

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

AMBASSADOR JAMES B. ENGLE

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INTERVIEW

[NOTE: The transcript was not edited by Ambassador Engle]

Q: Mr. Ambassador, could you tell me how you came into the Foreign Service?

ENGLE: I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago in 1941. I wrote a letter, out of the blue, to the Department of State, and said that I was a college graduate working on my Ph.D. at the university. I sent a copy of my transcript and indicated that I was Phi Beta Kappa. I said I was anxious to enter the Foreign Service, and I was prepared to go anywhere in the world--also, that I was still single.

Nothing happened for several months. Just after I returned from a cross-country trip from Chicago to San Francisco and back by freight, and after already having enlisted in the Navy, I received a telegram signed, "Cordell Hull," asking me to appear in the old State Department building next to the White House, at a certain time two days later for oral interview.

Q: What was the date of this?

ENGLE: That was October 7, 1941. We were supposed to be waiting for naval orders, and I knew I couldn't travel freely, so I went to the Chairman of the Democratic Committee of the county in which I lived, in Iowa. His name was Baxter. I asked him what I should do, and he said, "Go. If you get into any trouble with the Navy, I'll take care of you."

So I went in for an interview. The only suit of clothes I had was green in color, and an old shirt and some awful--I thought they were awful-looking--shoes, as I look back on it, along with eight or ten waiting for interviews. I looked at the others, and I realized I didn't have a chance.

I was taken into the interview, and there were three senior Foreign Service officers there, Mr. Burdett, Mr. Macatee, and Mr. Erhardt, who had come from Vienna, all of whom, I believe, eventually became ambassadors. I was interviewed orally for perhaps 15 minutes. The key question was this: "How do you view the two-ocean Navy?" That was the test to where you stood in 1941.

Q: There was a book, A Navy Second to None, by Banning at the time. This was a big issue at the time.

ENGLE: It was the issue. They were trying to sort people out. This was one way to do it. I said I was against the two-ocean Navy, and I could see the reaction of all three. I said, "I am

for a seven-ocean Navy." They asked me to explain this, and I said, "It's the essay I wrote earlier this year which won the national prize." It was entitled "The Next Ten Years in American Foreign Policy." It was through the Institute for Foreign Policy at William and Mary College, a national contest. With that, the interview ended, and ten minutes later, I was told that I was appointed.

Q: What had caused you to be interested in foreign affairs?

ENGLE: I was always interested in foreign affairs, despite the fact that I grew up in isolationist America, first in Montana and secondly, in Iowa. I was reading about foreign affairs as a child, and it was always my ambition to serve the US overseas, whether in a military or in a civilian capacity. I was always a sucker for all these ads for the Marines and Navy about seeing the world and doing something for your country.

Q: I'm going to skip over some parts of your early career that I hope we will get back to at another time. I would like to concentrate on several aspects. The first one is your time in Italy. How did you get assigned to Italy, and when was this?

ENGLE: This was in early 1951. I had taken and passed the Foreign Service exams of 1949, and you had to wait two years at that time in order to be appointed. This was '51. I had gone from Oxford to Italy.

Q: You had been a Rhodes Scholar.

ENGLE: I had been a Rhodes Scholar. I went from Oxford to Italy on a Fulbright in the fall of 1950, and I was studying in the home of Benedetto Croce, studying politics. The consulate general was nearby, and it turned out that the consul general, Alfred T. Nestor, I had worked for in Ecuador in 1942 and 1943.

Q: I might add that your early time in the Foreign Service was as a staff officer.

ENGLE: Yes. This is the third time, actually. I'd been a staff officer twice before. First, from 1941 to '44, I was in the old Auxiliary Service. That was converted to a staff service in '46, and in '47. I was taken back from the military directly to the staff service, knowing that I was leaving later on a Rhodes Scholarship.

But in '51, I was going in for the third time with a foreign wife, namely English. Nestor needed a political officer, so he arranged with the Department of State that I would be appointed in the staff service, and my wife, who was English, would be sent immediately to the US for naturalization, and, on her return, I would be made an FSO. It worked out just that way.

Q: You dealt with a number of things. Of course, by this time you were fluent in Italian.

ENGLE: Yes, I had studied it.

Q: So you worked under Claire Boothe Luce, and here is an ambassador who has been the subject of much controversy. I wonder, how did you see her when you operated? This is when you were assigned to Rome in 1953.

ENGLE: She had already been there for three or four months and had selected me from among those junior officers serving in consulates to replace Nathaniel Davis in the political section.

Q: Later Director General of the Foreign Service and ambassador.

ENGLE: Many times an ambassador. I went there for an interview, and I was asked to come up to Rome from Naples immediately and join the political section, urgently because one of the great elections of the post-war was held in May of 1953--De Gasperi versus the Communists, a second round, the first having been in '48.

Q: How did you evaluate her when you first got there? What was your feeling about her as an ambassador?

ENGLE: I was very cautious, because it was so unusual to have a woman ambassador, and also because of her known antecedents politically. But very shortly my reservations evaporated and I grew to like her very much. I always found that it was extremely stimulating to be around her. For one thing, she was intellectually curious, and she wanted to know what the facts were. It just happened that I knew Italy very well from several years of study and work there, and I knew Italian politicians and Italian history. I could give her an answer quickly on almost everything. Therefore, I tended to be referred to rather often and also, she needed an interpreter when she spoke to the president or the prime minister or the foreign minister or any politician or any minister. Therefore, I was with her and I wrote up the conversations.

Q: How effective was she?

ENGLE: I found her very effective, and I think she was popular with the Italian Government and with the ministers. Certainly the policy she followed was very popular, something they found agreeable.

Q: What were some of the issues that you particularly were involved with in Italy when you were there?

ENGLE: When I was in Naples, most of my time was spent doing political work. The last year I was doing consular work, and, in effect, political work on the side because I had so many influential connections. Then I was given a special assignment to run down the antecedents of US gangsters. Clients included "Lucky" Luciano.

Q: Was he still hanging around Naples at that time?

ENGLE: Yes. Joe Adonis, who was then public enemy number one, but he came back shortly after I got the goods on him. He was deported to Italy. Murder, Inc., the Anastasio brothers, who controlled the waterfront in New York.

Q: I might add that we were still working on the connections of the various groups out of Naples when I left there in 1981. We had somebody who was working on that today.

ENGLE: I went out in some places, literally on foot, spent days walking from one place to another to ask village clerks for birth certificates and that sort of thing, by surprise. That was Naples. But by the time I got to Rome, I was then in charge of the moderate political parties, those of the government and those supporting the government, the Cabinet, Parliament, and you might say the government. In other words, the ministry as a whole and how it was doing. The rest of my time was spent with directly supporting the ambassador as interpreter and sort of political aide and drafter of many of her personal communications.

Q: You were saying that you got involved in the opening to the left in Italy at that time, apperture en la senistre. What involvement did you have with this involvement to the left?

ENGLE: It was a matter of discussion for several years when I was in Italy, and then next, the Italian desk officer at the Department of State. The results of the 1953 Parliamentary elections were unfavorable to democratic Italy. The more moderate parties, Christian Democrats and two or three others, would return with such a small majority in Parliament, it was only 20 or 25 seats, it was clear that that did not give the country enough latitude to govern effectively. There was always a question of opening up on one side or the other to bring another party or two in, so that the majority would be larger and the consensus in the public would be larger. That was, you might say, the classic political problem of the day.

The Italians themselves, that is, key Italian politicians who would be responsible for such a maneuver, had doubts, and the US Government, particularly in Washington, had doubts about whether it would be a good idea to move either to the right, in the direction of the Neo-Fascists (that was going too much into the past), or moving to the left to embrace Pietro Nenni, who was an ally of the Communists. He was the head of the Italian Socialist Party.

The attitudes in Italy and in Washington evolved over the period of four or five years, and we began, in about 1957, to get rather serious in Washington about an opening, this time to the left with Nenni. Many in his party had given many signs of being sort of independent over there, instead of being tied to the Communists. They had been drifting toward the center, and they were in favor of being taken in; they wanted to be taken in. It became much clearer that this could be done successfully by 1957, and as I recall, it was 1958 when it became our official policy to support that maneuver.

When the US said this would be all right, the Italians heard this, and they maneuvered so that Nenni was brought into the family.

