Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

WARD BARMON

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 27th of July 1998. This is an interview with Ward Barmon. This is

being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

To begin with, can you tell me when and where you were born and a bit about your family?

BARMON: Sure. I was born in Huntington, Long Island in 1943. My father was an airline executive for most of his career. We lived in Lima, Peru, from 1947 to 1951. He worked for Panagra and then worked for Civil Air Transport. We lived in Hong Kong and Taipei, Taiwan from 1954 to 1956. Then, my mother and brother and I moved back to Long Island and Dad retired in 1972. So, that is a little of how I grew up partly overseas.

Q: You were first where, in Peru?

BARMON: In the Foreign Service?

Q: No, I mean living overseas.

BARMON: Oh, in Lima.

Q: You were there from what age?

BARMON: From age four to eight.

Q: Did you pick up Spanish?

BARMON: Yes, which I subsequently lost and had to relearn.

Q: That's the name of the game. Then you went to Hong Kong?

BARMON: Yes, for a year in 1954. Then we went to Taipei and lived there for a year.

Q: I don't imagine that you got much Chinese as a kid?

BARMON: Just swear words, basically. Then I studied Chinese at FSI later.

Q: When you came back where did you go to school?

BARMON: I came back and went to a local junior high school in Huntington and then went away to boarding school in Hotchkiss and then to Yale.

Q: You were at Hotchkiss from when to when?

BARMON: 1958 to 1961, I believe. Three years.

Q: What sort of things were you studying at Hotchkiss?

BARMON: Oh, just the usual courses, the standard curriculum.

Q: Much in the way of International Affairs?

BARMON: Not too much. I majored in Asian history at Yale. That reflected my interest in the Far East.

Q: So, from 1961 to 1965 you were at Yale?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: When you left Hotchkiss did you have any idea of why you wanted to go to Yale?

BARMON: Well, it was a popular school among Hotchkiss students. I really did not want to go to such a large University, but my father pushed me towards it. So, I ended up there and loved it.

Q: You said your major was Chinese studies?

BARMON: Well, at Yale, at least in my day, you had to do a double area major in history. So, I majored in American and Asian history. I was pre-med, too, but it did not last that long.

Q: Was there still a tradition about Yale and China? Were you getting reflections of that?

BARMON: I believe so. I did not express an interest in the Yale/China Program. I was more interested in studying for my Ph.D. in Chinese history. One of my professor's, Mrs. Wright discouraged me. Well, she did not discourage me, she just said to come back when I have studied Chinese/ Mandarin, French, and German at least so I could speak and read those languages.
Q: That was pretty daunting.

BARMON: It was, and it effectively discouraged me from pursuing an academic career in Chinese history.

Q: Was there any thrust, would you say to the Chinese history? Were you getting much about what was going on in China at the time about the "Great Leap Forward" and the Cultural Revolution?

BARMON: Most of the courses that I took were prior to that period. Mrs. Wright taught modern Chinese history, but it only went up to the 1911 Revolution.

Q: Had you picked up any feel for the Foreign Service at this point?

BARMON: Yes, when we lived in Hong Kong we had some good friends whose father worked in the consulate general. That, I guess was my first taste. I also met some embassy people when I lived in Taipei, so that was perhaps my first exposure, my first interest.

Q: When you got out of Yale in 1965, what then?

BARMON: Well, I went to Spain for a year. I wanted to relearn my Spanish. I did a year at the University of Madrid.

Q: What was student life like in those days?

BARMON: In Madrid?

Q: Yes.
BARMON: Well, it was cheap for one thing, which was nice. It was tough for the Spanish students, especially if they were very liberal, because of Franco. There were a lot of demonstrations, riots, and police. I pretty much stayed out of that. I did a lot of traveling around Spain. I managed to relearn my Spanish really quickly, and fairly enjoyed my year in Spain.

Q: Again, were there any contacts with the embassy?

BARMON: Very little. I went in and talked with a couple of junior officers just to get a feel for it. They were very nice. One of them I ran into subsequently my first tour.

Q: Who was that?

BARMON: Dick Tenny, in Belize.

Q: After the year in Spain, what were you pointed towards? Were you pointed towards anything at that point?

BARMON: Well, I had already taken the written exam and passed. I deferred my oral. So that was a possibility, and also graduate school. I applied and was excepted at Georgetown. I went to Georgetown for a semester until I heard from the Foreign Service.

Q: When did you take the oral exam?

BARMON: Late in my senior year at Yale. I'm sorry, that was my written. I took the oral when I came back from Spain, so that was a year later.

Q: So that would have been about 1966?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions?

BARMON: The only one that I recall is the story that was in The New York Times that morning. It was an U.S. Supreme Court case. I do not know what case. I had long forgotten what case it was. But, I remember thinking that I was fortune to have glanced at that particular article in The Times. At least I could say something coherent about it.

Q: In those days the exam what a bit ad hoc. It was not a bad exam. Just now they are trying so hard to make sure that everyone is on equal footing.

BARMON: Yes, it was only an hour long. They put you in some awkward situations to see how you would react. I guess I did all right.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

BARMON: March '67.

Q: I take it you went to an A-100 course and all that? What was your impression of the group?

BARMON: We had about 29 FSOs and then another seven, eight or nine USIS types. So, it was not a small, but not a large class either. I think there were a couple of classes that year that were around 70. I think that is too large. So, we had a good size class, and things went well. We only had one problem (officer) that just barely made it through the course. He never went overseas because he got into so many problems. But, the rest of us survived. Some of us went of to Vietnam. Well, no, I take it back. We lost another couple because he had been in the Navy in Vietnam. He was asked if he would be willing to go back as a civilian. He said yes. Then he married someone in the class and decided he did not want to go back to Vietnam. They said you go to Vietnam or you leave. So, he left and his new bride, who was a Czech lady and spoke four or five languages. They were a wonderful couple and it was a real loss to the Foreign Service, but they were determined to force him to go back to Vietnam.

Q: That sounds so strange since he had already served there.

BARMON: He felt kind of betrayed. I did not have to go because I had just got married during the course. So, they did not force me to go.

Q: Did you have a choice, or was there a provision where you could ask where

you wanted to go?

BARMON: I was not asked where I wanted to go. I was asked if I would not mind going to British Honduras. I said no, I would not mind, so that is where I was sent.

Q: It is still British Honduras?

BARMON: Well, it is Belize now.

Q: You were in Belize from when?

BARMON: From 1967 to 1969 when it was still a British colony.

Q: When you go there, can you describe what it was like?

BARMON: As the then post report said, it reminded one of a town along the Mississippi River, or the Mississippi Delta back in the depression days. It was very poor, tin, ramshackle shacks sewers. Pretty awful. There is a book out by the vice consul that served there in the early 1960s (Richard Conroy). If you are doing an oral history on Belize, you definitely want to get him to talk about his experiences. Of course, they are all in the book.

Q: What did we have there a consulate general?

BARMON: Consulate. Three officers which I thought at the time was one too many.

Q: What did you do?

BARMON: I was the number three in charge of the Consular Section. I had three ladies of Belize as my staff. I also did some political reporting the first year and did all the cultural work. Then, my second year, they brought in somebody else to do the consular work, a staff officer who was trained in consular work. I did administrative work and kept my political reporting and USIS jobs. Every area except that which I specialized in later, which was economics.

Q: What were American interests there?

BARMON: Almost none. There was a concern about the Cuban communist influence as well as Guatemala's interest in taking over British Honduras. They were concerned about that igniting some kind of little war in the area. Not much of a drug problem back then, a little bit of Marijuana growing up in the North. There really was not a smuggling conduit at that point that they knew of. There were some odd characters, a couple of Americans doing artifact smuggling, robbing the Mayan temples. A little bit of agriculture exported through to the

U.S., sugar cane, citrus, fish products. But, we did not have a lot of interests.

Q: What about relations with the British there?

BARMON: Relations were very good. The British governor and his assistant. The British Garrison, headed up by a colonel. Some British civil servant types who ran some of the ministries. Or, if they did not run the ministries, they were advisors to the ministries in agriculture, education, etc., left over from the colonial days.

Q: It still was a colony?

BARMON: Until the early 1980s.

Q: Were things sort of in line to give them independence?

BARMON: Well, it was moving along slowly, but the biggest fear the Belizeans had themselves and the British had, of course, was that the Guatemalans might invade if the British pulled out.

Q: So there was no real push for independence?

BARMON: No. They became self-governing in the early to mid-1960s, I believe. The British were there to run foreign affairs, defense, and advise them in other areas. Basically, they were self-governing.

Q: How much of a threat was Guatemala?

BARMON: In fact, not much of a threat. I do not think that the Guatemalans were prepared to take on the Brits. But, there was a lot of hype in the media and people professed to be afraid. The Mexicans, of course, wanted their piece of Belize if the Guatemalans came in. There was some scare tactics by the Guatemalans, but in fact, it was not a real threat.

Q: You said you were doing political work?

BARMON: I reported on the opposition party, the "NIPS," the National Independent Party. They did not get into power until the late '70s, early '80s. So, the People's United Party, the "PUPS," were in power for 20 years, until they were replaced by the NIPS.

Q: What was your impression of the political party's leadership?

BARMON: Oh, it was pretty amateurish. The premier, George Price, was an ex-Jesuit student in the States and had received the "word of God" in a vision to go back and lead his people. So, he left the seminary and came back and was in fact, a couple years later elected Premier. He was Premier for 20 years until the

opposition leader replaced him. Then, he won another term after that. So, he was Prime Minister during some of the 80s.

Q: Was there much social life there at that time?

BARMON: Well, there were not terribly many college graduates among the Belizeans. They were very nice people. We had some friends among the younger lawyers, and a few professionals, but a small group.

Q: Were the Cubans mucking around at all?

BARMON: No, but there was always the fear that they might muck around in Yucatan, just to the north. But, in fact, no.

Q: Around this time did we put troops in the Dominican Republic?
BARMON: I think that was 1965.
Q: So, that did not have any repercussion?

BARMON: Not that I am aware of. I did not get to Belize until September of 1967. But there was some concern about Cuban influence in that part of the Caribbean. As far as I am aware of there wasn't.

Q: Did you get any feel from the British there that they wished, "Hell, let the Guatemalans take it over?"

BARMON: The British would have liked to have left. They were spending 10 million pounds a year with their aid program and military garrison. I think those expenses were on top of 10 million that they gave to subsidize the colony. They would have gotten out earlier, but they felt constrained. They did not want to seem to be abandoning the colony with the perils of a Latino country invading a non-Latino country.

Q: After this rather sterile experience….(Barmon interjects)

BARMON: It wasn't sterile at all. We thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a fascinating experience.

Q: In what way?

BARMON: Well, for one thing it was very useful for me my first tour doing all these different jobs. There were very few Americans. We really got to know the local society, the Creoles, the Caribbeans, a few Latinos, the Brits, and some wonderful characters. They ended up in Belize for some odd reasons. Some were jaguar hunters, some were leftovers from the war. There were Jewish refugees, Arabs, Chinese, a couple of Germans that ended up there after the war was over. A truly interesting collection of people.

Q: After you finished this, where did you want to go?

BARMON: I was offered a job working for Bill MacComber in Congressional Relations when I came back to Washington.

Q: Congressional Relations from when to when?

BARMON: Just for one year. 1969-1970. I was the junior staff assistant.

Q: What was Bill like to work for?

BARMON: Bill was a real screamer. He used to get on the phone with other offices around the Department and just yell at them and swear up and down. He did not seem to place much emphasis on foreign policy. However, he was very interested in keeping the representatives and senators happy. So, whatever effort he could make to make sure the offices around the Department provided consular and other services quickly and efficiently, even if he had to scream and swear at them, that was his main interest. That was the impression I had.

Q: I would have thought that Congress would have been wanting a hell of a lot because this was at the height at the Vietnam War. I would have thought would have dominated the service of Congress. Was it?

BARMON: My impression was the Bill stayed out of that. He was more interested in keeping the congressmen as happy as he could: passports, visas, American services, etc.

Q: Very consular oriented?

BARMON: Well, yes. That was the impression that he gave. I think he was effective at that.

Q: Oh, yes! Oh, no that is not something to be denied. That is a very important aspect of our work. To keep the Congressmen happy makes for a happy State Department.

BARMON: And off the backs of the other principals.

Q: How did he deal with his staff?

BARMON: Fortunately, there was an executive assistant between him and me. So, he acted as sort of a buffer. I made myself a scarce as possible because anybody he saw, he tended to scream at. But, he could be very nice, too. He would be screaming at you one minute and being very pleasant the next. Strange man.

Q: Do you feel he was very effective in the various things he did?

BARMON: Well, frankly, I think he was less effective in his management job. The only other personal contact that I had with him later was when the Vietnam Task Force was put together to review the Pentagon Papers. I volunteered (silly me), to work on this task force. He was the head of it. He assembled a group of senior officers in the Vietnam Working Group Office. Steve Johnson and I were the gofers, and then we had some secretaries. Late that Friday night, the senior officers finished reviewing the text to be included in a memorandum (which was to be delivered to the Solicitor General) in order to present the U.S. governments case on Sunday morning to the Supreme Court. So, there was a bit of a frantic atmosphere trying to prepare this memorandum. He came out after they had finished and was standing over one of the poor secretary's backs watching her work. He was making her very nervous. I do not know what got into me. I went up to him and I said, "Sir, you are making the secretaries very nervous. Would you mind leaving them alone? We'll make sure this gets done." His face got red. I thought, uh oh, there goes my career, if not my life. He calmed down a little bit and said, "Ward, all right! You just make sure this gets done and let me know if there are any problems!" So he stormed off to the Operations Center. We got it done. I got in a taxi Sunday morning about 8:00, went over and delivered it to the Solicitor General who presented it to the Supreme Court, and lost the case.

