror of gun control. Every now and then, you run into these weird ideological stumbling blocks with members of Congress that you just didn't anticipate and you have to grapple your way through those.

Q: Speaking of this, you mentioned earlier about the AIDS epidemic. What about with Africa and AIDS? Did that involve you?

MCILVAINE: Oh, yes. It was devastating. We first became aware of it in the Congo in '83/'84. At the embassy there, we had a guy named Jonathan Mann. He was doing the first serious AIDS research at Mama Yemo Hospital. I got to know him. His wife then was French and she worked with me as a translator. She was our local hire translator for documents and things like that. Very nice lady. Mann later became the UN World AIDS guy and then even later died in that Swissair plane crash in Nova Scotia.

We became aware of this horrible disease. People were dying. It was just beginning to appear on the national scene back home. We went to Tanzania and it was not noticeable in Dar es Salaam and amongst the people I worked with. But I was hearing about it upcountry particularly around the southern shores of Lake Victoria. This belt here from southern Uganda to northern Tanzania was just devastated by AIDS, village after village

after village.

So I flew up to Bukoba, the Tanzanian town on Lake Victoria, just to find out what was going on. I went to the hospital there and came back horrified. It was a war zone. Right out of town there were villages... One had 223 orphans. Basically, people were telling me - these were Catholic priests and the medical workers at the hospital - that in village after village there were no mature adults. It was kids and the old folks. Everybody in between was dead. The old folks were struggling somehow to manage the kids and to feed them. I had a long talk with the folks at the hospital in Mwanza, where they were struggling to get surgical gloves because their health professionals were starting to die off. It was clear something serious was going on.

My next assignment was Zambia and there it was in plain sight. People I worked with at the foreign ministry just withered and died, disappeared. No one would say what had happened to them. "Where did So and So go?" "Oh, well, he died last week." "What happened?" "Oh, something." It was clear what it was. About five days before Christmas, we had been there three months, and the cook's teenage son knocks on the door about 4:00 AM and says, "Mama is very sick and we need your help." So I go with him to the servants' quarters and she is extremely sick. I carry her to my Land Rover, put her in the back seat of the Land Rover, and drive him and her to the hospital. Two days later, she's dead. It's AIDS. We had just gotten to know her. The kids were playing with her children. All the rest. So it got right home very quickly. Then every day the procession of funerals going out to this graveyard that was on the way to the school... It was devastating. It was wrecking Zambia. And then you hear the stories later about Botswana, where it's even worse. One of every four adult males is infected. It's appalling.

Q: How about during the time you were with Congressional Relations? Was AIDS a dominant theme?

MCILVAINE: It was a big theme and I didn't work with it. It was done mainly by the people doing the Office of Environment and Science, OES. There was big AIDS legislation but I didn't do it.

Q: Is there any other thing we should talk about about this last phase?

MCILVAINE: One other thing on AIDS that was particularly interesting and this particularly came through while I was in Zambia. That was the extent to which culture contributed to it. AIDS in Africa, or at least in the parts of Africa that I was dealing with, southern and eastern Africa, was transmitted mostly through heterosexual contact. That worked for several reasons. One, the poor medical system. There was a lot of venereal disease which meant that there were open sores in the vagina. It meant that if one or other of the partners was HIV positive, it was much easier to transmit the disease than it is in the West, where healthcare is reasonably good and you don't have open sores, you don't have the easy transmission. Secondly, the healthcare system was in very bad shape. Government after government had not put its resources into that. Healthcare was very

limited. Thirdly, and the one that was surprising, was how much the culture contributed to it. The view that the urban male could be a predator and that was just fine. My wife likes to say that the most dangerous thing a woman could do in Zambia was get married because you could count on your husband running around, becoming HIV positive, and then infecting you. You could just about count on it. There were all these stories about how the woman was supposed to pack their husbands bag for a trip - not a very liberated society - and put in the condoms so that when he was playing around on the trip. It was just assumed that if you were a successful male, which usually meant a senior government official, you could prey on any comely young thing in the ministry you came across. It seemed to be generally accepted. That contributed enormously to the easy transmission and the movement of the disease and the devastating impact it had on usually the most educated, the most privileged section of society. It was a bad news story all the way around. There was no good news about it.

Q: What did this do to you and your family and other American families? If the cook dies of AIDS, this is not good news.

MCILVAINE: As DCM, part of my responsibility was the morale and the protection of the mission. We did spend some time keeping the mission educated on the disease and the situation and how it could be transmitted. Basically, although it was all around us, we were well insulated from it. The Zambians around us were not. Hardly anybody could escape noticing that. We didn’t have any AIDS within the American community. We didn’t have any cases of it. We had to consciously reassure our people that if normal practices were maintained, you could prevent transmission from servants or anybody working on your house or anything like that. So we didn’t have any panic. But it was always there, the cloud in the background. For some families, it came right into the foreground when somebody you knew or worked with or admired or respected withered up and died.

Q: How about the Peace Corps? These are young, mostly single people.

MCILVAINE: I think Peace Corps was very careful to scare them to death in the training process. We never had any problem that I was aware of. We had a large Peace Corps presence in Zambia. But that’s not to say it didn’t happen. It must have been a major concern. A lot of kids, they’re young, they’re by themselves. But they were mostly in the countryside and AIDS was largely then - this may have changed - an urban phenomenon. It followed the highways. It was in the cities amongst the mobile elite. It wasn’t really a problem in the more static villages.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop. I want to thank you very much.

End of interview