Q: How did the ambassador, still Clare Boothe Luce at this time, and her supporting staff look upon this? Was there an evolution in thinking, or were they pressing for this early on?

ENGLE: No, Mrs. Luce never pressed for this. I think her thinking did evolve, because in early '53, when she went there, it was '57 that she came out, but the initiative hadn't matured that far for her to have to take a stand before she was replaced by Zellerbach.

Q: But she was not adamantly opposed? She was looking at her options or changing her thinking?

ENGLE: Yes, but I think it would be fair to say that she was against bringing Nenni in during her ambassadorship. In fact, most responsible Americans were. We wanted to be very cautious about bringing in something that might be a Trojan horse.

Q: I think there is still some controversy today about whether this was a good thing or not a good thing. I've heard it debated.

You then spent considerable time in London and in Dusseldorf and Bonn. I hate to move on, but I want to move to the next assignment that is of particular interest in this interview, and this is going to Accra. This was in 1961. How did this come about?

ENGLE: This came about because I was walking through the hall in the Department of State on home leave at the end of July 1961, and I was seen by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Henry Tasca. Henry had been Minister for Economic Affairs when I was in Rome, and also he came in as Minister for Economic Affairs in Bonn. We were always pretty good friends. At that time he was in African Affairs. This was the time of the opening of Africa. There was this great movement of personnel, mostly from the Bureau of European Affairs, which was sort of a treasurer particularly of middle-grade officers with experience. We just rushed them off to Africa, to open up new posts and to get well-established there. Henry was looking for recruits and saw me, and that very day, he had me called in and said, "We need a man in Accra who can deal with Nkrumah."

I had had a lot of recent experience with Socialist Parties and with trade unions. I said, "Well, I just came back from Bonn after being in that job as labor attaché for only ten months, and I'm being taken back there for another two-year tour. You'll have to modify the Europeans if they want me." He went to them, and they resisted, but "Soapy" Williams had a lot of influence. "Soapy" Williams was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs.

Q: And former governor of Michigan.

ENGLE: Former governor of Michigan. He had a lot of influence in the Democratic Party. A few days later, it was confirmed that the opposition of Ambassador Dowling out in Germany and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs also had been overcome, and I was to proceed immediately to Accra.

Q: How did you see the situation in Accra at the time you went there in '61?

ENGLE: We had very able leadership at the embassy, Francis Russell. Ambassador Russell was one of two or three people who invented the Marshall Plan, and he was a great ambassador. We had that great leadership. But we were already into a plan for supporting Ghana in the construction of a Volta River dam, which, I believe, was the first immense project of that time that we supported in Africa. It may have been the first after what we did for the Aswan Dam. It involved enormous expenditures, and as I recall, the commitment of the United States of something like a quarter of a billion dollars, it was to revolutionize the economy of Ghana based on backing up water, getting electric power, and building an aluminum manufacturing complex.

To be very honest with you, I was against the plan, in part because the Ghanaian Government, under [Kwame] Nkrumah's leadership, was aligning itself more and more closely with the Soviet Union, and Soviet influence was growing fast. Nkrumah and his government were attacking the United States all the time. This didn't seem to me to be the right sort of conditions in which we should commit such a vast amount of money. I thought we ought to concentrate on countries more willing to be agreeable to the United States, and that didn't mean we would demand that they be our minions at all. I believed that we ought to have a dignified relationship of a political and moral equality, and there had to be a sense of affability or agreeability, you might say, between the two governments, which really wasn't true between Nkrumah and the American Government.

Q: Ghana, being the first African country, really, to come out from colonial rule and also having a charismatic ruler such as Nkrumah, we were spending a great deal of time looking at Ghana, compared to other parts of Africa.

ENGLE: Yes, that was a mistake.

Q: A disproportionate time.

ENGLE: Disproportionate. We de-emphasized places like the Ivory Coast right next door. Today and ever since the early '60s or middle '60s, the Ivory Coast has been one of the examples, and Senegal, of countries that made sensible decisions, and therefore, they became wisely developed, and their populations gratified by the policies of their government.

Q: How did you find Ambassador Russell and then again, back in Washington, "Soapy" Williams, the African Bureau? Were they almost mesmerized by Ghana?

ENGLE: Francis Russell was not. He is an extremely able and wise man who could see all these defects, and was not very keen for us to be cooperating to this extent without dignity. He was a very dignified man himself. If it had at all been in his hands, he would have done

it far more wisely, and we would have had a more agreeable relationship with Nkrumah, and quite possibly Nkrumah wouldn't have been so hunkered up to the Soviets.

Q: Where was the pressure coming from in order to be overly accommodating?

ENGLE: In part it was coming from the Kaiser Company, the Kaiser people. They had their man called Chad Calhoun. This is a big company that was going to support the dam.

Q: This is Kaiser Aluminum.

ENGLE: Yes.

Q: Often the charge is that American commercial interests or economic interests drive our foreign policy. In this case, there is probably something to it, wouldn't you say?

ENGLE: Yes. The American Government had been moving in the direction of the Volta Dam for some time, and that sympathy began when Nkrumah was more sympathetic and more moderate and less tied in with the Russians. As we moved toward stronger support, which ended up in approval of the program, Nkrumah was moving in the other direction in international affairs; he was moving toward, in effect, alliance with the Soviets and anti-Americanism.

Q: Were we able to do anything about this? You at the embassy, you particularly, but also the staff of the embassy, how could you try to counter this or change the course?

ENGLE: We couldn't very much because we were tied down with the policy that was already approved. We could keep reporting the anti-American action of the Nkrumah Government.

Let me tell you that Chad Calhoun was sort of our second ambassador there, and this was a great embarrassment to Francis Russell. Chad would go back and forth. He had entre into the White House; he had information that was different, or at least he presented it differently, than what we had; Nkrumah used him as a special emissary, in effect, and he was really an advocate of Nkrumah, that's what he was. Quite often his judgments were exactly the contrary to the judgments of those in the embassy.

Q: What was the role that the African Bureau played in Washington under "Soapy" Williams?

ENGLE: The African Bureau's official policy was favorable to Nkrumah, and this was personified by "Soapy" himself, who came to Ghana in his first visit, he'd never met Nkrumah, and this was about May or June of 1963. At the airport, he began talking about osaygefo, which means "savior." He could have spoken of the president instead of osaygefo, but osaygefo is the expression used by the emotional supporters of Nkrumah and his party and, of course, in the press, to refer to the president, osaygefo. Well, he referred to

osaygefo instead of the president, and this stunned moderate people in Ghana, those who hoped the US would come back to a more even-keeled policy toward the Nkrumah Government.

Q: Did you or people at the embassy have a chance to talk to "Soapy" Williams and try to make him understand the situation more?

ENGLE: Yes, we did. I can remember we had several meetings with him, and I can remember meeting at the DCM's residence in Accra at the end of his visit, a wind-up, where I was number three at the embassy. I felt that I had to get up and tell "Soapy" Williams where I thought we were, where I thought we ought to go, because it wasn't going to come out completely in one whole. I did that, and "Soapy" was quite gracious about it. It was a contrary view to his own, but I realized that I probably didn't have any future in Africa after this. (Laughs) Sure enough, when my orders came out a few months later, I was transferred to Managua as DCM.

Our ambassador at that time, who was a political appointee and a very fine man named William P. Mahoney, from Arizona, who was really quite a balanced sort of man, but was caught with Williams' policy, greeted me in 1965 in Phoenix, at his home, while he was still ambassador there, when I was on home leave from Nicaragua. We went to see him, my wife and I. He came out on the front porch with his arms out like this, and he said, "Jim, you were right all the time." (Laughs) And I have to tell you that the efficiency report written on me was not good. It was said in there that I just didn't understand Africa.

I want to add here that I knew Africans and the key elements in government support, like the People's Convention Party and the trade unions. I was the only one who knew any people in those organizations at all.

Q: I recall this because I was involved slightly. I was in intelligence and research for African Affairs at this time. People were expected to "think right" about Africa. This was a "brand-new" continent and all things were possible, and the leaders were all wonderful. It was a time of really bright hope, which was not supported by the facts, even at the time. But would you say there was a certain amount of knocking down those in the Foreign Service who were trying to be more pragmatic about our approach, rather than romantic?