Q: Could you explain what the basic situation was, why you were doing this?

BARMON: Well, because the Executive Branch felt that there was classified information, including sources and methods in these papers that were pilfered from the Pentagon by Ellsberg. So, our task was to review the papers and decide, which, in fact, we felt, had revealed classified information, sources, methods, etc. Therefore, we needed to make the case that these papers should be embargoed and should not be publicized. Of course, they had been already published by The New York Times and The Washington Post. I think we wanted to indict Ellsberg. We failed in our effort. It was an interesting couple of days working for this task force.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

BARMON: Junior staff assistant, gofer, fill-ins for people, for example, doing the daily Congressional Record Summary. Helping out George Winett faking Bill MacComber's signature on all the letters to Congress, (with permission, of course), or filling in where I was needed. Basically doing very junior assistant work. I also was able to attend a number of meetings, briefing sessions, with staffers and a few congressmen. Several fairly junior officers and I formed a small group to meet monthly with some staffers. We had some interesting exchanges during lunch at the Foreign Service Club.

Q: Well, you sort of learned the layout of the Department of State, though didn't

you?

BARMON: Yes, it was very useful.

Q: When you left there you went to where?

BARMON: EA, staff assistant for Assistant Secretary Marshall Green.

Q: Now, he is a different person (from MacComber)?

BARMON: Oh, wonderful man. Just a wonderful boss. Very humane person, very smart. A delight to work for. He just recently died.

Q: Yes, I went to his funeral about a month and a half ago.

BARMON: I used to sit in the country team meetings, and hear him quipping back and forth, very funny.

Q: You were doing this from?

BARMON: 1970 to 1971. And that was during the height of the war. Very interesting perspective.

Q: What was your impression of how people were? You're in the guts of the Foreign Service Establishment looking at Vietnam. By this time we were pretty well pulled out?

BARMON: No, I do not think we began that process for another year or two.

Q: What was your impression how the East Asian establishment was looking at the war?

BARMON: Well, my impression from my very low vantage point was that we were still very vigorously prosecuting the war. I remember one incident very well where shortly after the Cambodian incursion a letter circulated among FSO's. It was supposed to be a private letter to the Secretary protesting the incursion and I was asked if I wanted to sign it. Something prevented me, I do not know why even though I was not terribly happy with the incursion. I did not sign it, and later on the letter was made public, even though we were told it was not going to be. The people who had signed were investigated and some of them had a rough time. That was kind of unfortunate. People were kind of intimidated. There was talk of people being forced to take lie detector tests to determine, whether these people were truly loyal to the Foreign Service. It was all a bit nasty.

Q: This is coming right from Nixon in the White House.

BARMON: Absolutely.

Q: I am told that Rogers more or less sort of protected the Foreign Service. Nixon had sort of said to get rid of them.

BARMON: Yes, but Bill Rogers was kind of ineffectual, and not very strong. It was tough for him to stand up to Kissinger. I think he did and try to protect the career officers. I think in the end, nothing really happened. I think they may have received a reprimand. I do not think that their career suffered. It was kind of a messy incident.

Q: How did Marshall Green use you and the other assistants?

BARMON: Well, there were two of us. Basically, paper central. One aspect that was a little tricky was that we received a lot of highly classified cables. We were in charge of making sure only certain officers got to see them. We interpreted that directive pretty loosely. Our feeling was that the people that really needed to see them were the desk officers, the ones that were doing the drafting and responses to those cables. But, these cables really were only supposed to be going to the office directors. So, we got into trouble a couple of times. The operations people would make a stink because they thought we were making too many copies, and distributing too many copies of those cables. I was not cleared to see the code word traffic, the other stuff. The secretaries handled those things.

Q: How did Marshall Green operate?

BARMON: He operated rather loosely in the sense that he was not a micromanager like his office directors. You were on your own as long as you reported back to him. I think he was a very effective manager. Never heard any criticism of him. You heard people making remarks about "Wild Bill Sullivan," but none about Marshall.

Q: At this point, did the NSC, did you pick up any emanations about Kissinger operations and the White House bypassing the State Department?

BARMON: Sure, what you read in the press. We were so busy, very active with a lot going on. So, I do not think we paid too much attention.

Q: After the two staff assistant jobs, what then?

BARMON: Then I studied Chinese.

Q: And you studied Chinese starting 1971?

BARMON: Yes, at FSI for a year. Then I went to Taipei in the embassy for two years and did not do my second year of Chinese until that.

Q: So, you went straight to the embassy?
BARMON: Yes.

Q: Well, let us talk about 1971, 1972, the Chinese training. How did the Chinese sit with you?

BARMON: Well, it is something that I always wanted to learn after living in Hong Kong and Taiwan. So, I got my chance; it was hard to get. I think a lot of the reason for going to the staff assistant job and EA was the hope to get Chinese from there. It is probably easier to get it from EA than from another job outside the Bureau. So, I was able to get Chinese training, but did not want to do two years in a row. It was an unusual way of doing it, but I am glad that it worked out that way.

Q: How far along were you coming by 1972? Did you feel it was going fairly well?

BARMON: Yes. I cannot remember exactly what I got, but almost nothing reading. You do not start your reading until your second year. I went to Taipei and got along fairly well with the Chinese on my job.

Q: You were in Taipei from 1972 to 1974?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: How would you describe Taiwan and Taipei at this time?

BARMON: Well, of course, I had the perspective of living over there in the mid 1950s when Taipei was very poor. There were very few automobiles on the streets. Many people were hungry, disease everywhere, entirely polluted. By the time I arrived in 1972, they outlawed burning of soft coal. People were in much better health. Taiwan started to produce for export, particularly textiles, electronics, and manufacturing components. So, when I was there, it really started to take off economically, but was still very backward and politically repressed. In those 15 years, it had progressed tremendously, and it was quite a different place.

Q: Who was the ambassador there?

BARMON: Walter McConaughy, a wonderful southern gentleman, and a Chinese language specialist. This was his last tour.

Q: You were there during the opening to China? That must have been quite an earthquake!

BARMON: Well, it was very traumatic for the Taiwanese, particularly the

mainlanders. Yes, it was a difficult period. The Taiwanese adjusted fairly quickly, however. Shortly thereafter, we downgraded the embassy to an "Institute."

Q: What were your interests?

BARMON: I was the junior economic officer and also the assistant commercial attaché. So, I did a variety of things. The most interesting was the commercial side doing trade work, promoting American investments, and promoting Taiwanese purchasing in the U.S. It was wonderful. It was an ideal job because the Taiwanese had decided to buy from the United States. They wanted to try and keep us as close as possible. So, they would all of a sudden be sending a trade mission of 10 people to purchase, giving them 800 million dollars and saying do not come back until you spend it. So, this made my job quite easy! All I had to do was arrange appointments!

Q: And take credit…

BARMON: Oh, of course.

Q: Did you find sort of an uneasiness towards the end?

BARMON: Sure, there was a lot of uneasiness. They kept a very close eye on our assistance structure. Of course, we phased out AID in the mid 1960s, but military people were there, and we started to phase them out. Yes, they were very nervous about us abandoning them. And of course, we were among the last to leave. Taiwan was left with very few countries that had diplomatic relations: a few Latin American countries, a few African and Arab countries, and not much else.

Q: Were getting much from them about what was going on in China itself?

BARMON: Well, from the cable traffic and news media. Yes, a fair amount, there was a lot of information.

Q: What about piracy of records, etc.?

BARMON: There was patent and copyright infringement; there was a lot of that going on. We got involved to a certain extent, but there was not a great deal that we could do because the Taiwanese were very adept closing their operation and opening one three blocks away. The government would go through the motions, but it was pretty hard to catch these people.

Q: Was that part of your job?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: I would think that you would have been sending reams of lists of pirated books,

and records.

BARMON: We did not spend a large amount of time doing that unless we got a specific complaint from a U.S. company. Then we would go in and encourage the U.S. company to hire a local lawyer after the company had already spent a considerable amount of money. As I said before, they would be successful in getting the operation close down, and three months later, it would open up three blocks away. I remember, Aladdin, you know, for Thermos bottles, drinks, those were being pirated like mad. I don not think we ever succeeded in totally closing them down. You could buy a whole set of Encyclopedia Britannica for $50.00. Of course, the pictures were not very clear, and the print was smudged. I must confess, I bought a few pirated books myself.

Q: I have one or two tucked away!

BARMON: I do not think either government was too serious about going after these people.

Q: In 1974, were there any demonstrations against the United States?

BARMON: I do not remember. But there was a lot of noise in the media.

Q: In 1974 did you go back to Chinese studies?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: By this time had you made pretty good progress in your speaking?

BARMON: Well, yes and no. The problem is that those habits that become ingrained after two years of speaking, you have to break. That was the hardest part for me. That was the disadvantage that I had competing against those who had just come from FSI, who did not have those habits ingrained.

Q: What habits are these?

BARMON: Well these are ways of expressing yourself at the one plus, two level. Then, to get over that barrier to reach a three level, you have to break a lot of those phrases and patterns that you have memorized in order to learn new ones. It took me months before I was able to get back into the swing of things. The advantage was, I was perhaps fresher. I was more anxious to start than some of the other students who had already had a year of studying Chinese. Also, I had a certain level of confidence after using it for two years. I could express myself easily, but just not on a very educated level. I think the way I did it was good, at least for me. It was a useful way of doing it. I just did not want to study for two years in a row.

Q: From the teachers there, were you getting much of the politics of Taiwan?

BARMON: Oh, sure. Of course their biggest hatred was directed against the Japanese. Many if these were mainland teachers and they just hated the Japanese. But, of course the mainlanders hated the communists as well. So, we learned to take on some of their prejudices, especially against the Japanese. They just said awful things against the Japanese. They described them as "dwarf slaves." Awful! I am not sure that I have ever gotten over that.

Q: At one point I took Serbian for year with a couple of honest to God Serbs who fit in very nicely in the Serbian government in Belgrade today. We picked up all sorts of things about the Croats. Where did you go after you got out in 1975?

BARMON: I thought I might be going to Beijing. We had just opened up an interests section in Beijing. George Bush was sent to head the interests section. I thought that I might be going as the economic officer, but one of my colleagues was selected. So, I was looking around for a job. Then, there was some kind of commercial conference going on in Taipei. I met the commercial attaché from Bangkok. We talked and I ended up going to Bangkok.

Q: From 1975 to?

BARMON: 1975 to the end of 1977.

Q: How was Bangkok in 1975?

BARMON: Bangkok was a nervous place. Saigon had just fallen a few months before. People were really concerned about what might happen there.

Q: How was the embassy?

BARMON: Huge. Overwhelming, it was so large. It made Taipei look tiny, not to speak of Belize. Hundreds and hundreds of people. This did not include the military and USIS posts up in the Northeast and elsewhere.

Q: What were you doing?

BARMON: Again, I was a commercial officer and worked in the commercial office across from the embassy. There were three American officers and a number of Thais.

Q: What was your major interest?

BARMON: Thailand was just starting to flourish economically. There were lots of major project opportunities, which I kind of made my own. I decided that I would go after those. It was rather ironic to me that most of the Department of

Commerce officials did not seem to place much importance on major projects, except for the major projects people themselves. I got a nice little note after I had been to Thailand for a year from the major projects people saying my work in Taipei on major projects had been appreciated as was my work in Thailand. They noticed a significant decrease in reporting of major projects since I left Taiwan and a tremendous increase after I had arrived in Bangkok. So, they were very appreciative, but the rest of the Commerce Department was not interested. They were more interested in the much more traditional trade opportunities. So, to answer your question, I kind of made major projects my special area.

Q: You say major projects, what do you mean?

BARMON: These are mainly major construction projects. Electrical generating, plants, transportation projects, bridges, airports, seaports, gas/oil pipelines, which were usually multimillion-dollar deals. I would try to report on these early to American companies so they could pick what interested them most. And, to help them if they wanted to compete for any of them.

Q: How responsive did you find business at the time?

BARMON: American business? Oh, quite responsive. The big construction companies were very interested in competing on projects, like Westinghouse, General Electric, etc. Many of them had small offices in the region. They were sending people through quite regularly. They would come in and talk to me and I would be as helpful as I could.

Q: How did you find Thai officials?

BARMON: Very open, seemingly open, responsive, and helpful. Sometimes they did not know a lot themselves if it was a private sector project. Yes, very helpful.

Q: Was there a lot of under the table negotiating, influence of money, what have you?

BARMON: Well, there was a fair amount of that going on. Particularly the European companies: the Germans, the French, the British. Sometimes it made it difficult to compete. We tried at least to provide early and accurate information so the American companies could compete. Then if they wanted to play that other game that was up to them. I did not want to hear about that. It was illegal as far as we were concerned. Our hands were tied. We could not even push one American company if there were more than one. So, it was difficult.

Q: In a way we really did not have a coherent policy, did we?

