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

AMBASSADOR ARTHUR W. LEWIS

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INTERVIEW

[Note: this transcript was not edited by Ambassador Lewis.]

Q: Mr. Ambassador, please give us a little of your background, before you entered the United States Information Agency (USIA).

LEWIS: Actually, I am a retired Naval officer. I entered the U.S. Navy in 1943, served during World War II, was recalled for the Korean conflict and then remained in the Service until 1966 at which time I retired. It was very interesting because I went into the Navy from Dartmouth College in 1943. I was on an athletic scholarship--football. I had graduated from Stuyvesant High School in New York City, but I was not used to the discipline necessary to study at Dartmouth. I lasted about six weeks after which I left Dartmouth and returned home to join the Navy, rather than to wait for the draft. My last assignment in the Navy was back at Dartmouth as a member of the N.R.O.T.C. Dartmouth, a wonderful institution, welcomed me back as a matriculant student at the same time. So in my last naval assignment as an instructor in naval sciences, I was also a Dartmouth student trying to acquire my B.A. I then entered a Ph.D. program at Dartmouth. I never finished my dissertation. In fact, I got an M.A. out of it rather than the Ph.D. I was 42 years old at that point in time, facing my first daughter's entry into University. The dissertation committee said to me :" We like your subject. We think it will take you two-three years of research and another two-three years more to complete the dissertation". I just could not afford six more years of academic endeavor at that point.

I came into the Foreign Service through the lateral entry program.

Q: Looking at you Navy career, had you any contact with or interest in foreign affairs?

LEWIS: My next-to-last assignment before going to Dartmouth had been to the "Strike Force-South Navy Command" in Naples, Italy. While I was there, I was elected President of the European Congress of American Parents and Teachers. One of the things that happened was that USIA invited me to come to "America Hauser" to lecture and talk about with Germans about these voluntary associations that we Americans had. I talked in a number of these facilities and in other USIA-sponsored offices in Western Europe. That gave me a sense of the Foreign Service.

Having been in the Navy, I had spent most of my time aboard ship. So most of my life had really been spent outside the United States in foreign cultures which I found very much to my liking.

Q: How did you get into USIA?

LEWIS: In 1966-67, the Foreign Service, both of State and USIA, was making a historic effort to make the Service more representative. It was looking for both junior--entrance level--personnel, but also mid-level candidates. I fell into that latter group. I came to Washington and talked to State and USIA. I finally decided that USIA was were I wanted to go because the role of USIA appeared to call for greater interaction with foreigners, rather than the more contemplative approach of the State Department. That to was the reason I chose USIA rather than State.

Q: What training or preparation did you receive as you entered the Service? How well did you feel you were served by the introductory program?

LEWIS: In essence, there was no real training with respect to my entry into USIA. I served for a year as a recruiter. I wrote a proposal to the Ford Foundation for a very special kind of minority recruitment program. The Foundation, for the first time ever to my knowledge, joined with public service institution to give a two million dollar grant to USIA to encourage and to bring into the Foreign Service minority candidates through the "front door" rather than the "back".

The program consisted of my seeking out bright young minority students who were graduating from undergraduate institutions. Then, we would bring them to Washington and enroll them in a very special two-year course of training at George Washington University. They would take courses in various histories and social sciences to bring them to speed. They would take the regular Foreign Service entrance examination at the end of their first year and again at the end of their second year. This was based on the assumption that they would not pass after the first year.

This program worked out very well. Of the twenty students with whom I was involved--ten the first year and the ten I chose for the second year--eleven remain in the Foreign Service today. Of those eleven, eight or nine are in the senior Foreign Service.

Q: Where did you seek these minority students?

LEWIS: I went to large public and private Universities. I went to Emery, for example, which was graduating its first two black students. I went to Tulane which was also graduating its first two black students. I got one from Emery and two from Tulane. I got some students from Berkeley, some from historically black institutions. We took ten students the first year of whom five were black, four were Hispanic-American and one was Native American. In order to find them, I went to schools from Puerto Rico to Hawaii. We got ten students the first year of whom eight made through that year. The other two discovered that they were unsuited.