ENGLE: You're right. You have described perfectly the attitude that prevailed at the time in Washington and, I think, generally throughout the Foreign Service and the posts in Africa. You had to be supportive of whatever Africans did, and some incredible and objectionable things were done by many African heads of government. I personally, and one or two others in the embassy, believed that we should insist on dignified relations and that we shouldn't get out and cheer things that were wrong; we just keep quiet about those things and conduct pleasant relations and be friendly and all that, but not accept any gaff and not get on our knees and sort of pray that this dictator would be reasonable and agreeable. That's what we were doing in Ghana. We just had too many people around there engaged in Nkrumah worship.

Q: I recall this period vividly.

ENGLE: Of course, there was a reaction later just to the opposite side in some places.

Q: In Managua, I'd like to just concentrate quickly on your role as DCM. Who was the ambassador when you went, and what were the dates you went to Managua, Nicaragua?

ENGLE: I got to Nicaragua in December of 1963. The ambassador was Brown, I think it was. I can't remember his first name. He was a career minister, previously head of personnel.

Q: What was our policy towards Nicaragua at the time?

ENGLE: Our policy toward Nicaragua was the best policy the United States ever had toward Nicaragua, and it was based on the Alianza Para el Progreso, but it wasn't just that. We had that policy officially everywhere in Latin America. This was Kennedy's policy brought in in 1961, of aid on a dignified basis, emphasizing growth.

Q: This is the Alliance for Progress.

ENGLE: Yes. But in Nicaragua, we had a policy that had been carefully worked out ever since Brown arrived, of trying to expand democracy, expand moderate government, let's say, in Nicaragua, by bringing in the moderate opposition, the conservative party, which was controlled by people largely educated in the United States. That was true of the governing liberal party, Somoza's, too. They had become familiar with democratic institutions in the United States and admired them, and they all wanted to bring about a political arrangement whereby there could be transfer of power back and forth, accepted by the country without revolution, and also, at the same time, in conditions of dynamic economic growth in the country. The country was just zooming at that time. It was one of the most promising economic situations anywhere in the world. Politically, the progress was very rapid when we began bringing conservatives into our houses and arranging for them to meet liberals and have dinner.

Q: This had not been done before?

ENGLE: No.

Q: But you felt quite free to move between the two wings of the parties?

ENGLE: Yes. We made it very clear. But fortunately, after Luis Somoza left power in '61, Luis was the elder son of the old Tacho, who was assassinated in 1956, Luis became president 'til '61 and he was a moderate. Things were drifting in the right way under Luis, who was American educated. They were going in the right direction, but when Brown got there, it moved far more rapidly because it was institutionalized as a US policy of bringing

together all the moderate elements in the country and try to persuade them to adopt a political mechanism, in other words, a Congress with all the necessary institutions of a democratic setup.

I must say that after Luis left power in '61, it was arranged that there should be a pro-Somoza liberal to take over the government, and that was Schick. Rene, I believe, was his first name. Rene Schick, who was a moderate man, very favorable to the United States. Luis, who left power, realized that this kind of arrangement would help moderate things still further. It had been a country where there was a lot of unrest all the time coming out of the 19th century.

It was also, I would say, a country that was like the Wild West of the 1870s. Everybody was armed, most people were on horseback, you fired first and asked questions later. This is the way the country was, still. It's unbelievable. It's like going to the Wild West in the United States, even during this period. But things were improving all the time, and our policy found the Schick regime to be very agreeable. In effect, it was actually supported, tacitly, by the conservative opposition, which didn't do things that provoked it. The country was in kind of an elated state as a result of this relaxation of tension. I can say that I've never been in a country which was so pro-American as in Nicaragua. Every part of the country, I'd go to villages, the most remote places, even on the east coast, and I found practically everyone.

Q: There was not much residue of resentment because of Walker and the gray-eyed man of destiny and then, of course, the Marines in there and all that?

ENGLE: No. In fact, everybody tried to remember his contacts with the Marines and tell me about them. That didn't leave contrary to the people now who are opposed to our policy in Nicaragua, who say that we did nothing but oppose true Nicaraguan interests all those decades. This wasn't true at all. We probably favored those who happened to be in power more than we should have, but Nicaraguans, in general, did not harbor old resentments, any resentments against the United States. Maybe there were a few people that I couldn't find, but my colleagues and I got around the country, just everywhere, and every place was open to us. We'd just walk in anywhere without introduction, say who we were, and they'd say, "Oh, my goodness. I've got So-and-so living up in San Francisco, he's my cousin. Do you know him?" I very, very seldom heard anything critical of the United States. I've never been in a country before that wanted so much to be the 51st state of the United States.

Q: At the time, was there any political development that was particularly critical that happened while you were there?

ENGLE: Yes. There were a couple of things. I would mention that there was a tiny cell of Communists who called themselves Sandinistas, out in the bush. The policy of General Somoza, who controlled the National Guard, the Guardia, he was the head of the National Guard, which, by the way, had only 6,000 members for all the police and army duties in the country. Today how big is the Army? 120,000 plus as many in the reserves, maybe 20 times

as great, and yet this regime refers to the Somoza regime as a military dictatorship, and we do, too, as most of our people who don't understand.

There was this little group way back in the bush, and General Somoza's policy was to hunt them down and kill them.

Q: This is Somoza who later became president.

ENGLE: Yes, a West Point graduate who took over the National Guard at his father's death. I believe he didn't head the Guard until after his father was assassinated. But he was the strongest man in the country.

Q: His first name was?

ENGLE: Anastasio, Jr.--Tachito. The other great development was that there was to be an election, a popular election in February 1967, and the conservative party was given all kinds of freedom to conduct big rallies criticizing liberals and Somoza all the time. We sent representatives to all these things, and we told the liberals, "We're going to be present at all of your rallies, and we want you to know this." They understood this. Most of the liberals liked this idea, that there were going to be friends in the opposition. We helped them a great deal in this four or five years.

But the conservative party was headed by a hot-head named Dr. Aguero, a dentist trained in the United States. He and a few other extremists decided that in the election where Aguero was opposing Anastasio, Jr., for the presidency, the votes weren't going to be counted honestly, so they'd better have a revolution before the election.

Let me say that I was a DCM, and I was always fearful that the hot-headed minority in the conservative party, in the leadership, would precipitate violence as a solution, which was the typical Nicaraguan solution. After the American intervention in the Dominican Republic under Lyndon Johnson in '65, the idea came to me that due to undertones in Nicaraguan politics, that this small minority in the conservative party might decide to precipitate exactly the kind of revolution there, hoping that America would intervene as they had in the Dominican Republic and had historically in Nicaragua over the decades. To them, it was successful American intervention. Both parties believed this intervention was successful. (Laughs) Except at certain times, the conservatives when Somoza was in. They saw, traditionally, America as the outside force that could change things in Nicaragua, so therefore they would be in favor when they were out of power.

There were undertones that suggested that the same thing could happen in Nicaragua, so I talked the line all the time against this kind of thing happening. Others did, too, in the embassy, suggesting that we wouldn't do this kind of thing in Nicaragua, which is a different situation, that Nicaragua had far better prospects in the Dominican Republic, moderate people like themselves could build democracy in a country, it would not be necessary to resort to force.

Q: The role of the ambassador at this time, was he doing the same thing or was he around at this time?

ENGLE: He was around, but he was unwell most of the time, and he died only a year or two after he left. Aaron S. Brown was his name. He was a very effective ambassador, liked by all sides and was symbolic of the Alianza, and knew how to persuade elements in both parties to cooperate with each other. We merely followed him always on this, talking the line hard ourselves, but it was something that really worked. Aaron was very concerned that something like this might happen, particularly in the last few months before that election. But we had definite information clandestinely, a few weeks ahead of time, that it was definitely planned that there should be something, and it would be in the great political rally in Managua to be the climax of the conservative campaign. We expected at least 50,000. Managua didn't have more than 200,000 living there.

So I immediately requested the CIA station chief to bring in walkie-talkies so that we could monitor that effectively. I began planning, I and others, including the ambassador. We were going to the conservative leadership and trying to persuade him not to do anything, "Just go through with the election, whatever the result. We've got a lot of time to build a future here, and we're counting on you people."

They looked to us, you see, for leadership and guidance on this, and so did a lot of the liberals. I began planning, with one or two on my staff, what we would do if this broke out. So we had a plan of operation immediately available for when it did. We got four or five or six walkie-talkies, TRC-120s. They were effective. We had them all ready. The intelligence indicated, and there were also hints in the open, that this would take place in Managua on that Sunday the 22nd of January.

