

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

THEODORE A. BOYD

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Initial interview date: November 29, 2005
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Tape 1, Side 1 with Theodore A. Boyd. What does the A. stand for?

BOYD: Alexander.

Q: Alexander and you go by Ted?

BOYD: Yep.

Q: All right, well we'll start off. When and where were you born?

BOYD: I was born October 9th, 1941 in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Q: All right, let's do a little about the family. What do you know about the Boyd side of the family?

BOYD: My father was an AME (African Methodist Episcopal) minister and my mother was a schoolteacher.

Q: Had you always lived in Indiana?

BOYD: Well, both my parents were born in Clark County, Indiana. When my father became a minister they moved quite a lot. When I came along, we were in Terre Haute, Indiana. We moved from Terre Haute to Benton Harbor, Michigan and then to Inkster, Michigan. From Inkster we went to Danville, Illinois, where we spent a year. Then we moved to Carbondale, Illinois for a year. I'm basically a second-generation itinerant.

Q: You were a preacher's kid?

BOYD: Yep, I'm a PK (preacher's kid).

Q: A PK? What denomination was your father?

BOYD: African Methodist Episcopal. He graduated from Wilberforce College and the Payne Theological Seminary. You see, Wilberforce is sort of the West Point of the AME Church.

Q: Yeah, very much so and named after the...

BOYD: William Wilberforce.

Q: The Wilberforce's of England. What about on your mother's side.

BOYD: Before she got married, she was a teacher. . She did her training at what was then Indiana State Teacher's College and taught elementary school.

Q: Did your father come from a ministerial background?

BOYD: No he didn't. His family was working class — laborers would be a more accurate description.

Q: Yeah, how about your mother?

BOYD: Granddad tried his hand at farming, didn't do too well there, and then worked at various plants. His last job was at a boat yard in the late 40's.

Q: Well then you moved around quite a bit where...

BOYD: We moved around quite a bit until I got to the fourth grade and then we settled in Jeffersonville, Indiana. I was there from grade four through high school. They moved back because the salary Dad was paid as a minister wasn't sufficient to support the family. They came back home because there was steady work.

Q: As a minister still?

BOYD: No, he no longer had a Parish but he was still affiliated with the church. He was working at the Quartermaster Depot in Jeffersonville.

Q: Oh yeah. Do you remember much about, in the first place, do you have siblings?

BOYD: No, I'm an only child. —and also a late child. Dad was forty and my mom was in her mid-thirties when I was born..

Q: Well do you find, I mean let's take up to when you got to the fourth grade. Fourth grade was when you were about ten years old. Before that how did you find being an only child and bouncing around like this, it must have been kind of a lonely life for a kid?

BOYD: No, because if you are the pastor's child everybody in the congregation is looking out for you. It is not unlike when our children doing the "around the world in a lifetime" thing. You go from place to place and you've got to make new friends and you're almost always the new kid on the block.

Q: Sort of like being a Foreign Service kid?

BOYD: Yeah, that's the way.

Q: Well then let's take Jeffersonville. You were there...

BOYD: Roughly eight years.

Q: In about '51 or so?

BOYD: OK, about '51-'59, yeah.

Q: What was Jeffersonville like at the time?

BOYD: Plenty of friendly people and a few soreheads. It's right across the Ohio River from Louisville, Kentucky, so it is a gateway to the south. At the time —when I entered the fourth grade I went to Taylor School, which was an all Black school. I could have gone to Spring Hill Elementary School, which was much closer to home, but my parents wanted me to go to Taylor since they had both taught at the school in the 30's and were friends with the Principal of Taylor School. The next year the schools integrated.

Q: This would be before the Brown vs. the Board of Education?

BOYD: Just before Brown vs. the Board of Education. But Indiana was ahead of the game, particularly Clark County..

Q: The whole thing was so illogical anyway I suppose small counties couldn't afford to keep them, I mean it was illogical. Were you much of a reader?

BOYD: That was the whole thing. Since both my parents had also taught they encouraged me to read. I read a lot since we didn't watch television that much.

Q: Can you think of any sort of books that you read as a kid that sort of stuck with you?

BOYD: Let's see, as a kid, no. But as an adolescent I read all the John R. Tunis books.

Q: Oh yeah.

BOYD: Do you remember him, the sports books?

Q: The sports books, absolutely.

BOYD: And then I would go to the library and read the Saturday Evening Post and Reader's Digest.

Q: Yeah. What was Jeffersonville like? I mean was it...?

BOYD: Just a small town.

Q: A small town?

BOYD: Almost a bedroom community, essentially a suburb of Louisville, Kentucky. Many people worked in Kentucky. There was also a DuPont chemical plant that had started out as a munitions factory. So people found work there.

Q: Were you into sports much?

BOYD: Not really. The football coach wanted me to go out because of my size, but dad said I couldn't go out because I was a late baby and had brittle bones. Hey, I didn't know any better. Anyway I was more of a scholar than an athlete.

Q: What sort of subjects in elementary and high school did you enjoy?

BOYD: Well let's see. English, math, history, and journalism. I was a two-year member of the National Honor Society and Quill and Scroll, an honor group for high school journalists. I was in the band for four years as well.

Q: What did you play, what instruments?

BOYD: Cornet, trombone, baritone horn, let's see most brass.

Q: Did you pick this up in high school or...?

BOYD: No, it started out in elementary school. I was going to be the next Satchmo sort of, or somebody thought I should be but anyway I picked it up in elementary school. I said I wanted a cornet. Mom bought the horn and I took lessons from grades five through high school.

Q: Well you were there on the Mississippi...

BOYD: The Ohio.

Q: The Ohio but I mean it was all part of that whole...

BOYD: The up-the-river New Orleans type of thing.

Q: I mean you were part of a...

BOYD: Situation.

Q: In the right place to pick up the horn. Did you get involved with bands, small bands and that sort of thing?

BOYD: Not small bands but marching bands. We always went to the Indiana State Fair for the band competition and we usually finished in the top ten.

Q: That's great. Well then while you were at high school what were you and your family looking for you to do?