The peculiar aspect of the program that I, who was not a career member of the Service, was extolling the virtues of a Service I barely knew.

Q: Let's talk about your first overseas assignment. You were the Cultural Affairs Officer in Bucharest from 1969-72. What were your responsibilities?

LEWIS: Interestingly enough, I arrived in Bucharest with probably a two-plus in Romanian speaking and understanding. My predecessor had to leave in a hurry. I became eventually in charge of the educational exchange program--the Fulbright program. Subsequently, I discovered that a lot of students were really jazz lovers. So I made a great effort to bring American jazz musicians to Romania. Over the three years, we developed a regular routine of bringing jazz musicians through Western Europe and then Eastern Europe, including Romania.

Romania was in an expansive state at that time. It was opening to the West and looking for opportunities to trade more with the West. The Romanians wanted to get away from the "the granary of Eastern Europe" image which they had in the past. The idea of American jazz was accepted by the authorities, even if they didn't really like it. In Eastern Europe, when you deal with cultural attractions, you must deal through State institutions. I spent a lot of time working with these institutions, bringing various cultural attractions, not only jazz, but for example also American plays and other cultural attractions. These gave a different view of the United States from that acquired by a lot of young Romanians. I spent a lot of time working with University students' clubs. That was possible only because the Romanians wanted to change their orientation.

Q: That is very interesting because today the Romanians are the hard liners. But in the late '60s and early 70s, Romania was the hope of Eastern Europe and was going in the direction that Yugoslavia took. How did you deal with the local authorities all of whom must have been members of the Communist Party? Were they cooperating under duress or did they seem interested in your programs?

LEWIS: Romania was occupied by the Soviets until 1962. It was under the rule of , who himself was a Stalinist figure. It was 1965 when he died and Ceausescu came to power. It was believed that Ceausescu, supposedly the great liberator, was the great "opener" to the West. Indeed he was, from an economic point of view, but from the social and cultural

point, Romania with the strangest kind of openness in its international affairs, was still one of the most domestically repressive Eastern European nations. I didn't think that has ever changed. This fact has become now much more noticeable and much better known. Even in those days, Romania was internally a repressive state. We were probably viewing it with hope rather than realistically. Even though we have had an adversarial relationship with the Soviet Union and the Soviet block, we have always harbored hope of eventual change. That hope has flourished at times; at other times, it has withered. We are a society that strongly believes in change and the inevitability of change. We accept change. For us, therefore, it is normal assumption as we enter into diplomatic relationships with other States.

Q: Did you believe that the cultural program was an assist to that process of change?

LEWIS: Yes, because, even though the Romanians knew and understood the power of culture and what it can do, they were still willing to allow a certain amount of cultural exchange. I have seen certain cultural attractions taking place in Romania and frightening the authorities. I remember a group called "Blood, Sweat and Tears" which almost caused a riot. They were almost thrown out of the country along with me. The group didn't want to continue its performances in Romania because of its repressiveness, as illustrated by what the authorities did to the young people who wanted to hear them.

First of all, the group was on the cutting edge of the 60s' modern musical groups. They sang of a kind of freedom that young people saw and felt strongly in the West and particularly the United States. Their music reflected the very vital dynamism on a United States that was going through a profound change. The young people of Easter Europe had heard some of this music on the "Voice of America". English is the preferred language in Eastern Europe because it is the language of science and technology. At that point, no one yet understood that it was also the language of finance and economics. It was a language that many young people understood and responded to in Eastern Europe. While I don't remember the name of particular songs, they were extremely popular and the young Romanians wanted to hear them. I do remember that in the concerts, the young people got so vociferous in the audience that the authorities stepped on the stage and tried to stop the performance. The musical group refused; then the authorities turned off the electricity so that there was no sound. They nevertheless continued to play and the audience of 15-20,000 arose and began to break up the chairs and lit fires. I was right there wondering what I had wrought.