BARMON: Well, it is just the way we operate as a government. The Japanese were probably our biggest competitors out there, and then later, the Koreans. We

just operated differently. I think some of the Asian countries appreciated it. However, I am sure there was an awful lot of corruption. I am sure we lost a lot of projects because of that. I am convinced in many cases that we had the best project presentation and probably among the best equipment. It was always tough to compete against the Germans, because they had such a good reputation. Then, later, it was the Japanese. On the commercial side, we just did not know how to market products in Asia. During that period in the 1970s, GM [General Motors] and Ford did such a poor job. They basically controlled the market in Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s. They lost it to the Japanese in the 1970s for a very simple reason. They did not know how to finance the sale of the cars and trucks. The financing was for too short a period of time. The Japanese came in and offered 10 year financing, or five to 10 year financing. GM, Chrysler, and Ford could not compete, or chose not to. So, we lost that market.

Q: Were we trying to make them aware of how the game was played?

BARMON: Those companies are so big, they do not listen to us. On the financing side, they were very short sighted. They wanted the money up front quickly, and were not willing to extend longer term financing. It was too bad.

Q: Were we concerned at the time (since it was close to the fall of Vietnam) about maybe there would be some convulsion in Thailand that it would be taken over by the Communists?

BARMON: I do not think the concern was too great. There was some concern. We watched the border area very closely. The Thais were more concerned with internal subversion. There was one incident that happened when I was there that had everybody all excited. There was a lot of concern about the flood of refugees. Among the refugees were agents that came across the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Largely in the Northeast, and along the border area closer to Bangkok. I can't remember exactly how this started, but there was a rumor going around to not eat the watermelons or the ducks. The Vietnamese along the border largely grew these two products. This was a conspiracy to do in the Thais. The rumor got around, and into the media very quickly that if you ate these products in any amount, it would have a negative effect on the size of the male organ, and on women's breasts. They would shrink and fall off, or eventually disappear. This was taken quite seriously. Those of us who were not Thai found this very amusing. But even we did not eat that many ducks or watermelons. We did not go to some of the lengths of the Thais though. We had a friend who was a U.S. Navy doctor. He was posted to Thailand with a naval disease research organization. He was asked to come up and visit the northeast area by the head abbot of a wat. He went into this room, where there was a whole line of males (In another room was a line of females.). At the abbot's say so, they dropped their pants. He looked at them and said to me later that they looked perfectly normal, except that a certain number of them had fish hooks to keep them from shrinking. He thought that was a little strange. He went into the other room and saw the women. They took their

tops off and did not see anything unusual. But, the abbot was quite concerned and some of these people had obviously done some physical damage to themselves. He wrote all of this up and reported it back to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. They went through the motions and came back and said that they knew of no disease or virus transmitted through watermelons or ducks that would cause this. This panic eventually died down. However, there were serious repercussions by the Thais against some of the refugees. Some refugees were killed. This panic swept the country and continued for a couple of months. People actually finally realized that nothing was going to fall off or shrink in significance. To the Thai male, this is very important. So, the Thai people took it quite seriously. Quite an interesting story. This was the only time while I was there that there seemed to be a real concern of the average Thai that the Vietnamese really wanted to take over Thailand.

Q: Did you get involved in the disputes over American cigarettes with the Thai people? Or, maybe that came up later.

BARMON: I do not think that happened while I was there.

Q: You left Bangkok in 1977 and then?

BARMON: I came back to Washington.

Q: What were you doing?

BARMON: I took the economics course.

Q: Was that the six-month course?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: So that was 1977.

BARMON: That was the first six months of 1978.

Q: Then where did you go?

BARMON: I went to the Regional Political/Economic Office for Europe - EUR/RPE.

Q: You did that from what?

BARMON: 1978 to 1980, three years.

Q: What were your major concerns?

BARMON: I was the junior desk officer. I also had the Council of Europe. I think I was only one of two officers who was interested in the Council of Europe. The other was Pat Derian, head of the Human Rights Bureau.

Q: Why would she be interested?

BARMON: The Council of Europe was very active in Human Rights. It was much more so than the European Community. Nobody else in the United States government was interested in the Council of Europe. At least, none that I was aware of. I enjoyed it, because I got to go to Strasbourg several times.

Q: What was the Council of Europe?

BARMON: It was a loose organization set up after the war. There were 25 or 26 European member countries to promote democracy, human rights, and development, etc. No power, unlike NATO, but it was a useful public forum. It had a staff of several thousand people.

Q: You were there during the middle of the Carter Administration?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: In the European Bureau, what was the reaction to the human rights pact and all?

BARMON: I think it was a laughing stock.. The importance placed on human rights above anything else except for non-proliferation, which was Carter's other pillar of foreign affairs. I think most people kind of snickered behind their hands, unfortunately.

Q: Actually it turned out to be much more important than we give credit for.

BARMON: Yes. But Pat Derian was just a little too pushy and I remember one incident where she went to Singapore and lectured Lee Quan Yu, who had her thrown out of the country.

Q: You were dealing with the European Community?

BARMON: Yes, and the European Parliament had just been formed. That was another one of my responsibilities.

Q: What was the consensus within the European Bureau about, was this going to be something viable, or was this going to break down?

BARMON: I think most people had accepted the Community. The Parliament was another matter. People were very skeptical about the Parliament developing

into anything. It did not then have the power of the purse. But, it did have a few powers, and I think it later became a viable organization. However, back then it was only a year or two old, and people were very skeptical. The Commission was extremely bureaucratic, even then. It has probably become more so. So, it was very slow, ponderous, but it did wield power.

Q: Were there concerns about this hurting American trade?

BARMON: Oh, sure. We were tremendously concerned about that. I think in the end it benefited us by opening up the internal tariffs. A lot of American companies had the sense to set up some kind of facility in one of those countries so they could use that as a springboard. Yes, there was a lot of initial concern.

Q: How did we look at the French, were they a particular problem?

BARMON: Oh, sure. They were also a particular problem inside the Community itself. Not just with us. So, I think we dealt largely with other countries that were more amicable to our interests, particularly the Germans, Italians and also the smaller countries.

Q: There was a lot of strain on the American-European Alliance over shorter range/medium range nuclear weapons, the SS 20 vs. the cruise missiles. Did that intrude in your work?

BARMON: The other regional office in the Bureau, RPM, mostly through NATO and our bilateral embassies handled that issue. Not really so much through the Community. There were some repercussions, but not with the Commission. So, the answer is no.

Q: Any major issues that you were dealing with?

BARMON: Well, the three regional issues that I was responsible for were nuclear non-proliferation, fisheries, and the Law of the Sea. The first was a hot issue. I had a lot of contact with OES, the nuclear people in OES. So I went on to OES, the nuclear area.

Q: OES meaning?

BARMON: The Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science.

Q: From your perspective, non-proliferation, what were our concerns?

BARMON: Not so much about Europe, but more about working with the Europeans concerning other countries through the International Atomic Energy Agency, which was in Vienna. We were very concerned about the Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, and three or four other countries that looked like they were developing the bomb: Argentina, Brazil, Israel, and South Africa.

Q: Did you find it was a problem trying to keep Europeans from doing business which might further research, I don't know, like Germans selling technology to Argentina, what have you?

BARMON: It was almost impossible. We had more success with the British and the Dutch.

Q: What was your impression of the Carter Administration dealing with Europe?

BARMON: I think in the normal parameter of relations, things went fairly smoothly. I think the Europeans laughed at us a little about our concern for human rights. To a certain extent, also non-proliferation. However, they played along with the game in most cases. They went through the motions.

Q: The only real human rights thing in Western Europe was Great Britain and Ireland, was it not?

BARMON: Well again, like non-proliferation, most of the human rights issues were outside of Europe. However, yes, but I do not think we got too much involved in the UK's problem in Ireland. Outside of that, there were always the concerns of how some of the workers in Germany were being treated. The immigrants form Turkey, North Africans in France. Most of the issues were outside of Europe. The Europeans usually cooperated.

Q: Any reverberations from the seizure of our hostages in Iran?

BARMON: Oh, sure. They were very sympathetic. I was not directly involved in that, but some other countries like Canada were very helpful.

Q: In 1980, you are off again, I assume.

BARMON: To OES. I spent three years in the Nuclear Safeguards Office.

Q: I would have thought the office of nuclear safeguards you would have to have a fairly strong technical background.

BARMON: I had zero technical background. I ended up there because the deputy assistant secretary in charge of Nuclear Affairs, Lou Nosenzo, and I had gotten to know each other. He said that he wanted me to come and work for him, and I could have the deputy director's job in any of the three offices. But it turned out that the NTS job was the only one available. It was the most technical of the three offices. So, I found myself doing all of the office's non-technical work. To a certain extent, some of the drafting. I was supposed to manage the employees, many of whom were senior to me in Civil Service grades. Many of them were technical experts. There is one thing that saved those three years for me. That was

that Israel bombed the Iraqi reactor. It made my job very interesting because I was the logical candidate to work within a small group of Department officers on that issue. I had to help prepare a memorandum for the President to decide whether the U.S. would leave the IABA if Israel were expelled. That is, our non-proliferation interests versus our support for Israel. We wrote a 50-page memorandum for the President and then had to boil it down to a five page executive summary and finally to a one page summary. Now, that process was more difficult - than writing the 50 pages. In the end, we decided to stay in the IAEA and Israel was not expelled, although it was not allowed to attend the General Conference that year.

Q: When you are writing a paper like this, I would have thought, politics being what they were, you would have found lobbies, (particularly the Jewish Lobby) breathing down your necks.

BARMON: They were. And, also the embassy of Israel. The embassy wanted to be kept informed on a daily basis, especially what was happening inside the State Department. It was a very important issue for the Israelis. Secretly, most of us were happy that the reactor was bombed, because it definitely was producing some plutonium. At some point, we presumed that the Iraqis could manufacture a nuclear device. But, obviously that was not our public policy. We had to balance our interests in the IAEA, which were very strongly against our pro-Israeli interest. The Israeli interests turned out to be even stronger. The decision was a close one. We did not attend the annual meeting that year, because the Israelis were denied credentials. But, they were not expelled. We fought very hard within the IAEA to keep them in. If they had been expelled, I think we might have left the agency, at least for a time period. For about a year, we scaled down our cooperation with the IAEA, but we did not leave the agency. In the end, everyone made the correct decision.

Q: What was the IAEA doing?

BARMON: Basically, its job is to monitor the research and development of nuclear weapons in the non-weapon states. Also to work with the signatory nations to persuade and prevent those countries from continuing their research. Or, if they chose to continue the research, to continue that in a peaceful area - for example, medical isotopes - not in the weapons area.

Q: In this particular field we were more or less one with the Soviets, were we not?

BARMON: They have always gone along with the non-proliferation agenda lip service. But, they have exported a lot of equipment and technological assistance to a number of countries.

Q: Where had Iraq received its equipment?

BARMON: Like Libya, from Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. They exported a lot of technology to Iraq.

Q: Were we sort of watching it?

BARMON: We were trying to. With some equipment, which is so-called "dual-use," it is very difficult to monitor. It is hard to keep track of. That was not our office, but a companion office in OES which spent all of its time trying to follow the equipment trail to make sure it did not end up in countries like Iraq.

Q: Had we more or less by the time accepted the fact that Israel had nuclear capability? Was this accepted back at that time?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: Did we try to do anything about the Israelis?

BARMON: We tried. We tried to persuade them to cease and assist. As far as I am aware of, we did not apply any sanctions. There were too many other interests.

Q: Where do you figure the Israelis were testing their weapons?

BARMON: The only one I am aware of is the one bomb in the atmosphere above South Africa. We are pretty sure that was via Israeli-South African cooperation.

Q: It was described as an "event…"

BARMON: Yes, an event in the atmosphere. It was not in our interest to point fingers too closely. We pointed the fingers at South Africa, but we were not willing to point fingers at Israel, if the trail led there. I think that it did.

Q: Who was the head during the time you were with OES?

BARMON: James Malone. We had some problems with Taiwan at this time. They were doing some nuclear research. The Assistant Secretary had worked as a lawyer, previously. He had done some work for Taiwan Nuclear Power. So he had to recuse himself on these issues.

Q: Whoever was the head of this at the time, did they have a real problem in administering the place. There was the reputation that you were not getting good management at the time. Did you see this?

BARMON: Well, I think the management varied. We did have some good people. I think the problem was more OES was just a diverse bureau trying to do nuclear on one side, non-proliferation. On the other side there was the environment, on another side, fisheries. The issues were too diverse.

Q: Did you follow Law of the Sea?

BARMON: Very little. While I was in EUR/RPE, I followed it, but there was not a great deal going on at the time. There was more activity on the economic side, seabed mining and resources.

Q: You left OES when?

BARMON: 1983. Then I went to El Salvador.

Q: You were in El Salvador from?

BARMON: 1983-1985.

Q: It was a rather hot time.

BARMON: Yes, it was a very hot time.

Q: Could you explain what the situation was in El Salvador?

BARMON: The civil insurgency was not quite as active as it had been several years earlier when the two nuns and layworkers were killed. However it was quite active at the end of 1983, just about the time I arrived. The FMLN bombed the major dam and major railroad bridge over the largest river in the country, and did destroy that bridge. They attacked and destroyed a major army garrison up in the north. That killed a lot of people. So, those two incidents happened a short while after I arrived, just prior to Christmas.