BOYD: I was going to go to college but dad lost his job so the money that was to have gone to college went for other things. I was in an academic program and I graduated fourth out of 175. As I mentioned earlier, I was a two-year member of the National Honor Society and a member of Quill and Scroll as a result of my being the features editor of

the school newspaper. In addition to the band work I was the feature editor of the school newspaper. Since going to college wasn't in my immediate future, I joined the Army a week after I graduated.

Q: While you were in high school, and before that, had you had jobs after school?

BOYD: Yes, I had jobs after school cutting grass, cleaning windows, helping people, raking leaves doing that sort of thing.

Q: Well then you joined the Army when?

BOYD: 1959.

Q: 1959. Where did you go? What branch were you in?

BOYD: By enlisting early the recruiter said I would have my choice of assignments. I wound up in the Ordnance Corps. I started out in the Signal Corps and then went into the Ordnance Corps because my military occupational specialty was nuclear weapons assembly. Not much call for that outside but...

Q: No, no.

BOYD: I went to basic training at Fort Hood (Texas), advanced training at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey and then at the Defense Atomic Support Agency in Sandia Base, New Mexico before going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Then, since they had, they were over staffed — believe it or not — I joined the 440th U.S. Army band playing trumpet. I played "Taps" at funerals in North Carolina. Then I reenlisted and went to Fort Benjamin Harrison, the Adjutant General's school for training as an Army stenographer. By that time the surplus in the nuclear weapons assembly had dwindled because most of the people who took training at the same time I did not opt to reenlist so I got assigned to a nuclear weapons support detachment. That was back in the Cold War days when we had Nike-Hercules missiles protecting major urban areas. I was in effect the attachment clerk combining nuclear weapons assembly skills and stenography skills.

Q: Tell me, it sounds kind of hair-raising to be...

BOYD: No, every thing was contained and quite safe, putting part A into part B and following the manual and hoping you don't mess up, definitely hoping you don't mess up. OK and that was about it. I did that for let's see, I did the band thing for about two years and the Nike Support Detachment for three years. That brought us up to '64 and another opportunity to re-enlist. I had fulfilled my obligation and did not really want to see Southeast Asia.

Q: So you left there in when?

BOYD: In '64.

Q: In '64, that was just before we really started to crank up in Vietnam?

BOYD: Well it started cranking up because I had friends and contemporaries who had been over there and some of them had not come back. Since the government had not afforded me the opportunity to request assignment there I decided not to, so then I got out.

Q: Were you married at the time?

BOYD: No I was single because I was only 23.

Q: 23, yeah. Well then by this time was there an equivalent to a GI (active military education benefits) bill or something of that nature?

BOYD: We will get there. No, not yet. I got out and as I was wondering what I was going to do next — knowing that I wasn't going to stay in the Army — I heard this announcement: "If you have clerical skills or interested in travel, please go to your state employment office and see about a career with the Department of State." That's how I got into communications.

Q: Great. So had you ever thought about the Department of State or ever thought about...?

BOYD: Not before they were making a push for clerks and typists. While I was doing that I also took the Civil Service exam and got hired as an admissions clerk at the Veterans Administration (VA) hospital. While I was waiting for the State Department to "call me" I worked at the VA hospital.

Q: Well how did you find your introduction to State? You came into the State Department when?

BOYD: In July of '65.

Q: Was this as a...

BOYD: As a communications and records clerk trainee. I had to learn how to use perforated tape and five letter code groups and all that. Luckily, they didn't have smoke signals and semaphores by that time. But it was back in the old days where you had to type a telegram three times. The secretary had to type, no the drafter had to type it up, the secretary had to put it on a form and then the communications clerk had to put it into a format for transmission on a teletype machine.

Q: Yeah and that...

BOYD: And then there was filing and pouch clerk as well.

Q: How did you find the training through this?

BOYD: OK, it was pretty good.

Q: Where was it taking place here in Washington or...?

BOYD: Yes, it was over at the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) in Arlington.

Q: Did they give you any choice about where you wanted to go or do?

BOYD: No, they said, "Since we got this far welcome, you are going to be assigned to Bamako," but that fell through because there was a real glitch going on in Brazzaville. So the person who was in Brazzaville went to Bamako and I was assigned to Leopoldville.

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

BOYD: Let's see, Leopoldville, I arrived there the day Mobutu took over, it was November, I think it was the Wednesday before Thanksgiving; it was either November 24th or 25th of '65. When I got up on Thanksgiving Day and there was no one on the streets I said, "Oh, that's OK because it's a holiday." Then it dawned on me subsequently that the Congolese didn't observe Thanksgiving so I went over to the embassy and they said, "Come on in we need you, we've just had a coup." I was in the Congo for 18 months.

Q: What was life like there?

BOYD: Well it was pretty good for a single man with no responsibilities and a raging libido. It was to have been a two-year tour but if you chose not to take an R&R (rest and relaxation) you could get out in 18 months because it was harrowing at the time. It was in crisis because that was back when Mobutu was our guy.

Q: Also the Congolese army was not a very safe organization was it?

BOYD: No, no but I didn't feel uncomfortable because at that time I had a certain protective coloring that many of my colleagues did not have in the Congo.

Q: Did you sort of fade into the population?

BOYD: No they figured I wasn't American.

Q: Well this is it I mean African Americans who have gone back to Africa often and are sort of surprised that the people there, you know each locality, doesn't know their role...

BOYD: They do not welcome them with open arms — that is true. But again I said I look more African than most Africans, as we go on we will get down to that too. I was there

for 18 months and didn't venture outside the city limits of Leopoldville (it became Kinshasa in 1966).

Q: Well how did you find the embassy?

BOYD: Oh well it was quite active; everybody was quite busy because everybody had a lot of things to do. Lots of ambassador's came out of there.

Q: How did you find communications work?

BOYD: I found it quite interesting because as a communicator everything came through you. Whatever reporting there was, the communicator was the first to see it going out and the first to see it coming in. It was quite a learning experience.

Q: Did you find it almost a two-track system, where the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) had its own communicators and you were State or how did that work?

BOYD: That's how it worked. There was a hole in the wall. The company had their stuff, no the company got their stuff and our stuff and they threw our stuff through the window.

Q: But we sent out our stuff?