Interestingly enough, this episode resulted in a Romanian decision that they didn't want the group anymore. The group decided that it would not perform any longer in Romania. We came to a stand-off. I had a meeting with the group in which it became clear that my 42-year old perception was not too much different than their views which were those of 20 or 21 year olds. I was young at heart. I was able to talk to them and got them to agree to continue the tour if the Romanian government would not interfere. I finally talked to the governmental institution I had to deal with and got it to agree to lower everyone's temperature and permit the tour to continue. If they hadn't allowed the tour to continue, it

would have complicated relationships between Romania and the United States. The group had after all come at the invitation the Romanian government. The tensions were calmed and the tour was completed. The group then went to Warsaw and became someone else's problem.

Q: What instruction were you getting from Washington?

LEWIS: "Don't let this get out of hand. It is your problem, but don't let it get out of hand". Ambassador Leonard Meeker was involved in a peripheral way, but I think he was perceived by the group as an old fuddy-duddy. He let me handle it and take care of it. Eventually, we were able to put the pieces back together.

Q: This is what diplomacy is all about: tensions between sovereign states created by a young rock group and Communist authorities.

LEWIS: You never think of it in that fashion. Even putting the pieces back together within the American community representing different generations was difficult.

Q: Did you have many touring play groups and did have to be careful about which plays were presented? Or other cultural events?

LEWIS: Yes. We had a couple of Thornton Wilder plays which were better received because they were held under University auspices and the people who attended were mostly University students majoring in English or literature. They didn't have the emotional content and velocity of musical groups. Somehow music is a most powerful instrument. That is one lesson I learned.

Q: Your next assignment was as Public Affairs Officer--the chief USIA person--at the U.S. Embassy in Lusaka, Zambia. How did this assignment come about?

LEWIS: During my graduate academic programs in sociology and government affairs, I became interested in economic development, particularly in Africa. That became my academic area of concentration. I wanted to serve in Africa. When the discussion began about my post-Bucharest assignment, I was informed that I would not be sent to Africa, but probably to Mexico City or London. There had been mounting complaints that blacks were being shunted off to Africa. Frankly, as I said, I wanted to go to Africa. It took a lot of pushing and strong urgings.

Q: Where were the complaints coming from? The African countries or the American black community?

LEWIS: I have never had an African tell me he would prefer to have a white diplomat, but on the other hand, I have heard from non-Africans that Africans have expressed a preference for more white American diplomats because black American were second-class citizens. I am not sure I believe that story. A lot of complaints were coming from the

American black community who believed that black diplomats were being stereo-typed by being sent to Africa and not to Western Europe or the Far East. Although blacks did serve in Western Europe, in Eastern Europe, the Far East and Latin America, the bulks of blacks could be found serving in Africa.

I think that Personnel just had to find bodies for these new Embassies in Africa wherever they could. Many of the new bodies that were coming into the Foreign Service at that time were black Americans.

Q: Also of course there was the other side of the coin. Many Foreign Service officers, black and white, saw opportunities for advancement by being assigned to these new embassies in Africa. They could be "somebody" in a small Embassy whereas in a large Embassy, they might end up as "nobodies". Professionally, you could probably climb the ladder faster sticking to the African or Near East circuits than elsewhere. Of course, the outside doesn't always understand these Service features. Was Zambia itself your target or were just interested in Africa in general?

LEWIS: Actually, there was position in Tanzania that greatly interested me. Unfortunately, that did not work out and Zambia became the next possibility.

Q: You served in Lusaka from 1972-74. What was the situation in Zambia at that time?