Q: What was your job?

BARMON: Economic/commercial counselor.

Q: You had two of our top professionals there. Did that make any difference?

BARMON: Yes. Pickering was an outstanding ambassador. I did not work directly for Dean Hinton, who had left before I arrived. Pickering did an outstanding job working with the interim president and later with President Duarte to bring about a resolution of the conflict. This was both in the interest of El Salvador and us.

Q: This was almost THE focus of the new Reagan Administration.

BARMON: That, and Nicaragua.

Q: I would have thought that this would have made it very difficult area in which

to cooperate. American ideology was as much part of the equation as much as getting a practical solution.

BARMON: Absolutely. It complicated matters a great deal. Especially for somebody trying to do a normal embassy job. I was trying to do a normal economic/commercial job. It was impossible to do a normal commercial job because of the violence.

Q: What was your impression of Pickering's relations with the governments that were there during the time?

BARMON: I think he had very good relations. I think he treated Duarte very respectfully. The man survived a great deal of torture at some point before he went to Venezuela in exile. Then he came back and risked his life to run for President, and won against a very nasty opposition. We gave him a great deal of support. The embassy was accused of supporting Duarte against the ARENA people (the far right). It was true. We did. We made no bones about it. We are not supposed to take sides. Actually, we did. It was clear to everybody that we were taking sides. We became targets of the far right as well as the far left. Duarte was accused by the far right of being a communist, but he was not. The most you could say that he was a populist or a socialist, but he was certainly not a communist. So, we supported him as the best hope for El Salvadoran democracy.

Q: What about on the commercial side, was there anything economically going on?

BARMON: Very little after a couple of very prominent Japanese businessmen were assassinated. Most of the foreign businessmen left. There were very few American businessmen. There was a small American Chamber of Commerce. There was a large active El Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce. I did a lot of work with both. Most of the American operations had either shut down, or were being run by Salvadorans. Visits by American businessmen had almost died out.

Q: Did you find yourself inundated by high level visitors from Washington coming with more of a political agenda than anything else?

BARMON: About once a week.

Q: (Laughter) That must have been fun.
BARMON: Everybody in the embassy became involved. This was because it was not that large of an embassy. We all had to help out. So, we took turns being control officers, just helping the ambassador and the others take care of these people. There were congressional staffers visiting all the time.

Q: Were they coming with a fixed idea and coming in with it and leaving with it?

BARMON: Only about 95% of the time.

Q: Oh, I see.

BARMON: Most of them hostile to what we were trying to do.

Q: What were they after?

BARMON: Media attention. They liked to be critical, some of them extremely vocal. Some of them were out and out proponents of the insurgent cause. They were very critical of local army and police force treatment of human rights. So, it was a very difficult time.

Q: What would you do? Would you find yourself being hissed off the stage from what you were trying to do?

BARMON: We did briefings. On average, we had one once a week. Maybe I am exaggerating slightly. There was only a major congressional member/staffer every two weeks. We always had a country team brief. The ambassador would spend hours. That, I believe, was Tom Pickering's strongest point. He, regardless of the ideological bent of the Congressmen, would devote hours and hours to talking and explaining things to them. This was to try to persuade, and let the person form an objective opinion. One of his favorite antagonists (if you want to use that word) who used to come down about every six months was Steve Solarz. I really do believe by the end of the two years that Pickering worked on him the man at least moderated his views to a certain extent. I give a lot of credit to Tom Pickering.

Q: Solarz would approach the subject, in a way, intellectually. Not completely, I mean he would try to talk to as many people as he could...

BARMON: We were convinced that when he came down for the first time that he already had his mind made up that our policy was all wrong. I remember one incident when I went along on a site visit with him. My wife, who was human rights officer in the Political Section, was the control officer because it was a Catholic refugee camp in San Salvador itself. We went to the camp and Solarz did not speak Spanish, so my wife served as interpreter. He wanted to speak to the camp leaders. Then he wanted to speak to random camp residents to get the "true scoop." Well, it was very funny. The camp leaders knew he was coming. They would all give him the same "spiel." They knew exactly what to say. The only men were the old and the crippled, and all the young men had been killed off and tortured. The women had all been raped. Then, by some chance, there was a young man, so we grabbed him. Solarz said, "I would like to speak to him." Apparently, this young man had not been properly indoctrinated. When he started speaking, he admitted that he was here on "R&R." His battle station was up in the mountain to the north. He was here on rest and relaxation, a few days off from the FMLN. He started to go on like this, and he was shut up very quickly. There were

not supposed to be any active combatants in this refugee center. So, Solarz got a bit of a different impression. This was sheer accident that young man happened to be there at the time. He soon realized he was saying the wrong things and was hustled off.

Q: He was a member of the insurgents. So, the refugee camp was not benign.

BARMON: But, that is what Solarz was led to believe. That is what he was convinced of. That was not the case, but how do you prove it? This opened up his eyes a little bit.

Q: What was your impression at the time of what we were doing there. Were you on board about what we were trying to do?

BARMON: Largely. But I thought some of what we were trying to do on the aid side was ridiculous. The land reform movement, particularly the "land-to-the-tiller" program, was a farce, I thought. Here we were supporting the government in forcing the big landowners to divide up their property if they held in excess of so many hectares. Many of them had thousands of hectares, growing cotton, coffee, etc. We were forcing them to divide up this land, and some being compensated by the state. They were dividing up these plantations, which supposedly kept the landless worker in poverty. However dividing up these huge estates into non-productive communes almost destroyed the economy and country. That was supposed to make Salvador more democratic. Some of us had some serious doubts about this. Land reform in Taiwan was very successful because the government really did pay the landowner. They gave them actual cash, money they could use to buy or start industries. Many of the farmers in Taiwan became huge businessmen over the years. As far as I know this has not happened in El Salvador. That part of our program was pretty much a disaster. I also think it was tricky to try and work with some of the security forces. The national police were better. A couple of the other police forces were pretty bad. They were horrible in terms of human rights abusers, despite our efforts. It was a touch and go situation. If we had not been there, I think the guerrillas would have had an excellent chance of winning.

Q: You left in?

BARMON: 1985.

Q: What about El Salvador from your perspective?

BARMON: It turned out well, as the insurgents finally came to the peace table with President Alfredo "Freddie" Christiani, who was our neighbor. No one else in the embassy knew him personally. My wife and I only knew him slightly socially - that he seemed extremely honest, low key, and friendly, but politically moderate despite coming from one of the famous "14 families." He turned out to

be quite a good president. He really promoted the peace process and the UN intervention. I think things turned out as well as they could have. There is still a lot of unhappiness. At least El Salvador has a chance today. It was a very difficult process. There is still a lot of violence. It has been a tremendously violent country for a long time. You do not solve that quickly.

Q: Did you have the impression that the CIA had its hands in this stuff?

BARMON: Sure, but I did not know specifically what they were doing. I did not anything about what was going on at the Air Base. I had no knowledge of that at the time I was in El Salvador.

Q: One has the impression that the CIA, William Casey and Reagan Administration were a power unto themselves.

BARMON: Not under Tom Pickering. Under weaker ambassadors, probably. Not under Hinton and Pickering. Those two guys were tough. Both were backed by the Department as much as possible.

Q: When you left there in 1985, were you optimistic, pessimistic, reserved?

BARMON: Well, it was still very much up in the air. There was a major guerrilla attack in 1989. It still could have gone either way. But, the Salvadoran people, on both sides are very tough. Having gotten to know a number of Salvadorans, I know they do not give up easily. I was fairly optimistic.

Q: Well, we will stop at this point for today, but when you left in 1985, where did you go?

BARMON: Back to Washington. I went to the Economic/Commercial Policy Office of the ARA Bureau.

Q: What about your wife, where did you meet her? How did she get into the business?

BARMON: We met in Taipei. Her father was the assistant chief of staff of MAAG, the U.S. military assistance group. She finished to high school there. I went out for vacation and we met. We took an instant dislike to each other after having dinner, which was arranged and paid for by my father in good Chinese custom. We met again and dated a couple of times back here during college. We met again at Georgetown University, where we were both doing an MA. We married shortly thereafter. She was a Spanish teacher. She taught in Belize, Taiwan, and Thailand. In the early 1970s, we had two daughters and she was pressuring me to get out. Instead, I said, “Why don’t you try to get in?” So, she took the test and passed. She came in and we went through a tremendous problem trying to get an assignment together. That is why we ended up in El Salvador.

Q: I guess there was not a lot of competition.

BARMON: No, not for El Salvador. We originally wanted to go to Ghana, and I did not want to go. I heard about what a disastrous situation the country was in, so we tried to get out of that. We were then going to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. When somebody told me about El Salvador, I said, "Let's go." She was in the Consular Section. Then she became the human rights officer for a year. She had a much more interesting (and dangerous) job than I did.

Q: We will pick this up in 1985 when you are back to Washington in the ECP.

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Today is the 3rd of August, 1998. Ward, you wanted to add something?

BARMON: About the end of our tour in El Salvador. Our daughters were there when the Marine Guards were killed. It was a very traumatic experience for everyone, obviously. Our daughters were about nine and 11. We had come back to the U.S. that week to look for a house to buy. We left our daughters in the care of our maids. We thought that they would be fine. After we were up there a few days, we heard on the radio that the Marines had been killed, along with a couple of computer specialists from Wang who were sitting out in an open-air restaurant in the Zona Rosa (Pink Zone). So, this was a very difficult period. Fortunately a good Salvadoran friend of ours went over to reassure this kids. They heard the shooting. It was very traumatic. We came back sent the kids home early to stay with their grandparents in Florida. As it turned out, we got back to the States and started our respective jobs in Washington. About a month later, I saw a cable reporting on a sweep that had just been made of some guerrilla safehouses in San Salvador. I read it with a great deal of dismay. I called my wife and we met in the cafeteria. I showed her the cable and she burst into tears. The cable recounted picking up a young man at one of the safehouses. This happened because president Duarte's daughter had been kidnapped. So, they immediately raided all of the safehouses in San Salvador. This young man who was picked up turned out to have been our driver. We had hired him to drive our children in the afternoons after school and on weekends. Most of the time, a maid went along. But, this young man, who was a member of the FMLN, as it turned out, was tortured and confessed that he had been ordered to infiltrate himself into the embassy community with the hope of eventually becoming a regular driver. We liked him so much that we did try and get him a job as a regular driver. Fortunately, there was no position open. He was finally allowed to go to Canada. It was quite a story to read about. This guy, who had open access to our house, keys to our house, could have let the "bad guys" in at any time. He could have kidnapped our children, but apparently his job was just to gather information. He always had a notebook with him. He would jot things down, like addresses, names, and license plate numbers. Fortunately, nothing happened while we were there. It was quite

dismaying reading about this later. It was a little too close to home!

Q: You came back to Washington in 1985?

BARMON: Yes.

Q: You were doing what?

BARMON: I went to work in the Economic/Commercial Policy Office for the Latin American Bureau (ARA). I was the chief of the Central American and Caribbean Unit. I had two officers working for me. We did the economic policy papers. We worked very closely with AID, particularly in assistance levels for the Central American and Caribbean countries. This was at the height of the various civil wars and the Contras, so we were pumping a great deal of money into the region, particularly, El Salvador, and Honduras. Also, to a lesser extent, into Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Of course, there was all the activity surrounding Nicaragua. It was a very active job, and a very interesting one.

Q: You were there from 1985 to?

BARMON: 1985 to 1988.

Q: Was Panama off to one side? Was that considered-

BARMON: We included them for assistance purposes, and some other purposes. But the Panamanians, when it suited them, wanted to be considered part of Central America. When it did not, they were not. The Central Americans wanted to bring them in. They tried to entice them to become a member of the Central American Common Market. But, they were always on the margin the same way Belize was. They were torn between Latin/Central America, and the Caribbean. We included Belize and Panama in our office.

Q: What about Costa Rica?

BARMON: Costa Rica was always a bit of an anomaly. The few indigenous people that lived in Costa Rica were either killed off or chased away by the Europeans. It's a rather different country. It had a fairly successful working democracy. It had eliminated in the military in the late 1940s. But, of course, it was beset with problems as well. There was corruption, problems on both borders. You had Contras in the northern area. You had smuggling problems. Costa Rica had its share of problems.

Q: Was this a viable economic area from your point of view?

BARMON: It could have been viable. The wars caused so many disruptions. Many parts of it became non-viable for a 10 or 15 year period. In the aftermath,

Nicaragua and El Salvador are still struggling. Honduras was never very viable to begin with. Costa Rica and Guatemala were the two extremes that did fairly well. Costa Rica partly because of tourism. Guatemala, because it is a much larger and richer country. It has a very viable agriculture, mainly coffee. Of course, it had its share of problems with the indigenous population. Many human rights violations. The problem countries were the three in the middle. We had to provide a great deal of economic and other assistance to make sure they survived the turmoil.
Q: Nicaragua, where does that rest in our place? During that time, Nicaragua had not gone through the reforms.

BARMON: Well, they were going through reforms, but Sandinista reforms.

Q: I mean it was on our non-friendly list, to say the least.

BARMON: Very much so.

Q*: Were you in the position of sitting around to figure out how to do nasty things to Nicaragua while you did good things to El Salvador and Hondurans*?