BOYD: In Kinshasa... It was Leopoldville when I got there and Kinshasa when I left. the CIA was both the transmitter and the receiver, everything went through them. They received our stuff and passed it to us.

Q: But you would type it up and put it on tape.

BOYD: Yeah.

Q: And then they would take it from there?

BOYD: And they would take it from there and send it out. If we had stuff that they weren't supposed to see we would encrypt it.

Q: What about if, I mean the communicators sometimes get really put upon at a busy post like that. Did you feel that? I mean on call a lot more?

BOYD: Yeah, but a grateful government reimbursed appropriately. The overtime was good and plus the fact I did not feel that put upon because I was there by myself; I had no family and was not looking to create one.

Q: Did you get out at all much around or was that not a good idea at the time?

BOYD: I hit the clubs; there were several clubs within walking distance of my house.

Q: These were Congolese clubs?

BOYD: Just regular clubs where the expats met because there were a lot of expats because there was the UN (United Nations) group and all those things there, everybody was there, not unlike the way things have become or have always been where a country is in crisis and there are mercenaries of all types there.

Q: I spent 18 months in Saigon very much that way. So you left...

BOYD: Left Kinshasa.

Q: Left Kinshasa when?

BOYD: OK, let's see in April of '67 to Nairobi.

Q: To Nairobi. How did that come about?

BOYD: Rumor was that if you served in Leopoldville or Kinshasa or a major hardship post, if you asked for something better you would get it and at that time Nairobi was very good duty.

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

BOYD: '67-'69 and I was regional communicator there.

Q: What does that mean?

BOYD: That meant that if there were posts that needed a communicator (some posts where there was just one communicator and that one communicator wanted to go on vacation), I would go out and fill in. During that time I was based in Nairobi but also served TDY (temporary duty) in Lusaka, Mauritius, and Eritrea.

Q: That was a pretty good way to get a feel for Africa.

BOYD: Yeah.

Q: How did you find the embassy in Nairobi?

BOYD: The U.S. Embassy in an insurance company building and we occupied the upper floors. It was quite well appointed. We had a Vice Presidential visit and we also had a Secretary of State visit back when Rogers was Secretary of State just before Kissinger was elevated.

Q: Did you see a difference in how the embassy fit together, morale and all that then compared with Kinshasa?

BOYD: In Kinshasa morale was pretty good but there was kind of close knit, people spent a lot of time together.

Q: A little more danger.

BOYD: Nairobi was a major tourist attraction so we had a lot more to do. There was AID (Aid for International Development), Peace Corps and other activities so there was good socializing.

Q: Did you get out and around?

BOYD: Yeah we got out and around there. In addition to the regional travel, I got down to Mombassa and traveled in country in Kenya, yes.

Q: How did you find Mauritius?

BOYD: Well, at that time it was one big sugar cane field. The embassy had just opened and didn't even have communication facilities. We were using the facilities of a British ship that was off coast called the H.M.S. Mauritius. So everything came in encrypted, all the classified stuff came in encrypted that was ok. The embassy was just opening so they had a series of regional communicators I was one amongst several.

Q: I'm sure things have changed a lot so we aren't divulging any secrets at all. Basically did we have machines or something that took care of things or did you have to do it by hand?

BOYD: Depending on the availability of equipment. There is one-time-tape where you have two machines running and then there is a one time pad where you had to decrypt by hand. I didn't have to do that much because Mauritius wasn't that strategic at that time but it was part of our plan of globalization. You have to be everywhere.

Q: After the time in...

BOYD: Nairobi.

Q: Nairobi...

BOYD: Well during that time in Nairobi I took the test for the Foreign Service Written Examination (FSWE) and so after my assignment in Nairobi was over I was reassigned to Addis Ababa but in route I came for the oral assessment and the Board of Examiners and I passed that.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions asked you by the oral exam?

BOYD: What sort of books I would put in a library because this was a test to be with the USIA that is the question I remember. The other thing I remember was they said, "OK,

smoke if you would like,” and at the time I smoked but they didn’t have any ashtrays. I got around that because I smoked a pipe. Then the usual ‘what would you do if...’ questions and then the basic knowledge questions ‘how would you explain the American system of government’ and that sort of thing.

Q: What caused you to zero in on the information side of the Foreign Service?

BOYD: This was one of those instances where the FSWE was only for people going into USIA. I was thinking I would take it as practice for the State exam and go into the admin cone, but I passed the USIA test. They said come on over for an oral assessment and I passed that one so I went to USIA. Another reason for going to USIA was that at that time most of the ranking Foreign Service Officers of color — all the career ambassadors at that time — came from USIA.

Q: Was Carl Rowan in around that time?

BOYD: He came later. I was thinking of I don’t know if you know the name Bev Carter?

Q: Oh yeah.

BOYD: Yeah, he was...Reinhardt he was USIS.

Q: John Reinhardt.

BOYD: John Reinhardt, he was USIA alum.

Q: You did feel that...

BOYD: I felt that my career advancement might be quicker with USIA than with the Department because there was empirical evidence to support that hypothesis.

Q: Well then, did they bring you...what happened then?

BOYD: I went to Addis for a year until they had a class for me.

Q: What were you doing in Addis?

BOYD: I was still in communications..

Q: What was the situation like there?

BOYD: At the time it was quite “stable” because Haile Selassie was in charge and things hadn’t gone down the tubes. It was quite stable during the period I was there.

Q: Now this was before the...

BOYD: Before the 'dirgue' and all.

Q: And then _____ and all that came in...

BOYD: Yes, because I was there from late '69 and left in September '70 so I could make the class in October '70.

Q: So you came into the information service, USIA, in 1970? What was your officer course like, the A-100 of the junior officer course?

BOYD: State and USIA were all together but it was basically a State A-100 course. Much of the Statecraft they were trying to teach us was old news to me.

Q: How to communicate and how to get around...

BOYD: How to get around the embassy and all that, what the embassy politics, the hierarchy and that sort of thing and reporting I had to learn how to do things.

Q: Have you kept up with members of your class?

BOYD: Many members, no not many but some of them have made ambassador, most of them got into the Senior Foreign Service, members of the USIA part of it yes.