LEWIS: Economically, the situation was that the government of Kenneth Kaunda had just nationalized fifty-one percent of the Anglo-American copper mines in the northern province. The government was beginning to flex its muscles in a number of ways with respect to central planning and control of the economy. It was kind of socialism, even if it wasn't called that. It was not an ideological socialism in any sense of the term. It was that the Government felt more capable of managing large economic entities centrally. The benefits would be more wide-spread to the people through the government if the Government owned the controlling interests. At the time, the price of copper was fairly high; at the time, Zambia was--and still is--one of the major enemies of South Africa and its apartheid system. Zambia was still a multi-racial society. All in all, during the early 1970s, things were going quite well.

Q: Was there a tribalism problem?

LEWIS: At that time, not really. Certainly one understood that there were different ethnic groups and that some of them were more represented in government than others. But it was not really a problem.

Q: What were American interests in Zambia?

LEWIS: American interests were in the success of an independent Anglophobe State, the continued American access to the copper mines, the opportunity to show to the rest of

black Africa that we were ready to sit down with any independent black African state to assist in its development.

Q: What was the Embassy saying internally about Kaunda?

LEWIS: We were observing how foolish he was to have nationalized the mines. He didn't have the skills to operate the mines. Certainly, we felt some sympathy for Zambia because in 1973, Southern Rhodesia declared its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and closed its borders with Zambia. Zambia is a land-locked state and this action made it increasingly difficult for Zambia to ship its copper, forcing it to use Tanzania. The railroad that the Chinese Communists were building was not yet finished. So its was a very crucial and delicate time for Zambia. We certainly wanted to be of assistance. We were trying to help rebuild the railroad from Dar-es-Salaam that went through to Kitwe because that was the way fuel and other supplies came in. We had to fly fuel from Zaire and from Dar-es-Salaam for a while. Our relations with Zambia have always been somewhat tenuous because we always had the feeling that Kaunda didn't know what he was really doing or that exercised his authority well in centralizing the economy of the country. While it never showed in a large and clear way, there was always a feeling in the background that we shouldn't put too many of our eggs in that basket. I think that Kaunda and the Zambians knew this.

Q: Who was our Ambassador at that time?

LEWIS: When I first got there, Oliver Troxel was the Ambassador. When I came from Romania, Troxel wanted to interview me before agreeing to the appointment. I had to come from Bucharest to Lusaka for an interview. He left shortly after I arrived and was followed by Jean Wilkowski.

Q: How did Ambassador Wilkowski run her Embassy?

LEWIS: With an iron hand. It was clear who was the Ambassador--there was never any doubt about that. Jean was also clear with me that my contacts should not include ministerial level persons, which were hers. Unfortunately, I played tennis with the Foreign Minister and a number of other ministers and drank beer with them. That didn't endear me with her.

Q: How did this impact on your work?

LEWIS: I didn't let it impact on my work. I did not seek out Vernon Mwange who was the Foreign Minister. Or Lubia, who succeeded him as Foreign Minister. We played tennis together; they would drop by the house; they would invite me to go places with them. It really didn't effect my work; it was just an irritant to her and to me.

Q: What type of work were you doing? What were your concerns?

LEWIS: My major concern was to move the USIS out of the terrible dump where it was located. We were then in the central arcade of Lusaka, right on Cairo Road, which is the Cape-to-Cairo road. While it was a wonderful location because there was a lot of human traffic in the area, it was still very bad because the building in which we were was in dire need of repairs--in fact, it really needed to be torn down and rebuilt. Then we had a couple of beatings and murders right on our door-steps and those activities are not conducive to cultural and educational programs we were trying to conduct. So one of my major concerns was to find someway to relocate USIS, but in an area where it could continue to be in the main-stream. That took a lot of doing because it meant you had to find out who was building, where, who really owned the building and then to find that person to negotiate a lease.

A lot of my time was also spent in working at the University of Zambia--the Lusaka campus. We were helping them to build the faculty and I developed a faculty-enrichment program in which we would take some of their young faculty members and assist them in acquiring advanced degrees through the Fulbright program.