There was a big conservative social gathering in Granada, which was the conservative center, sort of a historic place 30 or 40 miles south of Managua. We were invited, as always, and so we went. I spent that whole evening with members of the staff, and I believe the ambassador might have been there, trying to persuade them--this was directly now--not to do it tomorrow, pointing out dire results, and telling them, "The United States is not going to intervene to support you, not militarily." As I recall, we didn't have any authority at all from Washington to do this, but we did it.

Q: Were you deliberately trying to avoid asking Washington?

ENGLE: We reported all along, but as I recall, there was no guidance. In any case, the leadership in Washington was, I would say, traditionalist in the sense that you had a change of assistant secretaries. You had Tom Mann as Assistant Secretary now. As we looked at him, he seemed to be less persuaded of the need to follow the old policy which was still on paper, the policy we'd been following so successfully. We had a feeling that we didn't have any real support one way or the other from Washington.

Q: Which, in a way, is probably ideal from an operation point of view.

ENGLE: It was ideal, and it was the result of that that we were able to get this revolution stopped, and wound up before Washington got excited. It would have been a real crisis there in Managuan foreign relations.

Q: How did this play out?

ENGLE: I said to myself, "If it breaks out Sunday, we've got to have this all solved by dark on Monday. In other words, it was about 27 hours; that's all the time we've got. Then Washington will take it over and it will be a terrible mess." This was the plan. I'd been thinking about this for two years already.

I worked out a duty list beforehand of people to come in early in the morning on Sunday to stand by at the embassy for what we thought was going to happen, and we were at the embassy, waiting. Nothing broke out until marching down the street, bands of conservatives, they always had to march at a meeting, at 2:00 p.m., opened fire just randomly at the National Guard who were around. The Somozas brought in a lot of National Guard units into the city because they expected something, too. In the meantime, I had lookouts in various places in the Grand Hotel, which was a building down in the center of town, at the big square where the meeting was being held. Had four or five people out with walkie-talkies and they'd report to me all the time as to what was happening. I was in the embassy managing the show.

At about 2:00 o'clock, I got word that firing had commenced. There was no systematic plan of the opposition; they didn't know what they were going to do. Most of them were there and didn't know there was going to be anything. Right away, the National Guard responded with gunfire and the conservatives in the march, this great mass of conservatives, turned around and started running. They ran back down the street. These are rather narrow streets, by the way. As they ran past the Grand Hotel, someone got the idea that this was a place of refuge because there were a lot of foreigners staying in the place; they'd be safe in there. So they ran into this hotel. It wasn't a very big building. They ran into this hotel, which must have had four or five stories, and took it over, barricaded themselves in, and seized everybody in the hotel as a hostage.

Q: Including an American officer that you had there.

ENGLE: That's right. They probably didn't quite know who he was, but he explained himself and he wasn't touched at all. He kept reporting to us from this room which he had rented right in the front of the hotel on the second floor, and we got vivid reports which we fired off to Washington right away. There was a lot of confusion. We knew something of what was going on, since we did have some people down there, but not everything. One fellow, a junior officer named Pat Theros, took refuge in a place that sold coffee and doughnuts and that kind of thing, and he got on his walkie-talkie to me and said, "I'm under the counter. Can you hear the gunfire?" (Laughs) "What shall I do?" He reported everything he knew. He eventually got out.

It was some time before we were able to put very many pieces together to determine intelligently just what the deployments were on the two sides, what was happening. We did have the head of our military group, a full colonel, who was down with the Somoza military units, the Guardia, and he reported from time to time, as did the defense attaché when he got to the scene. We arranged that he shouldn't be around, but the commander of the military group didn't pay any attention to the instructions, and he was down there on the other side.

Q: Too involved, would you say?

ENGLE: Too involved, yes.

Q: You really wanted him to stay away?

ENGLE: That's right. This resulted in sharp language on my part and that of others, complaints to his boss down in Panama.

At that time, we knew there were a lot of American citizens in that hotel, and other foreign nationals, as well. We began planning what to do with these people if the place became free. Of course, we started from the beginning and tried to persuade both sides to stop firing, because for us, it endangered American nations. That was the concrete reason we could use for interfering: "Just don't do any firing." But they did a lot of firing, and they fired, as I recall, 37-millimeter cannon shells, the Guardia did, point blank from a block away or so into the front of the Grand Hotel, and these shells went all the way through the hotel, some of them did, and our man there, Walter Cadette, a junior officer, was wounded. But he kept reporting up to a certain time and then just faded out. We got no more from him.

The firing did die down, but there was a lot of firing. We knew there were conservatives up on rooftops in various places, firing as snipers and otherwise. But we still had only a vague idea, except where the Guardia was. We could identify that because it was their units and they were friendly to us, of course. Both sides were friendly to us. We could see how they were deployed. We just didn't want any massacre as a result of military action on either side.

By some time well after dark, after interviewing a few people who were let out, as I recall there were some nuns and one or two others who had some reason to be released, they came out and told us what things were like on the inside, and we got a picture of what was happening. We managed to get one of our officers who was head of our political section, named Edward T. Cheney, also from Vermont, later killed in the Philippines, into the hotel. By the way, the ambassador was not well. He had terrible heart and other problems. He was at the residence, and we reported to him now and then how things were going. Ted got in and talked to the rebel leadership, all of whom were good friends of his. He came back out. This was without result. We reported what he came back with.

During the night, we were doing a lot of things supportive in the way of, for instance, making plans for dealing with all the people who would get out of the hotel. We arranged for people evacuated, whether they were American or not, to be taken in by embassy families. So this was all planned during the night, and also how we would get supplies, food, in to them, because the hotel had very little food, in case the thing lasted very long. We didn't want them to die of hunger. We were going to mount a food assistance program that we'd arranged to get through the lines during a cease-fire. But that part of it turned out not to be necessary.

I remember going out. I was very exhausted. I had gotten up at 4:00 o'clock that morning. About 1:00 o'clock the following morning, I went home to eat a meal, and that was several miles away. I swam for about an hour. Instead of sleeping, I swam and went straight back to the office. By that time, we thought we could put a team into the hotel by arrangement with the Guardia, to talk to them about their plight and what could be done, and urge them not to do anything to jeopardize all these foreigners, including Americans.

So I headed this team and went with the ambassador's car, with the flag flying, and got within about two blocks. I remember seeing a couple of nuns crouched behind a tank. (Laughs) So I stopped to talk to them. They had been released, but they were afraid of being shot, still, by conservatives who didn't know what they were shooting at. I talked to them, and when I was standing out there talking to them, I was fired at. (Laughs) Bullets hit the tank from rooftops. These poor fools didn't know what they were shooting at at all.

I had the chauffeur drive up to the front of the hotel and had already arranged with the Guardia not to fire. I called in, urging them not to fire. They didn't fire from the hotel; there were people watching, obviously. I walked in the hotel and there was a lot of destruction from cannon fire. I had a meeting with the same people I'd talked to Saturday night down in Granada. (Laughs) I remember saying, "Well, here we just resume our meeting. Remember the night before last, we urged you not to take action. I want to tell you that you're totally surrounded, and if you keep on going and there's no truce, you're going to be destroyed, every one of you. This is not good at all. You're all friends of ours. You're not going to achieve anything, and you are jeopardizing all these Americans. What you've done is not going to be very popular back in the United States." They kept hinting that we ought to bring in forces. "We're not going to bring in our forces at all. You're responsible for these hostages. We're expecting you to solve this problem."

Ted was with me, too, the two of us. We began to discuss with them a hint that they'd made, that they'd really like to end the thing. They were armed with just old pistols and old rifles, and their armament was nothing. You know, it turned out in the end, there were more than 1,300 of them in that place. Maybe only a third of them had arms, but they had crammed into this small building.

Ted and I put together sort of a proposal that I took up to General Somoza for a cease-fire and an end to the whole thing. Luis was there, too, thank heaven, in the president's office,

and I talked mostly to him and the acting president, who was Guerrero, Schick having died. He was a good friend, too. Both Luis and Guerrero were good friends of ours.