Q: Well then at that time, 1970, did one concentrate on one branch of the USIA work? There was...

BOYD: There was culture and information.

Q: Cultural.

BOYD: Cultural and information but that wasn't the concentration they were supposed to get all three of them in a JOT (junior officer trainee) thing.

Q: So where did they send you?

BOYD: Well, let's see. I met my wife in Addis Ababa and we were going to get married and at that time if you married a non-citizen you had to serve in the U.S. at the earliest point so that your non-citizen wife could become a U.S. citizen.

Q: What was her background?

BOYD: At that time she was 21, a pretty young woman.

Q: From Ethiopia?

BOYD: No, from Eritrea.

Q: From Eritrea.

BOYD: No, no she is Eritrean but she grew up in Addis and that was before the hostilities. She is another interesting story if you should get her because her career advancement, that's another story all together. Hers is a good story too.

Q: Basically, what was it, what happened?

BOYD: We had been married for a while and she decided to become a Foreign Service person as well and she is now an OC. But back to '70 we were in Washington and I went to work at the Voice of America because ideally you are supposed to go out on your first post so you can get first hand experience at working at an embassy. I was ahead of the game on that one plus I was going to have to come back here anyway so we were going to get it all out of the way at once, get my wife naturalized, get my tour done and then we would go out. We were here from '71 through '74.

Q: How did you find the Voice of America?

BOYD: I used to listen to Voice of America when I was overseas. Then I went over there and I was a radio writer/editor. That was as good as communicating because again I got the news first and then transmitted it to the people and produced various programs.

Q: Did you find...? I've talked to people who've worked with the Voice of America and they say it was a place sort of riddled with politics of every country and not just between the various sense and different countries but intro within...

BOYD: Within the language.

Q: Within the language.

BOYD: Yes, but I didn't get that because I was in the division called "English to Africa". There was a lot of stuff but we had more of a cooperative effort, because we were 'telling America's story'. What we did was music, news and feature stories.

Q: Did you find the...was there sort of a heavy-hand of censorship of what we could say or what we couldn't or how did you play it?

BOYD: This was the '70s, '71 through '72, '73. Not a heavy-handed censorship because we were broadcasting news, music and feature stories. just doing basically ours was just news and good news, reporting the news and then there wasn't that much editorial comment. They had yet to start labeling editorial comment as "the view of the U.S. government." It was more like a National Public Radio type transmission with emphasis on "positive" stories.

Q: Well you did this until '73 and then where?

BOYD: Then I started out as a trainee at the Voice of America and then went over to the press and publication side and was a writer, writer/editor and then went back to the Voice of America, so it was all information oriented, interviews, news stories again.

Q: What sort of interviews did you do?

BOYD: My most memorable one was with somebody who had developed something that would cure virtually everything using the mulched bark of a tree that only grew in Africa. It was then the *Wireless File* and it is now called the *Washington File* with various stories. When Howard University won the NCAA soccer championship we did a story on that. I remember that and a lot of stories; those are the two I most remember.

Q: Were you sort of acting as a reporter or were you collecting wire services?

BOYD: Both. No, no we were creating material for our own wireless service. It was called the Wireless File, that was back before Internet and overseas the USIA usually had the story first before others because the local newspapers didn't have access to the wire service. When you are overseas you could give them nice packages to fill their foreign news pages.

Q: Was there any feeling of competition with the BBC, the British Broadcasting System Corporation?

BOYD: Competition?

Q: Well I mean you were saying they had that story and we didn't?

BOYD: No, no scope at all. They didn't have an inferiority complex because everybody felt the BBC was better and reported more objectively. BBC is better, more objective probably just because of the accent.

Q: I suspect there was something to it. By '73 your wife became an American citizen?

BOYD: And during that time I was also going to graduate school.

Q: What were you taking?

BOYD: Adult Education and Administration at what was then Federal City College (FCC) that has become the University of the District of Columbia, the first urban land grant college. I went there because...there has been no mention of my undergraduate studies because I didn't do any on-campus undergraduate studies.

Q: I was going to ask.

BOYD: FCC had a program saying, "If you had some college, we have this graduate program," let's see what happens. So I went over and I said, "I would be interested in this program." They told me, "You've only got just a years credit". I said, "Yes that is true but I did pass the Foreign Service written examination so I think that would demonstrate a certain level of cognitive ability," because most people have to have either an undergraduate or graduate degree to pass that test. That was convincing enough for the admission guy and he said, "Come on over." So I went over and I did the graduate degree and got an MA in '74.

Q: Without a bachelors?

BOYD: Without a bachelors.

Q: I think it's interesting to note here that the Foreign Service is considered sort of the elite of the government organizations. It's the only one of the executive branch organizations that does not require a college degree to enter or take the exam. We've had, I won't say a large number but a significant number of people who for one reason or another didn't have a college degree and it continues to this day.

BOYD: But then I was told that you don't have one now but you should get one and that was the impetus for my going into this program because it's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it.

Q: When you are up against personnel people and other things it's a little check mark and they don't care as much about it unless...

BOYD: But it still looks good on the biographic register. OK so that was that and after that I was assigned in my first overseas assignment, as a JOT was Santo Domingo, the Dominion Republic.

Q: You were there from when to when?

BOYD: Just one year from '74 to '75. I was there for the kidnapping of the PAO (public affairs officer).

Q: I was going to say yes.

BOYD: Barbara Hutchison, yes.

Q: What happened?

BOYD: Some disgruntled people came into USIS. The USIS building was away from the Embassy. There was also another building for USIS activities, the Bi-National Center (BNC). At the time the American staffing at USIS was Public Affairs Officer (PAO), Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) and the Junior Officer Trainee (JOT). The CAO was also the Director of the BNC. At the time of the kidnapping, the PAO was the only officer at

the USIS Building. The PAO wasn't the only one who was captured at the time. There was about a two week: standoff, and then they were released.

Q: What was the issue?

BOYD: Some people were dissatisfied with what the government was doing and they wanted to get some of their people who were in jail released so they could all go to Panama so that did happen. My memory disserves me because that was about thirty years ago now.

Q: Tell me, what about the situation in the Dominican Republic as you recall it.