Q: Did find yourself in competition with the English who must have had a proprietary view of Zambia? Or did they cooperate?

LEWIS: There was very little competition because the Vice-Chancellor of the University was American-educated. He set the tone at the University. Over the years, as a USIA officer and then as an Ambassador, I always made it a point to become involved in the national university of the country to which I had been assigned. My wife, who is an African historian and had been the deputy director of African studies program at Northwestern, has taught in countries to which we were assigned. It has been a very difficult time for her because she has done it without recompense and without being in a career ladder. I have always attempted to become involved one way or another in the national university.

What has become very clear to me is that the philosophy of education in America and the philosophy of education in the U.K. are very different. Our education prepared the individual to be a practical member of society--a person who was willing to wear a white shirt to the office, but who would roll up his or her sleeve to do the work necessary to accomplish the task embarked upon. European education, particularly the British, on the other hand, to a large degree provided people with very sound foundation with less of a desire to become practically involved in the life that they were going to have to face in a Third World country.

Q: Was this seen by those the decision-makers in Zambia?

LEWIS: I don't think so. At that time, the National University was one of the government's expenditures that had to be made. There were only a tiny number of university graduates in Zambia at that time. There was a push to get people through university and particularly Zambian University. Certainly, there was an interest on the

part of the government in the University and in creating an institution and an environment which would train people to do the kind of things that needed to be done in Zambia. For example, the Vice-Chancellor of the University knew very well that an American-oriented education was going to make people who would be willing to go down in the trenches to work and who would not feel, despite the fact that they had a degree and not only a certificate, that they had to sit in an office and could not become involved or engaged.

Q: Surely, the guarantee of a secure, high income, not-much-work position in an office must have had some attractions. Did you see much of that?

LEWIS: Certainly the students knew that the completion of higher education was a passport into a much better life for them, much more comfortable, access to things that they never had before. I don't think it was as bad then as it is now because now students really don't have jobs waiting for them.

Q: Was America popular at that time with the Zambian educated class?

LEWIS: Yes, America was and is popular in Africa. We have as a nation a residue of good will in Africa that can only be exhausted by thing that the U.S. I don't think is capable of doing. The whole idea of having been the first colony to have engaged in a revolution for its liberty and independence is a powerful asset. That idea for African states, all of which except Liberia and Ethiopia are new states, is an objective. The growth of a state which came into being through revolution against its colonial oppressor or power, is a most powerful model in Africa.

I would presume that it might so also in other Third World areas. But I know that in Africa, that carries with it an immense amount of emotional, ideological baggage. Also America is known in Africa as a country in which the mistakes of the nation are debated, surface and come out. There is a dialogue between the public and the private that doesn't exist in other societies. Also, America is perceived as a multi-racial society in which the most significant minority is black--comes from Africa and has African roots. All of these things are very powerful elements in creating in the African minds a very positive image of America.

Q: Did you have any problems with Zambian bureaucrats who had grown up in the British system and saw the Americans as upstarts and a threat?

LEWIS: Yes, among the older Zambians who were in the system and in positions of importance certainly could view the way we did things as the ways of an upstart nation. I have served in a number of Anglophonic countries and have observed that even though there is a general dissatisfaction with a society which is developing out of the British model, there are some aspects of it which remain in the mind and hearts of the citizens of the Anglophone countries. For example, no trip begins or ends except through London. For a long, long time, many of the civil services of the newly independent Anglophone

African countries, provided for an annual trip or for a long leave every two or three years to Britain. I remember being a member of a dining club--that peculiar hoary institution that the British have foisted on many unsuspecting Third World countries--men only, tuxedo required for dinner on Saturday night, usually once a month--in which the evening was devoted to a formalism in which the events were known beforehand. Among the events, for example, was a period during which all who had been away and therefore may have missed a meeting, had to rise and report where and what he had done. I will forever remember this wonderful African doctor talking about having spent a wonderful summer "at home" in green, lush Ireland. For him, in a sense, that was home. We don't have anything like that with respect to how people feel about America, except in Liberia perhaps. Indeed while I consider it a hoary kind of institution, certainly it binds people to a way of thinking and a way of doing things.