The proposal was this: that there should be no more firing, that those in the hotel who were in rebellion would deposit their arms as they walked out, deposit their arms in stacks and be frisked, and would be put on buses and taken back to their home provinces at government expense, and that everybody would be able to return home without being touched. Only then--this was the condition of the rebels--would the hostages be freed. They would be the last ones out.

So this was done, and it was done correctly by both sides. They piled up their arms and left, went back home, and somewhere I had to transport a couple hundred miles in government-financed buses back home. I remember being there at the entrance when the last ones put down their arms. American reporters by that time had got there. It didn't make much of an impression in the US. Some photographers were there with TV crews. You know, not one of them came up to me and asked me for any information. They talked to the colonel commanding our military group; he was the only one they talked to. Therefore, it was reported inaccurately in the United States, the whole thing. There were some newspaper reporters, too. They didn't bother to get a balanced story; they didn't bother to talk to the embassy, nothing like that, or any responsible person. They came back with a report to the US which got play for just one day, and it was warped.

Q: I'd like to go back to one thing before we move on, and that is you said you figure you had maybe 24 or a little more hours before Washington would take over, and then it would be a big mess. How did you see the situation, as far as Washington? What was the problem about Washington that bothered you?

ENGLE: They would get too excited about the Americans in that hotel and would want to send protective forces, and that this would get us involved probably more and more, more than just that with the two sides, with our forces there. I thought this was a very bad thing. Remember, we ended up in Santo Domingo with thousands of American troops, and it took months to get out.

Q: Yes, and with a lot of ill will.

ENGLE: With a lot of ill will, and we didn't need this.

Q: But the main thing was, you felt that Washington was inclined, as we were in those days, to send troops. When in doubt, to protect Americans, send troops.

ENGLE: Probably so. We knew they wouldn't admit this in the first instance; they would wait until the problem looked desperate to them, and then they would make a snap decision like that to throw some forces in, like they had in the Dominican Republic. Maybe not, but it just seemed to us that this was likely, and we didn't want this to have any chance at all of coming about. In fact, it was great the way it happened, because American prestige was

high. Everybody thought that we conducted ourselves well. We pulled the two contending parties apart, and both of them, I think, were glad of that. Certainly all the families of the conservatives who were inside that hotel were gratified, because they thought they were going to lose their heads of family. The women, for instance, came around to me afterward, women who never kissed me before, thanks.

Q: What happened to the young officer, Walter Cadette, who was in the hotel?

ENGLE: Walter left the Foreign Service after Managua, and he's one of the vice presidents of Morgan Guaranty.

I want to say something about the Americans and other foreigners. It turned out there were 94 Americans and 31 other foreign nations from various countries. We had transport waiting for them. They were put straight into the vehicles, taken straight to American families where they were assigned, given drink if they wanted it, the children were taken care of, and then provided a nice dinner and put to bed. At the same time, we had people working on their transportation outside the country. Within a day or so, we had all of them out of the country or wherever they wanted to go.

Q: You were planning all the time for the next step.

ENGLE: We were planning the next step, and all this without any instructions. It was just the way it should be done.

Q: Now we move from Central America to what was then the hot spot of American foreign policy. This is 1968. You had gone to the Senior Seminar for a year, which is the State Department's equivalent of a senior War College. Then from there, you were assigned to Saigon. How did your appointment to Saigon come about, and what were you doing?

ENGLE: I was a volunteer for service in Saigon or somewhere in Vietnam. Actually, in February 1965, I responded to an appeal by LBJ to the Foreign Service for volunteers who could serve in CORDS. That was the pacification program, served mostly in the provinces, to assist in pacifying the Vietnamese population and organizing it so it could resist invasion by the North Vietnamese and the few Viet Cong that were left. I volunteered against the wishes of my ambassador, and it turned out I was the only senior officer in the Foreign Service who volunteered at that time.

A few months later, I was on home leave and went into the personnel department, and was interviewed as a nut, because I was senior and I wanted to go to Indochina. They asked me all sorts of questions about, "Are you getting along with your ambassador? Are you getting along with your wife? Any problems with your children? Are you in financial troubles?" Well, I apparently satisfied them on this score. They thought I was crazy.

The next day, they said, "AID agrees to take you, and we'll give you one of the four regional positions," which later were called Deputy for CORDS out in the country. These were the

four leading positions in pacification under the US ambassador assigned to MACV as the Deputy Commander of MACV, who was at that time Robert Komer. William E. Colby was his deputy after '67. I would have one of these senior positions, but they said, "You've got to get ARA to agree to release you," ARA being the Latin American Republics Bureau. "They've got to approve, which means your ambassador had got to approve."

I went to ARA and they said, "We'll let you go, but we have to get clearance from your ambassador." They consulted him, and then it came out--something I didn't know--that he was up for transfer to Guatemala as ambassador, and they said, "We can't let you go anywhere. You've got to remain there as chargé d'affaires. You've been there already two years. Until a new ambassador comes, and then when he comes, if you want to go to Indochina, you can go." So it snuffed that out right there.

When I got to the Senior Seminar more than two years later, I began working again to go out there on my follow-on assignment, even though ARA said they'd tried to get me back. I had to do this all on my own, working with a junior officer in personnel, and it was just this lack of interest.

Q: Why did you want to go to Vietnam?

ENGLE: For several reasons, but one, I had been in military government in World War II, and I figured I had skills that I could use. I had a prominent role in the military government, even as a junior officer in the provinces. I could use these skills in Indochina. But besides, it was the old patriotic thing that I had had since I was a boy, of wanting to raise the flag, wanting to get into a war if we were in a war. I just had to be in it. And I even persuaded my wife and children to let me go, and I've got six children.

Q: When did you go to Saigon, and what were you doing?

ENGLE: I got there in July of '68, and the reason I was given the job was because Bill Colby was the head of CORDS at that time, had been in the CIA station at Rome when I was there, and we were friends and cooperated a lot together. He gave me a job, which was to be the head of one of the divisions of CORDS in Saigon. It was a reporting and analysis division that would analyze all the reports from pacification, put them together, send them to Washington, put them in a form that the commander out there could understand, and advise him.

After I arrived, it turned out I was only to be deputy chief, so I complained about this to Komer and to Colby, and when I left on visitation after four months--you could come back twice a year to your family--I said, "If this is not corrected, if I'm only going to be deputy chief of this division and kept in Saigon, you can count me out. I'm going to get another job. I want to be here, but I've got to have a more responsible position."

At that time, it was clear that when that lieutenant colonel who was in that job left--he became a full colonel while I was there--they were going to bring in another colonel to

replace him, and I'd be deputy to the second colonel. I said, "Unacceptable." I was already a Class II. "I'm senior to him, and I want a more prominent role in the war."

While I was gone on visitation, Colby arranged for me to become province senior advisor in Phu Yen.

Q: Where is Phu Yen?

ENGLE: Military region two, on the coast north of Nha Trang. It was by far the largest military region.

Q: You were working as a deputy on screening and consolidating these reports that were coming in. This has always been very controversial. There are all sorts of indices about whether a particular village was a class one, class two, or what have you. How accurate and how good a picture did you think was coming out of this? Or was this the typical bureaucratic thing, where everybody wanted to make sure that they looked good, so they were reporting what they felt was wanted, rather than a really accurate picture?

ENGLE: The latter is more or less correct. The reports were usually too optimistic.

Q: This is almost an impossible tool to use, isn't it, to try to get real management techniques into a political situation, particularly when we have something at stake, would you say?

ENGLE: I wouldn't fault them for developing this device, which is called the amnesty evaluation system. It was a cleverly put together device, it was quite sound. I don't know that you could have done much better in putting it together, and it was done by Clay McManaway. He's since been in the Foreign Service; he's an ambassador now. You can't put together a bureaucratic device like this and expect it to work the way it should work if you've got a lot of the factors that influence the evaluation that you can't control.

The basic factor was that the Vietnamese counterparts, mostly the Vietnamese ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] officers, who were in the administrative posts and in the military posts that we dealt with for pacification, almost all the province chiefs were colonels or lieutenant colonels in the army, they were working all the time to look good. They wanted the evaluation to cover up the things that they weren't doing or not doing well.

One of the basic causes of their being able to continue this was that the American military and, I think, on the political side, too, we did not convince the Vietnamese adequately that they should be straightforward and should be doing their job. See, the Vietnamese more or less thought that the war was something for the Americans and the Koreans to conduct. This was the attitude of the province chief, for instance. They were just poor little Vietnamese, scrambling around to make ends meet, and to try to rake in money on the side, and to take care of the families and that sort of thing, instead of fighting the war effectively.