BOYD: In the Dominican Republic. The major activity at the BNC was Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). There were some cultural programs — concerts, art exhibits, plays — but the BNC was basically an English teaching school.

Q: What were the students after? Why were they learning English?

BOYD: So they could get admitted to schools in the U.S. and also because knowledge of English virtually anywhere is a marketable skill. After a year in the Dominican Republic, we were reassigned to Bolivia.

Q: How did you find the Bolivians?

BOYD: They were all right. Remember, La Paz is the world's highest capital city so lack of oxygen was a factor. Once they got to know you they were ok.

Q: Was there much unrest when you were there?

BOYD: Not much. We lived near the university so when the university students demonstrated we got a whiff of tear gas every once in a while but there wasn't rampant unrest and there wasn't any insurgence or guerrilla activity as such.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

BOYD: The ambassador there was Bill Stedman?

Q: Sure, he was there from '73-'77. Good, well done. You passed the test.

BOYD: By that time we had two sons — one son was born in the Dominican Republic in '75 and the other was born in '76. In 1977 we were reassigned from La Paz to Tehran.

Q: Were you in Tehran from when to when?

BOYD: Tehran from '77 to early '79. We were there during, we were there for the...

Q: First take over?

BOYD: No we were there for the Shah's departure and then the families were evacuated before Ayatollah Khomeini was due to come in and then all non-essential personnel were evacuated in February '79.

Q: How did you find, I mean going there were you told this was going to be a difficult post?

BOYD: Yes, we were told it was going to be a difficult post. When we went for the security briefing, they said: "If you are assigned to this place this is what you do in the event something happening. If you're assigned to Tehran make sure your insurance is well paid up because they don't take hostages." Then they showed us pictures of bullet ridden cars. Reportedly, once people who were going to Tehran opted out of the assignment once they saw the pictures. At that time conventional "wisdom" was that the Shah had everything under control and the Islamic unrest could be quelled and there was no real need for anybody to learn Farsi because all the really important people spoke major European languages — either French or English or both. That proved to be incorrect.

Q: What was your job there?

BOYD: I started out as Assistant Information Officer and wound up being acting cultural affairs Officer. When we arrived, Tehran had the largest expatriate American community in the world. The Tehran American School had enough students to field four high school football teams. There were about 50,000 people working at various aircraft companies — Hughes, Bell, Sikorsky — to name a few. Then things went downhill.

Q: How did that affect you as the...?

BOYD: I was still relatively junior and when they were saying "Yankee go home" they consider me to be American. There was a moderate sized African diplomatic community there because of Iran's membership in OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria were represented. Most of the time I was seen as someone from West Africa I was not affected.

Q: Where did you live?

BOYD: I can't remember the name of the area but it was...

Q: Were you on an American compound?

BOYD: No we weren't on a compound, it was a duplex. One family lived up. One family lived down. There were separate entrances. we were escorted to work in armored vehicles because there had been a few untoward incidents.

Q: How about your neighbors, did you get any feeling from them?

BOYD: No, I remember seeing the neighbors down the street and my wife was teaching the neighbors English and they were cautiously voicing opinions about what the Shah was and wasn't doing.

Q: During your work did this...were you working with university students at all?

BOYD: There were lots of university students. Most of them were trying to get to the United States so we did a lot of programs on "If You Want to Study in the U.S." At that time Iran had the largest foreign student population in the U.S. because they were trying to train a lot of geologists and petroleum engineers, or at least they were sending them over here to study and if they did — that's another story. These were the privileged people; these were not the fundamentalists or the Mullahs.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of the fundamentalists or the Mullah group and all?

BOYD: Yes because the CIA told us Khomeini had tapes going out and the government was trying to suppress the distribution of the tapes. There was a feeling of unrest and a feeling that perhaps the powers that be were pushing too hard to become Westernized and losing sight of what somebody felt would be the correct path.

Q: Where was your office? Was it in the embassy or outside?

BOYD: No the office was separated from the embassy. Our office was next to the Indian embassy. It was within leisurely walking distance of the embassy. When the unrest came and everybody left it was announced that the CIA station was next to the Indian embassy, so they trashed USIS but luckily we had gotten out. Then again remember information and intelligence overseas at that time were what, considered synonymous.

Q: Yeah, I think if I recall that the first major take over was on February 14?

BOYD: That was the first day...

Q: 19...

BOYD: 1979. We were "going to stay the course". At the time we were reporting realistically until we got instructions saying that Washington didn't want to read any bad news. There was a take over February 14th by counter insurgents and then the insurgents retook the Embassy. That's when we got the instruction: "There will be two Pan Am 747s coming to evacuate you. Be on one of the planes." I was on the plane that went to Rome. My luggage went to Frankfurt.

Q: And then what happened?

BOYD: I went to Frankfurt, got the luggage and then came to Washington. That was on the President's Day weekend—the blizzard of '79. There was a two-foot accumulation of snow.

Q: And then?

BOYD: That ended that chapter. When people asked me “What do you think we should do in Iran?” I said, “Get out.” And then they said, “That kind of opinion will ruffle some feathers.”

Q: What was your experience during this takeover?

BOYD: When I was driving to the Embassy I got stopped by a wild-eyed radical and he pointed a large bore handgun at my nose. Luckily somebody came over and said he's OK and I got through. That was my experience during the takeover. Families had already been evacuated to safe havens. I drove to the embassy, parked the car, got on the plane and left.

Q: Did you find the embassy before...what was the feeling within the embassy?

BOYD: Again in retrospect somebody missed the call because everybody was being told that “We've got this under control, don't worry.” And then we didn't have it under control. A major stumbling block was the fact that nobody at the embassy, none of the officers at the embassy spoke Farsi and they were relying on somebody else's agenda.

Q: Yeah. What about you? Did you find that the student's regime had turned on you or not?

BOYD: No because the people I was dealing with were looking to get out and I was helping them. Also, I was working with Fulbright professors and when things got really bad we had to get them out. They were grateful when they were able to leave. After the fact, when they got relocated they were less grateful. Once they were safe again they complained about the treatment they had received.

Q: Yeah. So we are talking about...