Q: Where there any problems while you were there over the Vietnam war?

LEWIS: Yes and no. We were disengaging and it certainly was a period in which the relations with the U.S. were dotted with little hiccups here and there with respect to Vietnam. More importantly, it was period in which Watergate came to head.

Q: Did they understand what was going on?

LEWIS: No one that I could speak with felt that they ever wanted to be in a position of authority in the U.S. if that was the way Americans treated their leadership. They thought that something was really wrong. How could a society treat its leader that way? It was expected that leaders would have foibles and that they would be entitled to do things that ordinary citizens could and should not. I was really struck by the shallowness of people's understanding of democracy. This was a world-wide phenomenon. There appears to be no universality of ethics.

Q: I think all of in the Foreign Service had a difficult time explaining Watergate. We considered the developments as a positive step for democracy, many of our foreign contacts thought we were destroying leadership. They were willing to accept conduct that the U.S. was not.

LEWIS: Looking back on it, ironically that ability of Americans for self-examination has always been perceived as the great strength of the American society. But the attack on our leadership made a lot of people in the African countries, where I served, uncomfortable. It was very difficult for them to comprehend, even though they saw it as a major strength of our society.

Q: You went from a country with a relative tranquility to a very difficult one: Ethiopia. You were there from 1973 to 1977. Did you volunteer for this assignment?

LEWIS: I was ordered to go. For me, it was certainly an advancement because the position was at a higher rank than I was. It was a much larger post in terms of personnel,

funds and branch offices-We had a branch office in Asmara and reading rooms in six regional capitals. It was an opportunity to go to a country which was terribly exciting and had the longest history in black Africa. The assignment could not have come at a better time.

Q: The political situation was, euphemistically, "challenging".

LEWIS: It is like Chinese telling you, "may you live in interesting times".

Q: What was the situation in Ethiopia in September, 1973 when you arrived?

LEWIS: There had a just been a drought in Welo province which is in the Ethiopian north. This drought had been probably responsible for the death of a quarter of a million people. This was not the first drought that had struck Welo or that had struck Ethiopia. There is a cycle of droughts that occur there and about every 20-25 years you have these massive droughts, which someone mordantly said were like birth control because you lose a quarter of a million people--no one is quite sure of the numbers. The Emperor in his traditional fashion continued as if the drought did not exist. One of his grand-daughters was getting married. At the height of the drought, a cake that costs 3,000 pounds sterling was brought in. In taking it off the plane, in Addis Ababa, it cracked and was thrown away and another cake ordered. There was a British TV producer and cameraman who happened to record the cake caper. They also recorded scenes in the Welo area, with children dying. They also taped scenes of the Emperor throwing scraps to his dogs and the zoo animals that were kept at the palace. Earlier in the year, the teachers and taxi drivers in Addis had gone on strike. There was a lot of unrest in the country. We were the major aid donors to Ethiopia. It is said that we did not respond to the drought with adequate force. It is said that for political reasons, the Emperor wanted this to happen and we allowed it. I am not sure about that. There were a number of things happening. Down in the Southern desert of Ethiopia in a place called Negilly, there was a mutiny on the part of some enlisted men against their officers over water. This was one of the first cracks in the formal institutional apparatus of the government. The Royal family members who were members of the Emperor's cabinet were being replaced with the hope that someone could pull the threads together. It was beginning to become clear that changes were taking place and something was happening.

Shortly after I arrived in September, the Emperor was arrested at his palace by members of the military--the Derg. This supposedly consisted of 120 military men. Shortly after the Emperor was arrested, a number of the royal family were also taken. A number of the "old guard" were executed one Saturday night. Changes began to take place; neighborhood organizations were set up; our political and military relationships began to deteriorate. Finally, our relationships went down to zero. Ethiopia became less important to the U.S. because the listening stations, particularly the one in Asmara, we had were overtaken by newer technological means. We no longer supported the military and our cooperation with the Navy went down to tube.