BARMON: Yes, we imposed a certain number of sanctions. We did not trade with Nicaragua, we did not buy from Nicaragua. The economy suffered a great deal. I know for a fact that the quality of their cigars went way down. Now, they are coming back. Obviously, they suffered across the board because of all the disruptions. The agriculture system went through a very difficult transition. I think it still had not recovered from this. Nicaragua was receiving a certain amount of aid from the former Soviet Union. It could not compare to the amount we used to provide. So, we economic types did not pay a great deal of attention to Nicaragua. That was more of a non-economic problem.

Q: What about the economic situation in Honduras?

BARMON: Honduras was terribly over reliant on two crops: bananas and coffee. Those were the two major crops. Some wood exports like tropical lumber, seafood, but a very poor agriculture. For example, in some years, they did not have enough corn and soybeans and were forced to import. There was some mining, and a little bit of clothing manufacturing. Basically, a poor economy. We provided a lot of assistance.

Q: You were doing the economic work with the aid people?

BARMON: We worked very closely. They were just down the hall. They were not in a separate building as they are now. We used to work hand in glove with them going to meetings, for example, at the IMF, the World Bank, and the IDB. We worked very well together.

Q: A lot of European countries were not pleased with what we were trying to do,

as in overthrowing the Sandinistas. Did that have any effect?

BARMON: We did not see too much of that. I think most of the Europeans wanted to leave most of those problems to us. I think they were pretty much happy to leave the mess to us.

Q: You were saying off of the microphone, what we were doing and the overall effect.

BARMON: I do not think there was much controversy or dissent in the Bureau, or even in the Department about the amount of money we were spending. I think most of us felt it was for a good cause. A lot of the money ended up disappearing one way or the other. I guess we figured that a lot of it trickled down one way or the other. Even if some of the officials skimmed off some of the money. As long as they kept it in the country. Even if they built themselves fancy houses, they had to employ workers and buy material. So, much of it was distributed one way or the other. A lot of it was used very inefficiently. The governments were either terribly inefficient or bureaucratically corrupt. That is why AID was forced to not only provide the money and technical support, but also devise the programs and spend the money themselves, directly. Certainly this was the case in Honduras.

Q: What was your impression of our aid program in Central America?
BARMON: It was terribly bureaucratic. I think the inclination was to have more staff rather than fewer staff. The larger the aid programs became as far as staffing, the more time, effort and money that had to be spent on each other checking on the projects, auditing. It got a little bit out of control.

Q: A large staff, which meant housing, the expenses…

BARMON: Oh, sure, the expenses were fantastic. A lot of the expenses were covered by local currency generated by the dollars we put in. The governments were required to supply a certain amount in return (in local currency). Some of that local currency, since it all could not be spent buying local materials and paying the staff, was spent for expenses. It was reasonable, better than spending more U.S. dollars.

Q: Did you sense any unease about the this? I mean, the bigger presence we have in a place, the more "It is those damn Yankees (Los Yanquees) coming in." The type of people we put in are not inconspicuous. They become a political liability. Was this a problem?

BARMON: I do not think it was. I think our military presence was more of a liability. They were very conspicuous. They were wearing uniforms, so it was more obvious. I think most Central Americans liked having us. This was because the Europeans, by and large, had gotten out. It showed we were interested and willing to put our own people there who were to a good degree in danger. So, we

certainly were not resented in Honduras, by and large. We were not resented in Honduras, except by the other side. I cannot speak so much for Guatemala and Costa Rica. But, my feeling is that we generally were not resented in Central America. We were liked. For whatever reasons, the Central Americans tended to like us. We had a lot of good interpersonal relationships.

Q: When one is dealing with this, no matter what year it is, one has to ask about the United Fruit Company. Was that a presence at all?

BARMON: United Fruit's major presence was in Honduras. They had a smaller presence in Guatemala and Costa Rica. Later they changed their name to Chiquita. The main presence was in Honduras because they were very large. They were not the only banana company, by the way. Standard Fruit - now Dole - had been in Honduras almost as long. United always seemed to get itself into more trouble than Standard, which maintained a much lower profile. There are many more stories about it interfering in the local political situation. There was a major strike when we were there, and all sorts of controversy that Trade United was trying to undermine the Unions through threats and intimidation. On the other hand, United and Standard did an awful lot of good for those countries. This was not often brought out, particularly, in Honduras. They really helped establish a middle class, which Honduras never really had. United and Standard sent a large number of the workers and their children for training and education in New Orleans. This was because New Orleans was the major port for the banana boats. So, the people would get rides on these ships. Both companies subsidized a lot of their employees' education. A lot of the lower and lower middle managers worked their way up over one or two generations, and many left the companies to form the cadre for many of the other businesses. They became the middle managers for other companies. So, they did a lot of good, for which they did not get much credit. You always hear the negative side, and not the positive.

Q: You were doing this when the Reagan Administration was almost obsessed with the developments in Nicaragua. Did you find you picking up any of the heat from this? These were true people, true believers. Did this move in the economic field? Were you getting any emanations from this?

BARMON: Obviously, there was lots of money to be had for these countries because of that problem, although Congress always tried to keep it in check. In terms of getting personally involved (our office) in the political side, there was very little of that. Obviously, we knew where the Bureau wanted us to go. But, I did not see a lot of the pro-Contra/anti-Sandinista involvement until I was posted to Honduras.

Q: So, the economic office was insulated. I take it you were working with the people in political affairs. I mean, this was all part of things. What was the feeling there among the professional Foreign Service officers? Were they skeptical or were they on board with what was happening?

BARMON: Well, with the leadership, I do not think it paid to be too openly skeptical. True believers like Elliot Abrams, Motley, and the other people who ran the ARA Bureau in those days. Besides, most of us who ended up working in the area tended to believe in the fight, more or less. Most of us became caught up in the fight. Especially in the fight to support El Salvador and the people against the FMLN. The guerrillas were a pretty nasty bunch. So, I do not think many of us had any major problems with the policy. Later, when it came out, during the time of the mining of the Nicaraguan ports, some of us felt that it had gone too far. Since we were not directly involved, we did not worry too much about those things. Speaking personally, that is. There may have been other people who quietly felt very unhappy about the policy and the excesses.

Q: Well, I has never served in the ARA, watching this, I felt everything was exaggerated, but at the same time it was not something one could set back and not try to do something. Obviously, Nicaragua was a menace. What about the Nicaraguan economy? Were we following that very closely?

BARMON: Not as closely as we were following the other countries in the region. But, yes, we had to follow it. We had to be aware of what was happening and write papers about it. The effect of the war, insurgency, the Sandinista policy. Obviously, we tended to be highly critical. Much of their policies warranted criticism. We had some business and other contacts in Managua, and some of the exile community. There, we tended to be very critical. We had to take some of what they said with a grain of salt. The Sandinistas were a disaster for the Nicaraguan economy. A disaster, period!

Q: Did Cuba play a role in what was happening there?

BARMON: They played a minor role. There were some technical advisors that Cuba provided. I do not think Cuba provided much in terms of military equipment or economic assistance. That was mostly funneled through the Soviet Bloc. But Cuba had the advantage of the language and provided some technical advice in the economic and military/political area.

Q: How much in Nicaragua were the Sandinistas moving toward a Soviet Style of government?

BARMON: That is hard for me to say. Like Cuba, they had their own self-styled revolution, and knew where they wanted to go. That is Socialism/Communism. Obviously, the fact that Violeta Chamorro was able to win an election showed that it was very different. She beat Daniel Ortega in an internationally supervised election. This showed that Nicaragua was very different from Cuba and the Soviet Bloc. He stepped down voluntarily. This surprised us all.

Q: We have not talked much about El Salvador. Were you seeing any

developments in El Salvador in 1985 to 1988?

BARMON: The war seemed to be moderating a little. It flared back up again in 1988 and 1989. There was an attack on the city. I think it was kind of a lull. The army seemed to be doing a little better, the police forces seemed to be doing a little better. Economically, El Salvador had not recovered, and would not for many years. However, militarily, the country seemed to be doing better. The government was in a less precarious situation. There were the beginnings of the UN involvement. Other countries were starting to get involved a little bit more. So, I think things were improving a little bit. As I said there was a sharp down turn in 1989. There was a last ditch attempt by the FMLN to take over the city. This was finally stopped, but it was a bit dicey for a few days. There was a serious earthquake sometime in that period. So, El Salvador was suffering. There was a lot of emigration, still a lot of human rights abuses. They went through a difficult period, but it was not quite as bad militarily as it had been in the mid 1980s.

Q: You mentioned emigration. It was during this time that the United States had a considerable immigrant population, much of it illegal from Nicaragua and El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Was this a concern of ARA by saying, "My god, we are getting these people coming up here, and we have to do something to keep them down there?"

BARMON: Well, that was all part of the overall strategy, as you helped the countries improve their economies presumably that creates jobs, raises wages, and keeps people in the country, aside from the political aspect. That was the theory. I think it works in general; unfortunately, the political side of it overwhelmed everything else. Then, there was the impact on the economies, which was largely negative despite our huge infusion of foreign assistance. But, I think one of the biggest infusions into the economy turned out to be the money that was sent back (the remittances) by the Salvadorans and other Central Americans living in the states sending money back every month to their relatives. It turned out to be huge amounts of money. In El Salvador, per capita, it was huge amounts of money. You are talking about 50 to 100 million dollars a month then. Now it is much more.

Q: It seems the Hispanics are much more family oriented than many other immigrants. The money really flows back to home rather to make the investments other immigrants make such as buying homes, education.

BARMON: Yes, but also perhaps because many of the immigrants from Central America went by themselves, many of them young women and young men who left their spouses, their parents, their siblings, and in many cases, children.

Q: Did Mexico play any role economically?

BARMON: Not really, and politically a minor role in terms some of the political

exiles who ended up in Mexico. So, in public, they seemed to take the side of the insurgents (the Sandinistas). Mexico never played a big role.

Q: What about the people who were the head of ARA? Tony Motley, Abrams, was there much interest on their part due to the economic side?

BARMON: Oh, very much so. I was there during Elliot Abrams, and there was a great deal of interest and the need to provide an adequate amount as well as to spend it as well as we good. Yes, there was great deal of interest.

Q: What about Congress, was Congress watching you and were you watching Congress?

BARMON: Well, again, that was mostly the political side. Some of the Congressmen for whatever reason balked at spending so much money in Central America. Generally, they were fairly generous in terms of allowing us to proportion significant amount of the worldwide aid budget, if you take out Israel and Egypt, of course.

Q: In 1988, what was your wife doing?

BARMON: She was working in the Human Rights Bureau. She had the Latin American account.

Q: In 1988, where?

BARMON: We were both transferred to Honduras.

Q: Did you have a feeling you were a Central American hand?

BARMON: Oh, no.

Q: I was wondering whether this was making you a bit concerned about spending so much time in a small, but very important area of the world.

BARMON: Well, we both felt comfortable. We felt comfortable with Spanish; also, it was my wife's area of academic expertise (Latin American history). So, we both felt very comfortable in Central America. As I said before, we both liked the Central Americans. Probably even more important than all of that was that it was easier to get a tandem assignment. So, my having worked in ARA helped, and we were both able to get jobs in Honduras at the same time.

Q: You were in Honduras from when to when?

BARMON: 1988 to 1992.

Q: What was your job?

BARMON: Economic counselor. Same job that I had in El Salvador but a much more important job than in El Salvador. There was a greater focus on economic development.

Q: We talked about it somewhat, but when you arrived in Honduras in 1988, how would describe the political situation and structure?

BARMON: Well, much of the focus within Honduras was on the Contras, the border. A lot of attention was spent on this at the embassy. The Honduran government forced a certain amount of attention upon it because the Contras were such a presence and the threat of a Nicaraguan invasion was always hanging over the country. As a matter of fact, there were a couple of incursions by the Sandinistas that made everybody nervous. We and the Hondurans reacted as though they were a real threat. A lot of focus was paid to Nicaragua, the Contras, and the Sandinistas. Also, there was a significant focus on the Honduran economy, and political system. There was an attempt to make it more transparent, more democratic, reduce corruption, and foster economic development, education, and health. Honduras has always been the least developed of all Central American countries. So, there was a great deal of focus on the effort to help Honduras develop economically, and make the economy less vulnerable to internal and external subversion.

Q: What type of government did Honduras have at that time?

BARMON: Quote, a democratically elected government. There was a great deal of "machine politics." But since the early 1980s, the governments were democratically elected. The government was not very efficient. The people were a little bit lower there (in relation to the rest of Central America) in terms of education. There was a great deal of focus in this area by the Inter-American Development Bank and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There was room for a lot of volunteer agencies, including the Peace Corps, which of course we did not have in El Salvador at the time. This was because there was not an internal civil war as in Honduras as El Salvador. So, there was great deal of focus on trying to help the Honduran people help themselves.

Q: I have never served there, but I always wondered, how were the Indian population and Spanish population? Were the Indians kind of the lower class, and the Spanish blood the runners of the business and government?

BARMON: By and large. What was interesting to me was to discover how very different the Latin American countries were (and still are). I always assumed that Honduras and El Salvador were very much alike, being next door neighbors. They are not. They are very different. In El Salvador, for example, the indigenous population was encouraged to leave El Salvador during the colonial period. A lot of them went to Guatemala because they found a more comfortable situation.