BOYD: We are talking about '79. In '79 we came back here. I went to the Office of African Affairs in USIA for a while until I got an assignment as Branch Public Affairs Officer in Kano, Nigeria, which was then the country's second largest city. I was the director of the American Cultural Center and the official American presence in northern Nigeria.

Q: I was going to say Kano sort of sits up there in Muslim country. It is quite different from...

BOYD: This was during the period when they were trying for an executive president and a representative government with a unicameral legislature.

Q: How long were you in Kano?

BOYD: Two years, '79-'81.

Q: Two years. What was living like there?

BOYD: Living was pretty good and since I was the official American presence I was recruited for the Rotary Club. We did have a major dust up there with Muslim fundamentalists killing a lot of people. The consulate was in Kaduna, which was about a couple hours drive away. I did lots of reporting during that period but we didn't have any communication there so I had to type up my stuff and put it in a pouch and the newspaper delivery truck would take it to Kaduna and deliver it to the Consulate General.'

Q: What was sort of the political situation there in the area?

BOYD: In and around Kano there were several political parties. The leader of the dominant party in northern Nigeria was Aminu Kano and he was not of the same party as the President Shehu Shagari. This was again all the old politicians who had been around since independence and they were still vying for the presidency. There was a lot of political infighting, everybody trying to get their piece of the pie. But they were still trying for a democracy because they had just come off of several coups. They were between coups at the time.

Q: Was there a feeling, I mean you were some distance away from the oil producing fields but was the feeling up in your area that the people in the capital were sort of stealing the oil wells and all that?

BOYD: No that would have been the people in the east, in Biafra, where the oil fields were. The people in the north didn't have that feeling because the northerners were the ones who were ripping off the southerners. The three major groups were: the Ibo's, Hausa and the Yoruba. So the Hausa's and the Ibo's were the ones who were at odds and the Yoruba's were standing back watching. That's an over simplification but not that much of an over simplification.

Q: You were up in Hausa country?

BOYD: Yes.

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

BOYD: Again pushing information, doing English teaching, programs, providing guidance for those who wanted to study in the U.S., coordinating with Fulbright professors. Mostly educational and cultural exchange work, with a little bit of

information thrown in — providing articles and features from the Wireless File that I was talking about before to locally published newspapers and magazines.

Q: Were you running across in that area or was that located some place else? The Nigerians in the United States are renowned for their scams of...

BOYD: There were not that many scams being run in Nigeria then, but they were well on the way to retiring the title of “Most Corrupt Nation.”

Q: During this time what were...you were up in...

BOYD: In Kano. At that time the Naira (Nigerian currency) was quite strong because of petrol dollars. As a matter of fact it took more than two dollars to equal one Naira.

Q: Did you run across the growing influence of fundamentalism of Mullahs?

BOYD: Yes that is what I was referring to previously when I mentioned that thousands of people were killed. It was estimated that then thousand were killed during the religious rioting before the Muslim cleric who was responsible for the uproar was killed by security forces.

Q: When I think of Kano and seen pictures and all I think of these mission tribal chiefs in very colorful costumes...

BOYD: The Emirs. Yes, they had ceremonies and exhibitions of horsemanship. all that.

Q: Did you get invited?

BOYD: Yes, we got invited since I was the official U.S. diplomatic presence. When U.S. dignitaries came through, they usually put on quite a show. Ambassador Andrew Young visited northern Nigeria when he was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Vice President Walter Mondale made a one-day stop in Kano in the summer of 1980.

Q: How did that visit work out?

BOYD: They fixed up the local market a little bit because the visit took place during the rainy season and the market was a virtual mud pit. They fixed it up so the visitors could shop and get artifacts. It was also during Ramadan and the U.S. party wanted to have lunch with the Kano state governor and other high-level officials. The problem with that was that nearly all the people they wanted to meet were Muslim. They were fasting during the day and didn't eat lunch.

Q: Yeah.

BOYD: So that was a bad, bad move but this was Vice President Mondale and a large delegation from the Black National Caucus. It was all part of a unity type thing, I guess,

because Nigeria was at that point trying for democracy but Nigeria also has some very good crude oil of its own. So it was a combination thing.

Q: What was the embassy asking of you?

BOYD: Very little. I was virtually on my own. I had to go to Lagos for \quarterly branch PAO conferences. There were branch posts in Kaduna, Kano, and Ibadan, and the Country Post in Lagos. So we would come down for meetings to discuss what USIS programming we were going to do.

Q: Did events in Tehran, the seizing of our embassy and all that long hostage business, was there much interest in that, where you were?

BOYD: Not really, no, not much interest. We were interested; we being my wife and I because we were in Tehran and there but for our evacuation from post, it could have been me. Other than that, no. Nigeria had other concerns at the time. If there was any comment at all, it was along the lines of “It sure was a shame what’s happening over there. How about what’s going on here?”

Q: Were you concerned being in a fundamentalist Islamic area that you might...?

BOYD: No it was fundamentalist but ecumenical. Now that sounds contradictory, but Muslims and Christians frequented the Kano Club. There wasn’t an emphasis on religion, as far as I could tell. The Muslims we associated with were more secular than fundamentalist.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Nigerian educational system as it was up in your area?

BOYD: Yeah because we had two universities in the area.

Q: I’ve talked to people who have been there on a Fulbright at different times not necessarily there more than the others but they said that one of the problems was the universities had been neglected, I mean this may be a different period when the students were out on strike period?

BOYD: That’s correct. When the students were upset because they weren’t getting their stipends they went on strike. The school system wasn’t all that; it probably still isn’t. That’s why you have more people coming to study in the U.S. During that time the Iranians comprised the largest foreign student population in the U.S. and Nigerians were second.

Q: Were you involved in the Fulbright program?

BOYD: Slightly. There were a couple of Fulbright professors at the university in Kano and we provided them logistic and facilitative assistance..

Q: Then what, in '81?

BOYD: In '81 we came back to the U.S. .

Q: So what were you doing?

BOYD: In '81 I was in Press and Publications again, working on the Washington File as a writer editor. I did that from '81 to '83. We were a block from the White House at 17th and Pennsylvania Avenue. USIA moved to Southwest Washington, across the street from the Health and Human Services building in 1983. From '83-'85 I was in the Office of American Republics Affairs as the Program Officer for Mexico and Central America.