We were never able to persuade them effectively enough to do what they ought to be doing, to fight the war as well as the North Vietnamese were fighting it. There were a few South Vietnamese who were doing this, but the great majority, no. The few who were like that didn't fit in with their system and therefore, couldn't get ahead.

Q: When you came back and went out to Phu Yen, what did your job involve?

ENGLE: I was the head of a team, a military-civilian advisory team, and it had approximately 250 military men. A number of them were senior NCOs. The table of organization had 23 civilian positions, of which not more than ten were filled at that time, to advise mostly on the civilian side, the operation of the provincial government. Under me, I had six teams in the six districts, and the teams out there are within the number I gave you; that's the whole organization. They were with district chiefs. Each of these district teams under me was commanded by a major, and the last year, by a retired captain who was a civilian. Usually it was a major. Sometimes later we got captains. They had the same functions in the district as I had with my team up at province.

Our business was to help them conduct the war effectively through their military forces. The province chief controlled the so-called regional forces and so-called popular forces, and they were forces outside the regular ARVN. The ARVN was to deal with the main force threat, and the RF and the PF, as they were called, were to deal with whatever threats came to towns and villages in the countryside. They weren't to be pitted against the NVA fourth division or whatever it was that was there, but with small units that tried to disrupt, and also to defend hamlets at night. Every hamlet was supposed to be defended at night when the North Vietnamese, with a few VC, infiltrated, trying to control the village totally just by being there at night.

The province chief controlled all the local forces, and then we also had the Popular Self-Defense Forces. All the rest of the men of all the villages and hamlets in the province were sort of conscripted into a force that was to help back up the RF and PF, because you ended up with maybe only four or five PF defending a village, and that wasn't enough. You needed other people who were armed, to support them. There weren't enough forces to go around.

So the total of these forces in Phu Yen province was 64,000 out of a population of 330,000. RF and PF were probably just several thousand; I can't remember the figure. The province chief commanded all this, and their effectiveness, in large part, depended on his command ability and whether he could get them to do the things they were supposed to do or not. This meant he had to be active militarily and give them proper instructions, give them proper orders, kick them in the behind if they didn't do their duty, and also to organize military operations to go out after these small units that were in the bush around hamlets, go after them, and provide intelligence so that we could get them with artillery fire. That required a lot of initiative, and the understanding and ability of the province chief was crucial to this whole thing.

Many province chiefs didn't have the understanding of this or didn't know how to command effectively, or took the view that was shared by so many other Vietnamese that really the Vietnamese shouldn't be very active in this thing at all, they should keep their casualties down, and not be aggressive. That was exactly the picture of my counterpart, who had formerly commanded a division.

Q: How long were you in Phu Yen?

ENGLE: I was in Phu Yen almost a year and a half.

Q: You came there just after the Tet Offensive in February of '68?

ENGLE: That's right. Then mini-Tet was in May. I arrived at MACV in July '68, and at the end of December or beginning of January, I was in Phu Yen--'69.

Q: For the period you were there, what was the situation in the province? Was it under much pressure, or was it pretty much a matter of local pacification?

ENGLE: There were some pressures. At the beginning, there were less pressures than we thought there were. We thought there was a lot of pressure, but the pressure went down a great deal after Tet and mini-Tet, because there was large-scale fighting in Phu Yen. The Viet Cong infrastructure was almost wiped out. So therefore, their military threat was way down, and the North Vietnamese pulled back with our main force units. By the way, I want to make very clear that the war was not a Viet Cong war; it was a North Vietnamese main force war, basically, and they used Viet Cong people just to infiltrate into hamlets and to form small units, usually having North Vietnamese soldiers with them to disrupt and to attack hamlets and things like that. It was basically a main force war.

When I first went there, they were still recovering from Tet, and we were trying to win back hamlets effectively. There was an organized campaign out of Saigon to do this in each of the provinces, and I arrived just as they were putting this counter-offensive into effect.

We very rapidly got hamlets back, to the point where in the end, only three or four hamlets out of 100-some we didn't have effective control over, at least in the daytime. So everything went well for several months, in spite of the ineptness of the province chief. This was, in part, due to the initiative of our advisory teams.

Q: How good were the teams that you had there, the military, and, particularly, the Foreign Service?

ENGLE: The team I had was generally rather good, but there were some persons of poor quality on it, both civilian and military, particularly civilian. These were civilians who managed to get hired off the street in various parts of the US in the middle '60s because we were desperate to have personnel out there, and we would hire literally anybody and send

him to Vietnam at a good salary with allowances and a good life, and they weren't energetic enough and their quality wasn't high enough, in many cases.

I had to try to get rid of those people. It was hard to do, there were so many ways of self-protection. It was hard to get rid of them. The same way with the military. If you had a man who wasn't very good, it was really very difficult to get rid of him unless you wrote a report that would ruin his career, if he was a career military.

Q: Did you have any junior Foreign Service officers?

ENGLE: Yes, I had three junior Foreign Service officers, all of whom were absolutely first class. By the way, I want to say there were also some very excellent civilian and military officers there on this team.

Q: Did you have any problem within the Foreign Service of inspiring the junior officers to see what they were doing, or were they motivated? Was it difficult for them?

ENGLE: They were always highly motivated. There were three, including one young black officer. They were highly motivated, all of them were very successful, and they were all admired by their military colleagues on the team, those under them and those who were over them and those on the same level, let's say. They've done pretty well in the Foreign Service since they left.

Q: You left in 1970 to go back to the Department.

ENGLE: Yes, in May 1970.

Q: What did you do in the Department?

ENGLE: I returned to become Director of the Vietnam Working Group.

Q: What did that involve?

ENGLE: That was the equivalent of a country director, and it was, at that time, the most important country director in the Department. That managed the war from the point of view of the Department of State's responsibilities. Most of the conduct of the war, of course, was managed in the Pentagon, but we had important aspects. We managed the embassy in Saigon, for instance, which was on top of the whole structure. MACV worked for the embassy. General Hayden worked for Ambassador Bunker.

We had the relationships of America and its allies in other countries in regard to that war, and we had to put together the policy papers, and we had to deal with the congressional inquiries. As I recall, I was director for about eight months only, more than 30% of the correspondence in the Department of State with Congress, congressional correspondence, was on the Vietnam War. This directorate had to deal with all that correspondence, and we

had only eight or nine officers to do everything. I had to personally do a lot of congressional letters myself.

Q: How about the direction of the war from the State Department? Who was calling the shots, and what sort of shots were they calling?

ENGLE: The most influential person was Ambassador William H. Sullivan, Bill Sullivan, ex-ambassador to Laos, who had had a lot of earlier Vietnam experience and worked with Dean Rusk on Vietnam back in the middle '60s. He was the most important element in this whole picture.

Q: What were we trying to do at that point? When you were there, how did you perceive the situation, and what we were going to try to accomplish?

ENGLE: We were going to try to maintain aid to the South Vietnamese, and we were going to try to reduce American forces to the point where we could get out and leave them to manage for themselves. We wanted also to arrange an end to the war with the North Vietnamese.

Q: In trying to work out policy and make policy recommendations, were you so involved in the day-to-day efforts, did you really have a chance to pull back and look at the big picture?

ENGLE: We did. We probably should have concentrated more on the big picture than we did. We had a lot of fires to put out right on the spot. For example, we had to be involved with all the visits of the top dignitaries from Vietnam to the United States. That took a lot of time. We had to support visits by senior Americans to Vietnam, and literally everybody was going. I remember having to do many of the papers for Vice President Agnew when he went there. I think that was in the summer of 1970. This drained away a lot of our manpower.

Q: How about relations with the military back in Washington? Were you seeing eye to eye, or were there some different outlooks?

ENGLE: I would say more or less eye to eye. In part, this was due to the effectiveness of Bill Sullivan up above me, who usually dealt with a very high level in Defense, and sometimes with Secretary Melvin Laird himself.

Q: You had a short detour from Vietnam, working with David Kennedy.