Many of the mixed blood in Guatemala moved to El Salvador. There was a natural separation of populations. El Salvador is a much more of a mixed country than Guatemala, even Honduras. Guatemala has the highest percentage of Mayan indigenous people. In Honduras, you have an interesting phenomenon. For whatever reason, Honduras attracted many Arab immigrants. This was when the Ottoman Empire was still functioning but crumbling. In many cases Catholic Arabs left the Middle East and made their way to Venezuela and moved north. Some moved south to Chile. For whatever reason, a large population ended up in Honduras. People that were called "Turcos" because of their Turkish passports. They are not ethnically Turkish at all. Basically, they took over the economy - not the agricultural, but the rest of the economy. They ran commerce, manufacturing, banking, media, and politics. As a matter of fact, the current president is half Arab. His name is Carlos Roberto Flores Facusse. So, that is an interesting fact in Honduras. This population is not so present in El Salvador. There, the biggest foreign influence is Jewish. These are Jews that came from Panama and found El Salvador more hospitable than Honduras. Guatemala also has a fairly large Sephardic Jewish population and Arab population. However, they do not seem to dominate the way that they do in Honduras. Yes, you are basically correct. Most of the big landowners and businessmen tend to be the "lighter colored" Spanish, and less indigenous, in general.

Q: Looking at Honduras, did you find that the indigenous population, what do they like to be called?

BARMON: They do not like to be called indigenous. They like to be called Hondurans. They feel that they are the original people.

Q: Fair enough. But did you find the ones from this background were difficult to get to move into the economic political life of the country?

BARMON: You see the process most clearly in Guatemala. Many of them that are still pure Indian are slowly moving into the political system. They stared out "getting the bug" in human rights movements. Per Capita, there are still very few involved. Economically, a little bit more. They still tend to be agriculturally based. But, in Honduras, you see a number of Indians, Indian black mixtures, mestizo, Creole, who have been trained by the banana companies. Now, they are pretty much spread throughout the economy. They are middle level managers, civil servants, professionals, and politicians.

Q: What about the military in Honduras? Often times, the military is a place where poor young men can enter the mainstream and get their education, or (laughter) take over the government.

BARMON: But always considered second class. Sure, I think that is true for all the countries where you do not need a college degree. You go in after high school and stay in as a career and work your way up. The more agile and clever ones

eventually get to run the military, and in many cases, run the country either overtly or covertly.

Q: What was the situation with the military when you where there?

BARMON: In Honduras, they largely ran the country. The real power tended to be the commander in chief of the Army. The Army was the major power. The Army controlled the police. It depended on the strength (or weakness) of the democratically elected regime whether the general chose to exert power greater or equal to the president. It was always a fact that you could not discount. With the war in the region the military even had more importance.

Q: As economic counselor, how would you deal with the Honduran government?

BARMON: The Honduran government was very open and very receptive. I dealt with everybody except the president and vice presidents. I dealt with almost all of the ministers and the head of the central bank. To a certain extent, it depended on what the ambassador wanted, whether he wanted to deal with some of those people himself. I did not go see the foreign minister alone. But, the economic minister, the finance minister, and some of the other ministers I saw almost on a weekly basis. They were very open and receptive.

Q: How did you find in dealing with them? Were they running things, or was it a complex situation?

BARMON: It was a complex situation. Some of them were more competent than others. In some cases, you wanted to go to the agency head directly involved, like the taxation bureau. It was more efficient to go to directly to those people. Or, you could go down below the minister of the mainline ministries and talk to office chiefs. By and large, we had a very open and good relationship. Some of them, of course, had their hands out. They wanted training, money for their ministries, trips to the U.S.

Q: Was there an effort on our part to try not to be over domineering as far as what we could do?

BARMON: I understand what you are saying. The AID director was never shy. Some of us who were not in the AID part of the embassy, we backed off and gave the Hondurans the chance to make their own mistakes. But, we were such an overwhelming presence that it was very difficult to do.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BARMON: It started out with Ted Briggs and ended up with Chris Arcos.

Q: Briggs, how did he operate?

BARMON: He was more a hands off ambassador. I think he preferred to let people do their own thing. He gave a lot of rein to John Penfold, the DCM, who was very good on the economic side. I found Briggs to be a congenial man. I think some of the people in the embassy did not like him. They felt he was a bit too elitist. He never bothered me. But then again, we played squash together.

Q: How about Chris Arcos?

BARMON: Totally different. Much more open, loved to talk and get directly involved. He was wonderful in the sense that if you took a problem him and he thought you made sense, he would deal with it right away instead of asking you to write a memo. He was very much of an activist. He knew Honduras backwards and forwards. He was bilingual. He really got to know the Hondurans. This was a problem for the Hondurans because he knew them too well. Arcos had served in Honduras as counselor for public affairs (USIS) during the Negroponte era. By and large, he was extremely effective. The problem with the Briggs embassy was that it was so focused on the Contras, which was not so much a problem for the Arcos embassy years. This was because during the first year of Arcos, the problem kind of went away with the election of Chamorro. We were able to turn to more Honduran problems and relationships. During the last year that Ted was ambassador, much of what we did was focused on the Contra and Sandinista problem. I thought this was excessively so.

Q: Let's talk about those earlier years. I am not sure of my exact timing. The whole mess that became known as the Iran-Contra affair, was that fairly out in the open and an issue?

BARMON: I think so.

Q: Correct me if I am wrong, but we were supporting the major military operation out of Honduras against Nicaragua. Were they using Nicaraguans?

BARMON: They were using themselves. We provided a lot of moral, physical, economic, and psychological support to the Contras who were on the Honduran side. I am not sure that you would call it an army or a terribly well organized group. There were different groups, different camps that we set up and supported. They pretty much did their own thing as far as I am aware. Obviously, we also provided some intelligence. It was a little bit different from Tegucigalpa. The border was a few hours away, most of the Contras stayed in the border area. Only the commandants came in to Tegucigalpa where some of the people in the embassy used to meet with them. Some of them lived in Tegucigalpa, but you did not see them on an everyday basis walking around with weapons. They kept a very low profile in Tegucigalpa. If you went out into the border area, that was something different.

Q: I am trying to pick up on the atmosphere in the embassy.

BARMON: Well, the first year I was there, the atmosphere was of an overwhelming American military and non-military, but war-related people coming through on TDYs a few days a week, a month. There was not a limitation of the number of U.S. officials in Honduras the way there was in El Salvador, so there was a huge presence of North Americans. They took over the main hotel in town (The Maya). Finally it got to the point where something had to be done. Their presence was dramatically cut back. I think that went along with the war scaling down. It was fortuitous, because it was overwhelming and excessive. As I said, the whole focus of the embassy in 1988 was on the Contra problem. There were a lot of people, you did not know exactly what they were doing. They were wandering around with weapons in cases, even some of them in fatigues.

Q: I spent a year and a half in Saigon. We had a real war there and we were involved. However, at the same time, we tend to have all sorts of agencies and everybody else (CIA in particular). When we get involved, we do tend to overwhelm it.

BARMON: Well, I think we treated this as a real war. It was not in many respects, but certainly for the embassy under Briggs, it was a real war.

Q: There were hearings concerning the Iran-Contra affair, did these impact at all on the embassy?

BARMON: Not terribly. Again, I was not directly involved. I am sure they impacted adversely on our efforts to support the Contras. It did not really effect the economic section.

Q: You were there from 1988, which was the end of the Reagan Administration. In 1989, the Bush Administration came in. Was there any change of feeling as to how you were looking at things?

BARMON: Huge change.
Q: Can you talk about that a little?

BARMON: I think there was a change from the top down. The desire to get out of the middle of the problem. This also coincided fortuitously with Chamorro's election. But even before that, I think there was a determination to ease our way out of being so directly involved. So, when the new ambassador came in, there was a total change of atmosphere. It developed slowly. I think the new ambassador (Chris Arcos) came down with a mandate to withdraw slowly and scale down our support. This did not become obvious for a few months. Nevertheless, this was clearly his directive. He was successful at it.

Q: Looking at the election of 1988, one of the charges against Bush was that he

was involved in the Iran-Contra affair. I suppose this was a reflection. He wanted to get the hell away from having being so tainted with this quasi-illegal operation.

BARMON: Absolutely. I think there is no doubt, at least in retrospect, that he wanted to try and reduce our presence. He certainly wanted to scale down the presence.

Q: When was the Chamorro, the Sandinistas held an election, what was the feeling in our embassy in Tegucigalpa. Did we look at this as a real election?

BARMON: Well, the hard-liners were very skeptical. The Sandinistas still controlled the military, police, the intelligence networks. Some of thought Chamorro was just going to be a figurehead. She turned out to be more than that. Most important of all, she survived. However, there were a great many skeptics, especially in the beginning.

Q: What were you getting from your colleagues in the Honduran government about changes in Nicaragua? How did they feel about it all along?

BARMON: I think the small groups in the government and the businessmen benefited from our involvement. I think the majority of the population and parts of the government that were not directly involved were happy to see the potential threat from Nicaragua reduced. The Contras were being disbanded, so the threat that the Sandinistas would attack Honduras was gone. Second, there was the hope that things could get back to normal with trading and commerce. There was a great deal of this. There was a bit of smuggling, so some people made money smuggling goods. However, the cross border economy had almost come to a halt.

Q: Was it the Contras and the Sandinistas who were doing the fighting?

BARMON: Some of the border area, not all of it. In the Gulf of Fonseca, there was not much fighting. Certainly inland and the mountainous area, which was a main coffee growing area. It adversely affected Honduran coffee production. So, it did have a negative impact in a number of areas.

Q: Were drugs at all a factor?

BARMON: No. There was some smuggling. Who was that Honduran who was finally captured working with the Colombians? Mate Ballesteros, I believe. So, there were stories about smuggling offshore in the Caribbean. Drugs were dropped and picked up by boat, and then re-exported. There was a small internal consumption problem. There was a small amount of marijuana grown in Honduras, but it was not significant.

Q: What about coffee? As economic counselor, what was the coffee situation and where did Honduras fit into it during these years?

BARMON: Well, Honduras, again was an unusual country as a coffee producer. The majority of the coffee growers were small growers. Small, rural, in many cases indigenous, farmers who had a few acres. Not terribly high quality coffee because of the higher altitudes. Good coffee gown in the lower altitudes was then usually blended with the lower quality coffee before being exported. Nevertheless, I think this helped Honduras become a more quote, "democratic country," because the coffee growers, by and large, were small growers. They were the backbone of the Honduran economy, unlike the situation in El Salvador or Guatemala.

Q: Did the United States play any role in world coffee prices? Did they have an impact in Honduras?

BARMON: The U.S. government, no. The U.S. roasting companies, yes. They had a huge impact. It was the International Coffee Organization, in which we were a prominent member as a consumer. As a consuming country, we were a major player. In that sense, yes. It is not government; it is supposedly a private organization. The biggest players are the growers cartel on one side, and the roasters on the other. Now, among the growers, many of the major players are government. This includes Brazil, Colombia, Central America, Mexico, and a few African and Asian countries.

Q: Were there any big fluctuations, or was it fairly steady while you were there?

BARMON: Huge fluctuations. People would pray for a drought in Brazil because coffee prices would go up and Central America could export more and get double, triple the prices. So, sure, that was a big factor. They tried to form groups to control the amount that was exported to increase the quality, to monitor, but it was very difficult.

Q: What was your wife doing at this time?

BARMON: She was the Labor officer in the Political Section, which was very interesting. Often, we would be on "opposite sides" of an issue. She would be dealing with the strikers at United Fruit, and I would be dealing with management.

Q: Sounds like a recipe not for domestic tranquillity.

BARMON: It was fascinating. Actually, it worked out very well, because she was able to influence me. She kept me more opened minded about the unions, and I vice versa. She stared to deal with management largely because of my contacts. I also had some contacts with the unions, and I think it worked out to everybody's benefit. It certainly made our jobs more interesting. For example, we would have receptions where we invited government, labor, and private sector representatives.

Most unusual, at least for the U.S. embassy.

Q: Can you talk about the dynamics of union and management/labor situation in Honduras? How were we involved?

BARMON: We were involved because of the two major banana companies. United always seemed to have the more pressing problems in terms of the union problems, wages, and benefits. Dole had its share of problems, too, but United always seemed to receive more publicity. Frankly, United's management seemed to be less enlightened, and took a more hard line position than Dole. So, it created more difficulties for the Honduran government. They tried to intervene several times. People came down from United's headquarters in Cincinnati and would take a very tough line. It made our work very interesting trying to moderate the situation. We worked closely with the Honduran government, United, and Dole management. There was always something happening. The labor management area was interesting. You had a lot of criticism, particularly with non-American, foreign owned sewing sweatshops. Some were owned by Koreans, and ethnic Chinese that were treating their workers very badly. The unions would try and go in and unionize in the midst of abuses and intimidation. We tried to intervene to resolve some of those issues. I think we helped ameliorate several of the worst situations.

Q: Did we have any card in the play if somebody was producing something using sweatshops where we could prohibit those goods from coming into the United States?