Q: What was the situation?

BOYD: During that time we had the Iran Contra, stuff going on in Nicaragua and Honduras...

Q: El Salvador.

BOYD: And El Salvador, all of that.

Q: What were...

BOYD: I was facilitating the efforts of the Posts in the field — coordinating International Visitors and briefing speakers who were going to Central America to promote U.S. policy. At the time I felt slighted because I didn't get to travel to the area but in retrospect that was a good thing because I had had my fill of excitement.

Q: What were we using the student program for there? Were we trying to bring students here?

BOYD: During that time it was a little bit more politicized; Mexico was doing all right and then this whole problem in Central America. My job mostly was to help the people in the field. They would say "We need something or we need some help. Who do we contact or would you please contact somebody?" I was the liaison.

Q: Did you get any whiff of the Iran Contra business at all while you were there?

BOYD: The name Ollie North was bandished about quite regularly but the scandal hadn't broken yet.

Then I was assigned as Branch Public Affairs Officer in Guayaquil, but I was only there for 18 months. During that period, it was mandated that all government agencies needed to make budget cuts. USIA decided to close the USIS operation in Guayaquil, even though Guayaquil is Ecuador's economic capital and largest city. The consulate remained. There were a lot of people trying to get to the United States so there were six

consular officers to handle the interviews. Also since Guayaquil was a seaport, it had some economic and commercial value to the U.S. as well. Lots of tourists were coming to Guayaquil so they could go to the Galapagos Islands. I was there from '85-'87 and then came back to Washington where I worked at the Operation Center in USIA from '87-'90.

Q: How did you find that, I mean were you trying to duplicate the State Department Operations Center or...?

BOYD: Not duplicate the Department's Center, no. We had different interests and responsibilities. We did coordinate in times of crisis, such as the invasion of Granada, but for the most part we maintained our autonomy. From '87-'90 I was in the Operations Center. I started out as a Watch Officer and wound up as Deputy Chief. Then I went to the Board of Examiners.

Q: What was your impression of the Board of Examiners?

BOYD: At that time they needed more representativeness; because once again people were asking "Why aren't there more minorities in the Foreign Service officer corps?" They rewrote the Foreign Service Written Examination and the format of the Oral Assessment while I was there. The examination process has undergone some changes since I was there. In the early '90s most of the examiners were Senior Foreign Service Officers who, by their own admission, were there to maximize their annuity.

Q: Yeah, well this is a time when you... but did you see any particular reason why more minorities weren't getting in?

BOYD: One of the rationales was if the minority candidates were truly qualified other people would pay them more.

Q: And quicker.

BOYD: Yes and they would bring them on board more quickly. Basically that is what happened with my son. He passed the Written Exam, but he didn't want to wait to be offered an entry-level position. He took a position instead as a United Nations Volunteer and then got his MBA from the University of Maryland. Now he is working at Bank of America.

In addition to testing for officers we tested for staff personnel and technical people as well. Many of them were less knowledgeable than you would expect. For example: when asked "How would you describe the American system of government?", one candidate said: "Well that's highly classified information and I wouldn't divulge it to a foreigner." Another answer to the same question was: "Well there are three branches of government; there's the legislative, the Senate and the House of Representatives."

Q: These were people who had passed the written exam?

BOYD: In some instances yes. When they came for the Oral Assessment they had to demonstrate an ability to report on an event and write an essay on a topic designated by the Board. Their syntax was sometimes not as ideal as could be, but that was probably because the Examiners placed greater stock in written literacy than this generation and we occasionally let our biases get in the way of objectivity.

I was there for a year and got assigned to Lomé as PAO and had to take six months of French,

Q: Lomé is the capital of?

BOYD: Togo.

Q: Togo. You were there from when to when?

BOYD: I was there from '92-'96. That was during the period when we had the dead cities and a lot of unrest but President Eyadema stayed in power throughout. There were occasional incursions from Ghana, some skirmishes and it was sometimes not a good place to be but we made it through.

Q: Well Togo is sort of a, it looks like it is squeezed in there...

BOYD: It's squeezed in between Benin and Ghana. It is not very wide, you can drive east to west in about two and a half hours and Lomé, the capital, is on the border with Ghana. We could walk from our house to the Ghanaian border. The political situation was unsettling. President Eyadema was almost deposed, but the opposition party leaders were fragmented and politically unsophisticated. They couldn't mount a good offensive so Eyadema was able to stay in power plus the fact that there were a lot of killings.

Q: Was it sort of gratuitous killing?

BOYD: Yes, because at the height of the unrest they were pulling bodies out of the river. Togo was the first sub-Saharan African country where the elected president was killed, Sylvanus Olympio.

Q: He was killed right on the doorstep of the...

BOYD: American Embassy, yes. The Embassy is still right there. It has been described as probably the only American Embassy that's in the center of an African market.

Q: Who is our ambassador, or ambassadors while you were there?

BOYD: When I got there it was Harmon Kirby, and then Johnny Young.

Q: How did you, how were our relations with Togo and what was in it for us?

BOYD: They don't have much. Their major commodity is phosphates.

Q: By the time 1996 the Soviets were out of the game weren't they?

BOYD: The Soviets were out of the game and the Chinese were in. The Chinese built big theatres, one in Lome and one in President Eyadema's hometown. The Chinese were trying to get a foothold throughout Africa.

Q: What were you doing then?

BOYD: I was the Public Affairs Officer, so I was in charge of the cultural programming. We had a English teaching program, cultural exchanges and a few Fulbrighters. We were getting up into cyberspace so we were able to pass information material around in the local newspapers and radio and TV.

Q: How would you describe the media in Togo?

BOYD: The broadcast media is government controlled, there is a government controlled press and the independent press is oppressed, not suppressed. if they were to publish articles the government felt were uncomplimentary, the paper would be mysteriously trashed by person or persons unknown or closed down on trumped up charges.

Q: Was there the feeling that President Eyadema government was going to be overthrown?

BOYD: It had almost been overthrown but they were able to remain in power because he had control of the army. When he died his son was thrust into it the presidency, similar to what happened in the Congo.

Q: There is quite a dispute over that.