ENGLE: Yes. When I was Director of the Vietnam Working Group, in February 1961, I was informed that David M. Kennedy, Secretary of the Treasury, was leaving that position to make way for John Connolly, and that President Kennedy was making him an ambassador-at-large, and the President wished to send him immediately to Vietnam and other places on a special mission. Marshall Green, I remember, called me. Marshall was

over Bill Sullivan, actually. He said, "Could you go?" I said, "Marshall, that would take three weeks of my time, and in view of everything that's happening, I haven't got that much amount of time to spend on this thing. There would be great difficulty of this directorate in meeting its requirements." He said, "Yes, I agree with you." I recommended that a Class VI officer who was a staff assistant of Marshall Green be sent instead, and Marshall said, "Fine, that's what we're going to do."

Well, apparently he went back to Kennedy. I believe this is what happened. Or maybe it was decided high up in the Department by Alex Johnson or somebody like that. We couldn't possibly get by with this kind of a thing, sending a junior officer; it had to be me. So I was called up and told that I had to depart the next day for Vietnam and other points with David Kennedy in a special presidential aircraft. I hardly knew what was involved, except that we were going to spend a lot of time in Hawaii, Hong Kong, and Bali. (Laughs)

Q: You're really talking about moving Kennedy out and giving him a pleasant trip, for the most part, in order to get another political appointee, John Connolly, in?

ENGLE: No, it wasn't quite that simple. That's the way it began, but the ambassador-at-large was also to take on other missions for the President, and he went on from that, very soon thereafter, to conduct trade and currency negotiations. He was the first one to do what Yeutter and all those people have been doing just recently.

Q: So it was more important, but it started out as moving him to one side in order to open up a spot for another person?

ENGLE: Yes.

Q: Were you doing anything else in Washington or on these trips dealing with Vietnam that you think was of particular pertinence? You mentioned something about a site ops operation.

ENGLE: That was much later. At this time I was also in the special working group of the NSC for Indochina. In fact, I was the secretary of that working group. It dealt also with Cambodia and Laos. Bill Sullivan was the chairman of that working group.

Q: What were your particular concerns?

ENGLE: This was sort of a policy making group that reviewed the main developments in these three countries and made decisions as to what to do or recommendations to pass on to the President or the Secretary of Defense. It had Defense and CIA people on it; it had everybody on it.

Q: What were the main issues you had to deal with?

ENGLE: At that particular time, we were in the course of reducing our forces. That was perhaps the main thing.

Q: So you were helping to monitor, to see how this was going?

ENGLE: Yes.

Q: This was the Vietnamization program.

ENGLE: The Vietnamization program. By the way, I should have mentioned earlier that I was maybe the first one to implement Vietnamization. Back when I was senior advisor in Phu Yen province, I read in the papers that Nixon and Kissinger had adopted this policy to Vietnamize and, through that method, reduce our presence. As province senior advisor, I decided that I was going to Vietnamize right then and there on the spot, and I started Vietnamizing in Phu Yen by turning over responsibilities to the Vietnamese province chief and his forces. I got a lot of flak from higher headquarters. They said, "Just wait for your instructions." And it took a long time for these to get down there. Even months later, things hadn't been properly worked out up above. In the meantime, I was Vietnamizing all the time, for instance, turning over artillery fires from the Koreans to the Vietnamese. They would be responsible, and the Koreans wouldn't have that.

We had two Korean regiments, you see, in that province. By the way, I was the senior allied officer, so I was senior to their commanders. I could bring about joint operations of the Koreans and the Vietnamese. This is a way of teaching the Vietnamese how to fight. I'd be the catalyzer of this thing and, in effect, the person who brought it about and managed what they did, which was a unique situation in the country.

Q: You went to Nha Trang. The peace initiatives had come after the cease-fire, which was when?

ENGLE: The cease-fire was in effect January 27, 1973.

Q: At that point, you were brought to Vietnam.

ENGLE: I left the US that very day, after helping Alex Johnson and Bill Sullivan draw up a plan that would involve expansion of Foreign Service posts out there. We were going to have four consulates general under the embassy, established at the headquarters of the previous four Vietnamese military regions. Among our responsibilities was to civilianize all US interests in each of these regions, and also monitor the cease-fire by observing the North Vietnamese, reporting how things were going in their contacts with the friendly side.

Q: You went to Nha Trang, which was the military district number two as consul general. What type of operation did you have there?

ENGL: First of all, I took in ten TDY FSOs, junior officers, most of whom spoke Vietnamese, who served at least one tour some years before--crackerjack, elite young men who were brought in from all over the world. I made one of them my deputy. We had to manage the phase-out of the US military presence. We still had considerable forces there at that time. They had 60 days to get out completely, and we wanted to recover US property that they had, and dispose of it properly, either appropriate it ourselves for civilian use, or turn it over by a systematic method to the Vietnamese for their use. In other words, not let it get out in the black market and things like that; do it the proper way to help the Vietnamese.

Then to establish a relationship with the Vietnamese authorities, mainly the military region commander who was a three-star general, and with province chiefs. I made the decision that I was going to maintain an American presence in every single one of the provinces, and that was 13 provinces. I had only ten FSOs to help me, so some of them couldn't go to provinces. A couple had to stay there. I had to use civilians inherited from CORDS to be present in the other places.

We phased down to the point where in some places, we had only one person. In of them, Quang Duc, I ended up with only one Vietnamese national as our presence, but under the American flag in the old headquarters. But I made that decision to stay in every province, and though there was pressure from the embassy at that time to get out of a lot of provinces, I didn't do it. I said, "It's psychologically important for the Vietnamese, if they're going to manage this whole show now, to have the American flag in every province and some place to go, with visits by me regularly to the Vietnamese authorities to reassure them. That's the only way they're going to stick together and have enough fortitude and will to resist the North Vietnamese who are still left there in position."

Q: How was it working? When were you in Nha Trang?

ENGL: I was in Nha Trang from about February 1 to the middle of May, and then I was gone two months. I was recalled to Washington. I was to be chargé d'affaires in Phnom Penh. Then I went back for one week in July. But a lot went on in those three months.

Q: What were the major problems that you had to deal with?

ENGL: First of all, I had to make the new Department of State operation credible to the Vietnamese authorities, make it clear that the United States wasn't leaving them totally to themselves, we were a capable organization, we could have liaison with them, they could come to us if they needed help, and we were there as an American presence.

I moved into the old commander's headquarters in Nha Trang, refurbished it to civilianize it, improved its defenses, which were very poor under the military, with Nung Chinese hired civilian guards, and immediately established relationship with all the key Vietnamese in that region, whom I talked to about their problems. These were mainly military, regularly. That was one thing.

Another thing was the physical establishment, and that was to set up a new civilian organization with the Department of State at the core, and the Agency was there, too, and build their offices which were very secure, and build new communications facilities--we brought SeaBees in to do that--establish a consular unit in it with a consular officer to deal with consular problems, and to make this work in a new Department of State framework.

We had property to dispose of. I should have mentioned that. All this property that CORDS and the military controlled, they left a lot of it just strewn around, without any accounting for it at all. We had to gather all that up and dispose of it properly. But I made this old military headquarters, which was a great mass of barbed wire, a very unattractive place, into a beautiful Foreign Service consulate general. You couldn't believe it. The resources I had that were already available, paint and paintbrushes, wire. I even had grenade screens built in with wire we had that the previous headquarters didn't have, and yet they were obscure. You couldn't tell from the outside that there were grenade screens there.

Q: These are screens to turn back a grenade that might be tossed into a window.

ENGLE: Yes. This was a very secure place.

Q: At the time you were there, were there any significant attacks within the district?

ENGLE: Yes, there was military action in a number of places, mostly in Kontum Province. One of my self-imposed jobs was to visit all of the armored garrisons behind enemy lines. I took a helicopter. Not even the Vietnamese authorities would do this. They were responsible.

I remember I had this columnist, Robert Novak. He's on TV all the time now, across from the editorial page of the Washington Post. He came to spend a couple of days with me, and I made a plan to give him all I could give him of what was happening, so he could get a complete picture. So he stayed with me, and I took him by helicopter to the 22nd Division and introduced him. I took him then to a combat zone in the northern part of Binh Dinh Province, where we had to be in shelters, and there was artillery fire going on at the same time. Then we flew back by helicopter to the 22nd Division and had another helicopter pick me up and take me to Kontum, where there was a lot of military action. We had Richard Mueller. He's now special assistant to the secretary. Richard was one of the junior FSOs who spoke Vietnamese well, and he actually rendezvoused with some North Vietnamese and talked to them and reported. They sent reports to me which I sent forward, and on the basis of that, I managed to persuade Washington to make him the junior officer of the year.