BARMON: Well, we could threaten, but generally, we only limited the amount if the country's quota exceeded a certain amount. There are other ways. You can work closely with the Honduran government to provide and take away concessions, visas. The easiest way to do it was just to talk to them. These people did not like adverse PR [public relations]. So, if word circulated that a company was treating its workers badly, in most cases, they tended to respond positively. Some of them did not, and in some cases, action would be taken. I remember in particular in the case of a Korean firm that was terribly abusing its workers. They would have to stand in a corner if they violated the precepts. They would not let them go to the bathroom and other things like that. It was almost torture. Most of these people were women, of course. I think we were able in this case to use the Honduran government to put pressure on the owners, and use a certain amount of public media attention to force them to change their ways. It succeeded.

Q: Could you talk about why some of the factories in Honduras were sensitive to American criticism?

BARMON: Well, many of the factories, were actually owned by Hondurans. Many were of Arab descent. These people, even 10 years ago, many of them did not have that many ties to Honduras. Many of them had other passports, including U.S. passports, and had been educated in the States, sent their wives to give birth

in the States, and many of them had their money in the States. So, they were very susceptible to U.S. pressure. Many of them dealt with U.S. companies, and their factories were under contract. Usually we did not have any problem dealing with those people at all. Some of the factories that were the worst were the foreign and Asian-owned. They were the real sweatshops.

Q: Some of these factories were probably producing for wholesale companies in the United States.

BARMON: Most of them. They were producing for the U.S. market. That was one reason we why we were involved.

Q: If you told Sears that their foreign operation in Tegucigalpa was a sweatshop, I would have thought they would have been somewhat sensitive to this because it was beginning a movement in the United States about where clothes came from. For example, child labor, slave labor, unsafe labor. Was that a card that was used?

BARMON: Sure. The other pressure came from a very strong, and active AFL-CIO office in Honduras. And a fairly strong local labor movement supported by the AFL-CIO, at least the non-extreme leftist unions, and the more moderate unions. The American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), which is the Latin American branch of the AFL-CIO was a very active player. The labor attaché in the embassy happened to be my wife at the time. She worked very closely with AFL to try and moderate and improve the conditions and support the union without, of course, supporting the union movement to an extreme where they were pushing for nationalization. In Honduras, they really did not push for that. They were more interested in better working conditions and higher salaries, which were legitimate issues. That is, except for a company like United, which did not want to hear any of that if they could avoid it.

Q: You have been watching this over a period of time. United Fruit had developed such a bad name as being the devil as far as banana republic diplomacy. This goes way back. I would have thought that they would have worked rather hard to change their outlook and ways over generations.

BARMON: Yes, it was a little bit surprising. They did not put much effort into that area, at least while we were there. The local manager was a German who had come up through the ranks. Therefore you would have thought that he would have been interested in worker's benefits, etc. He was not at all. He was extremely hard line, a bit arrogant, and difficult to deal with. We often had to go over his head directly with management in Cincinnati to try and put pressure on him to work with the union and the government instead of taking such a hard line. We also worked with the other managers under him, but of course that was a little bit tricky. I think that he typified the management style, whereas Dole, the head American was a university graduate from the United States. He was extremely

polished and sophisticated and worked well with the government.

Q: He was a Honduran?

BARMON: No, he was a North American. For example, the two had such contrasting styles; the head of Dole would be up in Tegucigalpa once a week. The German who ran United never came to Tegucigalpa if he could avoid it. Maybe once or twice a year. He never worked with the government. He had his man in Tegucigalpa that worked with the government, but the man there had little power. He was a Honduran. That just shows the contrast in styles. So, Dole had much more success and fewer problems.

Q: If somebody were saying what business was it of ours to be interfering with how a Korean firm operated?

BARMON: Well, in addition to the fact that we got involved in almost everything that was going on in the country, it was in our interest for several reasons. One, we wanted to see better economic development, but we also wanted to see more humane treatment of the workers. This was something that was part of U.S. government policy to a certain extent. Certainly there were a number of NGOs working in this area. So there was a certain amount of pressure in the embassy, to which we responded positively, certainly from the Labor attaché point of view. Selfishly speaking in terms of the economic interests, almost all of these factories were exporting to the United States. I think that was an excellent reason to get involved, if no other.

Q: Well, it represents a change in attitude on the part of the United States government. We were taking more of an active role. I think there had always been concern because you go back to the muckraking times and things like this would come about foreign or domestic labor. But now, we were really not letting this go by.

BARMON: Well, I think there was a certain amount of altruism, too. For example, my wife got involved in a problem in Honduras where the lobster fishing boat owners were abusing the Indians. My wife made it into a bit of a public scandal in an effort to force these people to improve the conditions of these Caribbean Indians who were being forced to dive repeatedly without adequate time intervals, going too deep without adequate equipment. They were becoming paralyzed, or dying because of this. Okay, most of the lobsters were exported to the United States, but I think the Labor attaché got involved because she was interested in trying to help these Indians, who were often their own worst enemies. They could make an awful lot of money doing this diving even though they imperiled their health. This was an instance where we did not have a great deal of reason to get involved, but she made it a bit of a campaign.

Q: Ward, you wanted to say something that will insert back about your first year

in Honduras.

BARMON: This was about the end of 1988, probably the beginning of 1989. This was my first year in the embassy in Tegucigalpa. The ambassador decided to call together a group of senior officers in the embassy, and some of the other officers of the political and economic sections as well to talk about our policy towards the Contras. A roundtable discussion was held at the DCM's house. Particularly what we might do to force the Sandinistas out of power. I was a little bit astonished, although perhaps I shouldn't have been. Almost everyone at this meeting was extremely aggressive against the Sandinistas. This was all in house and nothing formal. I was a little taken aback. Everybody except for two people, myself, and another person who was working for me in the Economic Section. We were the only two that advocated a more moderate course, perhaps doing some negotiating with the Sandinistas. All the rest of them took a hard line position, advocating invasion, bombing, embargoes, sanctions. It was quite an interesting discussion. I do not think anything came of it in terms of formal recommendations to Washington. There were a couple of articles produced for The Foreign Service Journal. Anyway, the fellow who worked for me and I were somewhat dismayed. We then became the embassy "Pincos." It was a revealing session.

Q: It is interesting. Do you think this is posturing because of the political situation back at home, or was this heart felt belief?

BARMON: I think some of it was heart-felt belief. I think a lot of the other people in the embassy there at that time self selected themselves to Tegucigalpa. They were natural hard-liners, political officers, the military, the CIA, even the PAO. We did not have anybody there from AID or the Administrative Section of the Consular Section. But, just about everybody else took a very hard line. Again, I think it was part self-selection, and part saying what the ambassador and DCM wanted to hear. It was an interesting experience for me

Q: In the Foreign Service as a whole, and I am speaking from absolute lack of knowledge. From instinct, I would say we were rather dubious about this whole Nicaraguan thing up to a point. I mean they saw it as a dangerous situation. I think Ronald Reagan was felt to be a little bit far off about the threat to Brownsville, Texas. It seemed almost out of left field, and more in right field.

BARMON: Well, I was a little taken aback, too, with the positions that most people took. Again, I think it was self-selection, people who worked in the Central American area and worked in ARA. After all, the assistant secretary was Elliot Abrams, and before that, Tony Motley. They were pretty tough, I guess they had to be on the whole issue. Particularly, Abrams. So, I guess it followed suit. Ambassadors to those countries generally took a hard line position.

Q: The ambassador again was?

BARMON: Ted Briggs.

Q: You then left there in 1992? Where did you go?

BARMON: Colombia.

Q: My god, you were getting a lot of coffee, weren't you? (Laughter).

BARMON: Yes.

Q: You were in Colombia from when to when?

BARMON: 1992 to 1994.

Q: Then we return to Colombia, 1992. What was the job and situation at that time?

BARMON: As for the job, again being a tandem couple, we had to look for a place we could both go together. The possibility of going to Colombia in the Political Section came up for my wife. The position was Labor attaché, but also covered the Liberal Party, the party in power, as well as the Congress. Then, I was able to get a job as the deputy director of the Narcotics Affairs section. This sounded like an interesting thing to do in Colombia.

Q: What was the situation in 1992 when you got there? Politically and drug wise?

BARMON: Well, President Gaviria had been in power for a couple of years. He had a good reputation and was fighting the drug war vigorously, or at least gave the impression of doing so. I think he did within certain constraints. The situation in Colombia, particularly in Medellin and Cali, was a bit dicey because there was a great deal of violence, more than normal. Colombia had always had, in the last 40 years, a high level of violence per capita, just as El Salvador has had a very level of violence per capita. That was intensified and augmented by the drug-related violence, particularly by Pablo Escobar. He was taking out his frustrations against the government by sending randomly detonated bombs into Bogota, and having them set off around the city. He was trying to intimidate the Colombian government. He did not succeed in doing this. It made life interesting in Bogota, because you never knew when or where the next bomb would go off. This was compounded by the fact that there was a very serious energy shortage. For our first year in Bogota, our electricity was rationed. We would only have electricity for a few hours in the morning, and a few hours at night. It was a strange experience being driven home in the dark with the streetlights being out. Some people had generators, but basically, the city was blacked out at 6 or 7 o'clock at night. It was an eerie feeling.

Q: Who was the ambassador and how was the drug side of things?

BARMON: The ambassador was Morris Busby. He was totally focused on the drug problem. That is why he was sent there. Unfortunately, but perhaps understandably, he paid very little attention to the rest of our bilateral relationship, such as cultural, economic, etc. But I was think it was forced upon him. He spent 98 percent of his time fighting the drug war, leading our efforts, and working with the Colombians. I think he did a good job.
Q: Your exact title was what?

BARMON: I was deputy director of the Narcotics Affairs Section.

Q: Who was your guiding bureau in Washington?

BARMON: The Bureau of International Narcotics. It became known as INL when it added law enforcement. When I was there it was still INN.

Q: What were you doing?

BARMON: The Narcotics Affairs Section of Colombia was the largest NAS [Narcotics Affairs Section] in the world. We had about 50 employees, most of them Colombian, but some were U.S. contractors. There were a number of advisors. Basically our job was to assist the Colombian Anti-Narcotics Police across the board. Logistically, training, spare parts, helicopters, just everything across the board. We basically helped to create and fund the Narcotics Police which was a very small number of police officers dedicated to the narcotics war with the much, much larger Colombian Police force.

Q: Could you describe some of the types of work that you were doing, and also talk about the effectiveness of what we were doing, and what the police were doing?

BARMON: Let me try and separate the two. As I said, we had four American officers, who were specialists. They were hired to do drug work. The head of the section had a military intelligence and DEA background, so he was ideally suited. He had served previously in Colombia in the mid 1980s. So, he was wonderfully experienced. He and the other drug specialists basically concentrated on working with the police. The other officer was the administrative officer and he did administrative and personnel work for the section. I, as the deputy did a number of things that no one else did. I ran the demand reduction program, that is helping Colombia deal with their own internal consumption problem. I worked with the local drug Czar, with whom I became close friends. Their drug czar's office reported to the Ministry of Justice rather than directly to the President. They basically ran the government-financed demand reduction programs. I am not talking about the department programs or the city programs. For example, Bogota City had a major program. They coordinated all of those programs. They funneled foreign assistance such as ours, into the various programs, like the media, against

using drugs. There were drug treatment programs. We sponsored a lot of training in the U.S. and also brought people down from the States to run demand reduction seminars, and how to set up and run a treatment program.

Then, some of the other things I did, I worked on a project that we started a number of years before to supply judges and prosecutors with armored vehicles. We had already provided the vehicles, but we needed follow up and needed to keep track of them. They needed repair. The vehicles had been dispersed all over the country. Some of them were already destroyed. Some had not had proper repairs. I spent some time working with the relevant people at the justice ministry trying to track down vehicles and get them repaired. I spent time to set up a central repair operation which we were never able to do. At least we did track down most of the vehicles to get some of them repaired. This was a very important program because it managed to keep a number of judges and prosecutors alive. Several were ambushed in their non-armored vehicles and were killed. One famous female judge was ambushed and killed in her car. She was not using one of our armored cars. So, I spent a fair amount of time trying to follow up on all of these vehicles. Then, AID had a program to supply some new armored vehicles. I worked with the AID people on that.

Another program I did, I ran the environmental monitoring of the Colombian Anti- Narcotics Policy project to spray opium poppies. We paid for a Colombian scientist who went out to the field and took surveys of the soil to determine if any damage was being caused to the soil, flora and fauna. He was hired by the Colombian drug czar's office. However, we paid his salary. I ran that program which was politically very important because there was a great deal of criticism by the environmental groups, but frankly, much of it orchestrated by the bad guys to discredit the spraying. They were claiming the spraying was killing the animals, killing people, causing abnormalities, etc., in order to try and get it stopped. The media campaign by the "druggies" had some success. This was probably the reason why the Colombian government resisted our pressure to spray coca plants for years and years. I played a small part in working with the drug czar's office finally to persuade the government to permit the spraying of coca, not just the opium poppies. The Colombians had sprayed the marijuana crops in the 80s with a toxic chemical, then switched to Roundup, which was much, much less toxic. That campaign had a certain success. There was a great deal of political resistance to spraying coca, but the Gaviria government finally overcame that resistance in the Congress. Toward the end of my tour, they did in fact start spraying coca with a certain amount of success.

Q: What was the mood in the embassy when you were there? What was the feeling with the drug problem? Were we winning, losing?