BOYD: Yeah, let's see, usually but nothing has much happened again.

Q: How is life there?

BOYD: It was great. Yes it was but then again most Foreign Service posts life is pretty good because we were walking distance to the border, our house was walking distance to the Atlantic Ocean, so a nice beach, all modern conveniences and many comforts, great restaurants.

Q: What were the Togolese like?

BOYD: They were very friendly, very warm, they are not belligerent people, most of them weren't because that's Eyadema's way of staying in power because the people would rather negotiate than fight. Again, for me it was quite good because definitely they thought I was, if not Togolese then maybe Ghanaian.

Q: Were the Ghanaians...

BOYD: Let's see, no we have to understand...we'll go ahead with your question.

Q: Were the Ghanaians a menacing presence in...?

BOYD: No, no the Ghanaians were not a menace to the Togolese because many of the Ghanaians and Togolese were cousins. We have to remember that they were all in the same area before the colonizers (Britain, France, Germany) came to the continent. When my colleagues wondered how the nominally French-speaking Togolese were able to communicate with their nominally English-speaking Ghanaian neighbors, I reminded them that the *lingua franca* was usually Ewe (Ebwe).

Q: Yeah, did you find French essential?

BOYD: Yes. Not as essential as it could have been because most of the people I dealt with spoke English spoke English. Let me backtrack and say, yeah I needed the French to get along. My wife joined the Foreign Service in 1992 and we were a tandem couple. In 1996 I was reassigned to Washington and she was assigned to Accra. I came back to Washington for a year in the Information Bureau of USIA and was then reassigned as the Public Affairs Officer in Yaounde, Cameroon from '97 to '99 and then retired.

Q: The Cameroon's, what was the situation there?

BOYD: At that time Cameroon had wrested the title of "Most Corrupt Country" from Nigeria. The president, Paul Biya, is now probably the longest serving African head of state. During my tenure there was a major dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over which one had oil rights to offshore reserves. Cameroon is nominally bilingual, there is an English speaking area and a French speaking area. The political situation was calm. The U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon was also accredited to Equatorial Guinea so we did go over to Malabo (capital of Equatorial Guinea).

Q: What was Equatorial Guinea like?

BOYD: Equatorial Guinea was in the process of becoming rich because of the major oil finds so it was a pit in the late '90s but as I understand now it's a show place.

Q: So much of this post-colonial period it was a place to be avoided.

BOYD: Right. There was an embassy there but that went down the tubes. the oil companies want a presence there rather than having to go to Douala.

Q: In the Cameroon's was there any political life or?

BOYD: Yes there was a political life because the universal opinion was that the party in power stole the last presidential election.

Q: Well how did you find doing your job there?

BOYD: We were dealing with the media — government controlled and independent. Charlie Twining was the U.S. Ambassador for much of my tour there. He was a friend of Cameroon, having served previously in the country, so it was easy to do the job. They welcomed our cultural programming. There was an English teaching program there. It had started out as a program affiliated with USIS but then some expatriate wives (Americans who had married Cameroonians) who had gotten into it so they took the program over when USIA was looking to make budget cuts. But mostly it was disseminating information about the U.S., do educational and cultural exchanges, and bringing in speakers and performers.

Q: Were there many students going to the United States?

BOYD: Yes, but they had several universities in Cameroon and the university situation, is about the same as that in Nigeria. They have nice buildings with very little in them and few books. I visited some universities and they showed me books that my predecessors had donated that were still in boxes. But at least they had the facilities and they do have people. Then I retired from USIA in 1999 when it was going to be subsumed into the Department of State.

Q: What was your impression of, I mean you had served around Africa. You have a very solid African experience. Just the other night I was watching a BBC television reporter on Africa, just the weekly round-up, most depressing because of stolen elections, lack of medical attention...

BOYD: The AIDS pandemic.

Q: AIDS pandemic but also so much of it had to do with the inability of the government of these various countries to really project it self in doing anything. Did you find yourself discouraged by this or...?

BOYD: Not after a while. In the beginning yeah, OK. When I first arrived in Africa in 1965 Rwanda had just survived genocide, and Congo was in crisis. When I retired and went back to Rwanda as an accompanying spouse in '99 the Congo was in crisis and Rwanda had just survived genocide. Now, during that 35-year period you could say that the more things change the more they remain the same. I'm not as discouraged as one could be, cynical perhaps — resigned might be a better characterization —but what can be done to improve the situation? we were hopeful that the wave of new leaders, particularly in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda would be more enlightened.. So then they stayed around quite some time and they are becoming the new big men.

Q: And Museveni (president of Uganda) just tossed his political opponent in jail.

BOYD: Yeah.

Q: And Eritrea and ...

BOYD: Ethiopia is getting ready to go to war.

Q: Are getting ready to go to war.

BOYD: So OK that is what I mean by the more things change the more they remain the same. But we can hope and then there, let's not forget Mugabe, but maybe something is going on.

Q: It is discouraging. Did you see while you were doing that there was this television series called Roots by Alex Haley. His hero came to Annapolis as a slave,. Did you see much of an interest in the African-American looking for their roots in Africa?

BOYD: Oh yeah, during the latter part of the '90s people were going to Ghana to see the Cape Castle and to Goree Island (Senegal) to see the Gate of No Return. There is an interest in people coming "back home after four hundred years" There was an interest, there. Some people say Alex Haley waited until the griot died before he published the book so that he could make it a better story.

Q: Anyway, I want to thank you very much for this. You've had a much better look at Africa than most.

BOYD: Yeah.

Q: But I have to say that you really haven't done much there, I mean you haven't changed the entire political life.

BOYD: No, just the players. The game remains the same.

Q: The game remains the same.

BOYD: Yeah.

Q: One keeps hoping.

BOYD: Yeah.

Q: Unfortunately, every time...

BOYD: But as long as they have actual materials and somebody is willing to give them, or we are willing to pay it for them we don't know.

Q: There seems to be a medical crisis always coming up. We have aids and maybe have...

BOYD: Ebola.

Q: Yeah and smallpox and I guess it's discouraging. OK well I want to thank you very much. This has been fun.

BOYD: We will try again.

Q: Yeah.

End of interview