We picked up Richard Mueller who, in effect, was the counterpart of the lieutenant commander commanding Kontum Province, which was one of the most damaged provinces in the war, where an enormous amount of fighting took place. It was subject to a lot of B-52 action during the war. We picked up Richard, and I went over with Richard to the province chief, a lieutenant colonel, and I persuaded him to go with us, to overfly North Vietnamese lines 50 miles back to Dak Pec, where there was a large garrison, isolated.

Mind you, we were unarmed and we had too many people on this helicopter, and we also had a case of beer and some other things, I think maybe two cases, which I was going to give to the officers up there. We spiraled up like this and wanted to get above the range of the missile, and then we wound our way down to Dak Pec, which is very mountainous and you had these positions around in the mountains. I went around bracing up the officers, after having given them the beer, and talking to a lot of people there with Robert Novak. He appeared terrified.

This is one of the things I criticize the South Vietnamese for: the commander of those people asked for a ride back, and the province chief let him come out. He should not. He should have stayed there. That was one thing that was wrong with the way the Vietnamese did things. If you take the commander out, there was no morale at all left. He's chickening out, is really what it amounts to.

Q: After the Nha Trang experience, what happened to you?

ENGLE: I was recalled. I got a message from Ambassador Whitehouse, who was number two in Saigon at that time. He said, "I've just received a message here from the Department saying that Ambassador Swank in Cambodia, at Phnom Penh, and DCM Thomas Enders are both leaving. They want to know if you would be willing to proceed to Phnom Penh immediately and take over from both of them. We would merely have a chargé d'affaires." The background for that is that Nixon had just been defeated on the Cooper-Church Amendment, which was on Cambodia, and he was in the middle of Watergate, in a lot of trouble, he did not want to have another debate on Cambodia in the Senate, and so we were going to go with a chargé d'affaires.

I had to give an immediate response. I said, "Respond saying that I accept." They asked how long it would take me to extract myself. I said it would take me 24 hours in order to make my proper goodbyes to the Vietnamese authorities, and then I could go. Charlie said, "Wait 'til I get a response to your response."

The next day a message came in, telling me to proceed to Washington immediately. So I turned over to Dick Teare, who was a Class IV officer, who had been working with me and was one of these TDY FSOs, turned over to him two months. I didn't think I would be coming back or I would come back two months later.

I got to Washington, and when I got there, it was intimated that really what they had in mind was for me to be the next ambassador to Cambodia. The President did not want a debate on Cambodia in the Senate, but he would send my name to the Senate as soon as he felt strong enough to take on the Senate on that issue.

So I accepted under these terms and went. But they waited a long time on this, and the hitch-up was really in Kissinger's office. I didn't know Kissinger, though I'd done a lot of work for him indirectly when I was on the working group. They didn't clear it. Finally, it got cleared somehow. Apparently, the whole overall plan wasn't cleared with them anyhow

about my getting the embassy, and I went out in July, just fooling around in Washington for a couple of months.

I went back out, stopping in Nha Trang for a week to wind up and turnover to Dick Teare while they got another consul general. Then I went directly from there to Phnom Penh. I moved straight into the residence of Ambassador Swank and lived in his residence, which, of course, signaled to everybody that I was going to take over from him. That's the way it was. I understudied him for about a month before he was to leave.

In the meantime, Tom Enders was in Washington and got there about two weeks after I got back. Nothing was said to me, but there just didn't seem to be any specific arrangement for him to leave, and it was very unclear to me and to others as to what would happen. Then suddenly, two days before Swank was to leave, came out the announcement that Kissinger had been made Secretary of State. I figured right then and there that this whole arrangement wasn't going to work out. (Laughs) And I was right. But not a word was said to me, ever, from then on by the Department. Not one word. I stayed there. Tom Enders remained, who was my junior, remained as chargé d'affaires for several months because Kissinger wanted him there. He was a very good man and I liked him, but not one word was ever said to me. I ended up by being DCM to the previous DCM, after all these promises. Well, I wouldn't say "promises," but this was hinted very strongly. Nobody wanted to make a definite commitment. Bill Porter, the Under Secretary of State, confirmed all this to me when I got back on visitation a few months later.

So I moved in as DCM to the previous DCM. This actually worked out well, because Tom is a brilliant fellow and he'd been there three years already. The Khmer liked him. He was a great authority, spoke French well, much better than I did, and he knew Lon Nol well. But there was just nothing definite on my status or his future or anything like that.

It turned out that we complemented each other very much, because I had a lot of field experience with the military and, in effect, had military command in Vietnam, and was involved in a lot of military operations. I took over the relationships with all the province chiefs outside of Phnom Penh, and they were almost all colonels or generals in the Khmer Army. I overflowed enemy lines all the time to visit them as part of my job. We worked very effectively together. Tom, who eventually took great pity on the way I'd been treated, he knew what it all was, I think in the beginning, he thought that since I was senior to him and these arrangements had been made with him, he should be worried about me, that I'd be working against him. But I didn't do that at all. It worked out very well.

Tom eventually jumped in and, I think, persuaded maybe Kissinger or the White House to do something about me, not just leave me like that. Eventually, something was done.

Early in December, it was announced that Tom Enders would be the new Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. Tom called me in right away and said, "Jim, you should go back on visitation at once. When you get back here, then I can leave and you can take over."

So I went back at once to Washington, and I went in to see Bill Porter. Bill Porter and Marshall Green had disappeared; they'd gone on to new assignments. I went in to see Bill Porter, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and he said, "Jim, just be patient. You're still the candidate." (Laughs) I really didn't think so. I really didn't think that Bill's influence on this thing would be decisive. He is very friendly. He said, "Just go back on out." But still, Tom wasn't called to go back; he was named Assistant Secretary, but it took him four months to leave. But that was all right. We were working together, things were going well.

Finally, he left. In February it was announced that John Dean, who had been DCM in Laos, would be the new ambassador. That meant that I'd be DCM. [telephone interruption]

Q: How did you leave Cambodia?

ENGLE: I was chargé d'affaires, believe it or not, for only two days before John Dean got there. I was his understudy for six weeks. Then one Sunday morning, we were in the office early, both of us, and he handed me a telegram that said, "Your agrément as ambassador to Dahomey has been accepted by that government." I didn't even know. They didn't ask me whether I wanted it or not.

Q: The time you were in Cambodia, what was the situation there?

ENGLE: The situation was that we had not had a very aggressive role in the conduct of that war up to that time, though we provided massive assistance to them. We were more disinterested in what they were doing among themselves, and our help, when they came around for it, maybe wasn't too effective. The enemy, the Khmer Rouge, gained everywhere.

During the period I was there, we were much more vigorous and much more directly interested, I would say, and the line was held in a lot of places and the enemy turned back. Things were beginning to look better. There were reforms; we managed to persuade them to have conscription. They had no conscription! Which provided them a good deal of manpower for their divisions. We gave them an enormous amount of technical assistance in agriculture; we managed a convoy system up the Mekong so that the rice we were giving them under the aid program and also weapons, could be brought safely into the country through Vietnam, up the Mekong, and in cooperation with the FANK we got artillery.

Q: What is FANK?

ENGLE: It's the Force Armee Nationale Khmer, something like that. It was the equivalent of the Army. Patrols went along the river to protect the riverbank as far as they could. Artillery units were moved to help out, so that a convoy which also had some Khmer naval patrol vessels with us, could fight its way up, if necessary, to Phnom Penh, unload the supplies, and come back down. This was done very effectively. We didn't lose a single boat the whole time I was there, after we set this thing up.

Q: So the situation was fairly stable? There was a military challenge.

ENGLE: A major military challenge.

Q: But the national forces of Cambodia were at least meeting the Khmer Rouge on equal ground at this point?

ENGLE: They were fighting very well. They fought a lot better than the Army fought. They were more motivated. Sometimes in a battle, a large percentage of the forces on both sides would be killed, and if the friendlies were losing the battle, they would kill themselves and their families right on the spot.

Q: It was a very difficult time. Why don't we end now, and I hope we get together in Washington.

ENGLE: Good.

End of interview