BARMON: Again, I think most of the people that worked in the fight against drugs in the embassy (and that was most of the country team) were believers in the effort. Not necessarily that we were going to win the war, but that we had to

fight it, and that we had to fight it various ways. Most of the people in the country team were concerned with the interdiction side. The DEA, CIA, the military, working with the various agencies in the Colombian government, and with the equivalent of the FBI, the Secret Service, and the CIA which is their Department of Administrative Security, which we funded to a certain extent to help train and equip their people. Basically on the interdiction side, on the ground, in the air, working with the U.S. military in Panama (SOUTHCOM), and in the Caribbean. Customs (very active), FBI, Coast Guard, everybody was involved. Again, it was almost totally on the interdiction side. Very few of us were very involved in the other aspects of the drug war, such as helping the Colombians deal with their own problem. Internal consumption of illicit drugs was not a major problem but was becoming worse. We had a special narcotics country team that used to meet twice a week and just talked about narcotics issues. We also had a regular weekly country team meeting where you had the non-players in the drug area as well. However, the focus of the embassy's attention definitely was the drug war.

Q: The way I understand it, in Colombia, the big people, Escobar, and others were making so much money off of the American market. They could buy almost anything they wanted and if they wanted. If they did not want to buy it, they could kill. They probably had more sophisticated arms than the Colombian Army. Colombia was in jeopardy in those days, and maybe still today of losing to this corruption.

BARMON: That is right. The other factor was the guerrillas who began to feed off of the drug war as well. They expanded into cultivation to a certain extent, protecting fields and labs out in the countryside. So, they began to feed off of these huge profits. You had a terrible combination of guerrillas and druggies, and the right wing militias. The politicians, police, military, and other people were either bought off or intimidated, or both. That combination was very difficult to fight. You did have some honest, legitimate, and honorable people in the government who either would not be intimidated, or would not be bought off. Many of them were killed or had to leave the country. I am convinced there were some who were not corrupt or intimidated. Some of the people in the embassy, particularly the head of the DEA felt that everyone in the government was corrupt. I think that was a vast exaggeration. Although there certainly were corrupt politicians and people in the Armed Forces and Police who had been corrupted, I think we were fortunate in the Anti-Narcotics Police that good people were selected. If anybody was found to have been corrupted or intimidated, or gotten to in any way by the guerrillas, they were immediately cashiered or returned to the regular police. They were prosecuted if there was any evidence. I think the Anti-Narcotics Police was basically pretty clean and excellent to deal with. They were very committed people.

Q: Did you get a feel for Colombian society having these drug lords and these guerrillas. I mean, sounds like a society that is not typical of almost anywhere.

BARMON: Many Colombians were somehow able to grow a bit inured to the problem if it did not effect them directly. For example, if they did not have close friends, or relatives killed or kidnapped. I think the people in the cities were able to isolate themselves a bit more than the ones in the countryside. In Medellin, and also Cali, there was a lot of violence, bombs, police being killed, gang murders. Innocent people were caught in cross fires or injured and killed by the bombings. Somehow the Colombians had developed this hard shell. If it did not affect them personally, they were seemingly able to ignore it and carry on. The problem was, while I was there, more and more people were being affected, either by the violence, by their children taking drugs, or by this campaign of intimidation of Escobar. I think it turned the Colombian people against the drug lords, many of whom were quite popular in their hometowns. Escobar did a great deal to help the poor people of Medellin. He financed housing, health services, and education. He even owned a soccer team. So, he was revered in Medellin by the poor. However, most Colombians were relieved when he was finally hunted down and killed. Certainly, the bombings stopped in Bogota.

Q: What were the guerrillas after?

BARMON: There was a debate going on in the embassy whether the guerrillas were still ideological or not. The guerrillas had been around 20 or 30 years by then. The embassy felt that they no longer were fighting an ideological war of liberation. They were more interested in money and/or power. They seemed to be less and less distinguishable from the druggies. Washington at that point had not acknowledged that we need to fight the guerrillas as well as the druggies. Washington believed the two were distinct and separable. Perhaps they were earlier, but as they became less and less distinguishable, you had to fight both. Now, we are doing that. When we were there, there were a lot of constraints to giving aid to the military in particular, if that aid was going to be used fighting the guerrillas because of allegations of corruption as well as human rights abuses. Some of both existed. If U.S. assistance was going to be used to fight the druggies, fine. But how do you make that distinction? I am sure a lot of our assistance was used for both purposes, as we felt it should be in the embassy. We had to justify our assistance to the Executive Branch, and it to the Congress that the money was not being used to fight the guerrillas. This was rather silly.

Q: How was life at the embassy during this time?

BARMON: We all felt beleaguered to a certain extent. There was tight security. We were provided with armored vehicles. The embassy was pretty much a garrison. There were a lot of security measures and rumors of possible assassination attempts against the Ambassador Busby and other officers. There were also threats of possible bombings against the embassy. Nothing came of that, perhaps, because we were so alert and worked well with the Colombian security people. It was a pretty beleaguered life. A lot of people were extremely nervous about living there. Before going outside of the city we always had to check with

the security office to see where we could drive or fly on the weekends, and what the latest rumor was about bombs. My wife and I were less nervous than most because we had spent two years in El Salvador, which I think was a lot worse. Most people were very nervous there during their tour, especially when Escobar was setting off these random bombings around Bogota in 1992 and 1993. One large bomb exploded in front of a restaurant only several blocks from our apartment building. An embassy couple had been in that same restaurant a half hour earlier.

Q: Could the embassy send officers to Medellin or to Cali?

BARMON: No. They were off limits for most of my tour. After Pablo was killed, it eased up a little. But, no, you did not do normal business in Medellin and Cali. We had closed our consulates there years ago. We had no Peace Corps, they had left the country. So, the only people that went to Medellin were undercover DEA agents, or occasionally the ambassador or some other drug related trip would sneak in with the Colombian military or police, and sneak out. They would covertly inspect some anti-drug operation. No, it was not life as usual.

Q: How about the DEA, was that a separate branch? If it was, how was cooperation?

BARMON: Yes, they were a separate branch. They had a large office in Bogota, and a smaller but significant office in Barranquilla, the only other city where we had a consulate. That was the primary reason we kept it open, to give DEA an official place to work. They had a lot of people doing every conceivable aspect of fighting the drug war. They had undercover people, analysts, and their own Administrative Section. They did a lot of work with informants. They were very active. We had excellent cooperation with them. We worked very closely because they also worked with the Anti-Narcotics Police on the operational side, and with the DAS. We worked with them on the logistics and training side. They did some training, too, so we had to work very closely with the DEA. The head of DEA was a bit of a controversial figure. He had been there for a number of years, and was very cynical by the time I had arrived. He had already been there for a couple of years, and was one of the people convinced that everyone in the Colombian government was corrupt.

Q: Were there problems of the DEA getting too involved?

BARMON: Well, it was part of their mandate. I do not think any American DEA employee was killed when I was there. It was always a risk. Obviously, we had a lot of Hispanic DEA agents who blended in, more or less. They were pretty active.

Q: Was there concern about Colombians who migrated to the United States who still had their "bad guys" connection?

BARMON: Sure. We kept very close track working with the FBI and other agencies, because in many instances it was the Colombians in the United States that received the drug shipments. They were the ones that distributed them, at least at the wholesale level. So, we were always working on trying to persuade the Colombian government to reverse their constitutional prohibition against extradition for those Colombians arrested in Colombia accused of crimes in the United States (Escobar's bombing campaign in Bogota was in part directed at "persuading" the Colombian government not to reverse its prohibition or extradition. That happened several years later under President Samper. There were a lot arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced in the U.S. We were always trying to figure out their connections back to Colombia. There was a great deal of that sort of work, particularly by the FBI (legal attaché), CIA, and by some of the DEA people.

Q: Did the CIA play much of a role?

BARMON: Yes, obviously they were very involved. Their main mission in the country was directed at the drug war as well. They provided some assistance in the logistics area, and trying to penetrate the drug organizations. Much of their work I was not familiar with. I did not get involved in it. Yes, they were very active as well.

Q: You were there 1992 to 1994? A new administration came in, the Clinton Administration came in early 1993. Was there any sense of any change in Colombia? Or, was it business as usual?

BARMON: It was pretty much business as usual. A new U.S. drug czar was appointed. I did not get the sense that things were any different overseas. Perhaps, less effort placed on the fighting the drug war domestically. At least, less effort placed on the media side. Certainly, the President did not make it quite the personal campaign that President and Mrs. Reagan and President Bush had. I did not notice any significant changes overseas.

Q: Did they have a presidential election while you were there?

BARMON: Yes, toward the end of my tour.

Q: That was one of quite a lot of controversy, was that the one?

BARMON: Yes, Ernesto Samper. It was alleged and he finally admitted that there was drug money in his campaign. We knew about it early on. We had also heard rumors that there was drug money in his opponent's, Pastrana's, campaign. Pastrana came out publicly saying that there was drug money in the Samper campaign. He was discredited at the time, lost the election, and went to Spain for a while. In any case, during the campaign and even for a period after he was elected, Samper never admitted that he knew about it. Two of his close assistants,

including the Minister of Defense, were fired or resigned, and faced indictments, and prison time. The Colombian people basically backed him. He was able to turn it around and blame it on the U.S. He protested his own personal innocence and got away with it. We took his visa away, so he could not travel to the U.S. except for UN business. It was a very difficult period between the United States and Colombia.

Q: Did that have any effect on your relationship with the drug police?

BARMON: Operational effect, no. This happened in the last couple of months that I was there. I am sure it had a negative effect later. We were always able to continue working very closely with the Anti-Narcotics Police.

Q: When you left in 1994, what was your feeling about this problem?
BARMON: Well, it just seemed to be getting worse. Colombia was, I believe, the one country in the world that produced all three narcotic drugs and exported them. Marijuana to a much smaller degree then in the past (1970s). Opium poppy cultivation was something new but was being expanded. Although Colombian coca is not as potent. It does not have the same level of the degree of alkali you need to make cocaine that Peruvian and Bolivian coca has. Nevertheless, cultivation was being expanded. Colombia was processing a lot of Bolivian and Peruvian coca paste which was transported into Colombia. Opium was being processed into heroin and being exported in small amounts. So, Colombia had a very diverse drug industry. They were also producing some artificial drugs, amphetamines and other things. It was basically concentrated on cocaine, but supplemented by opium and marijuana production. A very big industry.

Q: Were you hit at all by people saying, "who are you to do this? We are just supplying, you're the demand?

BARMON: Yes, and that was a legitimate argument. One of the ways we tried to turn it around was say "look at your own problem." You have a growing problem with consumption and a problem with all the violence resulting from the trafficking. Yes, we were a lot of the problem because we were the demand. There was also a growing demand in Europe for drugs and it was an uphill battle. I think the Colombians finally recognized it as their own problem as well. For a long time, they preferred to say, "It is not our problem; it is yours."

Q: When you left in 1994, where did you go? What job did you have?

BARMON: I came back to Washington. I worked in the Economic Bureau for a few months working on some of the summit of the Americas issues in the Investment Office. There was not enough work for me to do, so I moved to the International Organization Bureau in their Economic and Social Affairs Office. I was there for about six months and then went to the retirement course.

Q: What was your impression of working on international organizations?

BARMON: I think the people in IO were dedicated, worked hard, and felt it was useful. A lot of it was frustrating because working with these large, international, bureaucratic organizations, it was difficult to get anything done. People went about their day to day jobs. I think the feeling was now that the UN was less ideological with the end of the Cold War, that we could get more done. It was difficult because the U.S. was way behind in its dues, so we received a lot of criticism. Despite that, we were able to do a lot because the situation was more normal. Not everything was the U.S. and its allies against the Soviet Union and its allies. Before the end of the Cold War, everything turned into an ideological confrontation in the UN.

Q: What particular aspect of this did you have?

BARMON: I worked on some international conferences - for example, the Conference on Social Affairs in Copenhagen. I worked a little bit on the Beijing Women's Conference. I did a lot less on that. They needed some help staffing up the Copenhagen conference and I helped out there. Then, since the position in the Economic and Social Affairs Office covering Asia was vacant, I filled in there and went to the biannual meeting of ESCAP in Bangkok.

Q: What about the conference in Copenhagen on social affairs? I thought we had moved out of UNESCO. Where we a member of UNESCO?

BARMON: We were not, but we were still very involved in this conference. We were one of the prime pushers for the Conference on Social Affairs. Hillary Clinton ended up going over for a couple of days. It was a very high level delegation and we worked very closely with a lot of non-governmental groups here in the States. We were very interested in the issues. We did a lot of work on that conference.

Q: Your dealing with the women's conference in Beijing, what was the feeling about how that one went?

BARMON: Well, again, I did not work closely on it. I was more of an observer. I think people were happy in the end. There was a great deal of consternation in the beginning of the conference because of the way the NGOs were treated by the Chinese. I think the conference, in the end was a success.

Q: When did you leave the Foreign Service?

BARMON: At the end of September 1995.

Q: So, what have you been doing?

BARMON: I have been doing some volunteer work and teaching. I did a little bit of work for INL, the Narcotics Bureau. Some volunteer work; I am on the board of directors of a settlement house in Northwest Washington. Also, doing some work fixing up my house. I must say it was a most interesting 28 years. Now I am a Foreign Service spouse as my wife pursues the rest of her career.

Q: Well, I guess it is a good point as any to stop here.

BARMON: Thank you.

End of interview