The next thing we knew is that the basis for our relationship with Ethiopia changed completely.

Q: As Public Affairs Officer during an interesting period, what instructions were you receiving? Were you being advised to be aggressive or reactive?

LEWIS: It was a little bit of a roller-coaster which we couldn't get off. Kissinger was Secretary of State and in the global scheme of things, Ethiopia's importance diminished. There were no instructions to try to preserve relationships nor instructions to allow relationships to deteriorate. It was "che sera', sera'".

Q: There wasn't any dynamism either from State or USIA. No sense of urgency to solve a problem?

LEWIS: No. We felt somewhat adrift. For a lot of the time, we didn't have an Ambassador. There was Parker Wyman first, then Art Tienken as Chargé. He was there when I got expelled.

Q: Would you describe the USIA program when you arrived?

LEWIS: It was a program heavy on information and educational exchange. We had in Asmara a fairly large USIS center--that was the Italian speaking part of Ethiopia. We had reading rooms, which were basically medium-sized libraries in six provincial centers (Gondar, Dese, Makeli, Harar, Welo and Tigre). The purpose of this program was to provide information. We understood from the beginning that something was happening to the Emperor; that feudalism was coming to an end and that some preparation had to be made to try to help the country and its people prepare for the giant step which had to be taken. Information about the modern world was absolutely essential. My reading rooms and libraries played a very crucial part. We made available a lot of material about agriculture and basic health. The AID program was quite large in those days--one of our largest programs in Africa. We were also involved deeply in educational exchanges--bringing American to teach in the Universities there and sending Ethiopians to get further education in the United States. Essentially, information and educational exchange were the two major thrusts of my operation. We did have one or two cultural events: one was a musical group which came and gave a concert with the proceeds given to drought relief. A lot of money was collected from that concert.

My biggest job was getting around the country to the different places, providing reassurance that we would continue this or that program.

Q: You were a member of the Country Team. You probably traveled more than the others because of your job. Did you notice a deteriorating situation in the provinces or was the uprising confined mainly to Addis?

LEWIS: The situation in the provinces as a matter of fact was relatively stable. The real difficulties were in Addis and Asmara. Those took place once the Emperor fell. It didn't take long for the situation to collapse.

Q: Did the arrest of the Emperor surprise everyone or was it anticipated?

LEWIS: It was a surprise. No one really thought that the Emperor would be harmed. No one really understood. As I look back on Ethiopia, it was a society which was fatalistic. It was a society in which violence was just below the surface. I am not sure I or anybody else could have said that then or could have perceived it. We didn't understand what was going on in Tehran until it was too late. Same in Addis. The institutions--so called-- of government had reached a point at which they could no longer be supported by feudalistic society.

Q: It is undoubtedly difficult for foreigners to perceive a revolution coming, particularly when the ruling group is also blind. Did your contacts change after the Emperor's demise?

LEWIS: Yes. The original contacts that I had made were arrested or escaped from the country because they were about to be arrested. One of the strange things that happened was that I became the informal link between the Derg and the Embassy. This came about because one of my local employees suggested to me that I really should go up to the castle to meet the head of the derg's public affairs operation--a Colonel Asarat. I decided I would do that. I didn't check with the Embassy--we were downtown and the Embassy was in its compound above the city. I went and he received me. We talked for a long time; he introduced me to his deputy--a young major--who knew all about USIS because before joining the Army he was a shoe-shine boy right in front of our building. The major was later killed in a shoot-out and was succeeded by his deputy with whom I remained in contact.

Q: Did the fact that you were a formed naval officer help you?

LEWIS: I don't think so. It was probably just the fact that I made the effort to talk to them and that came without any preconceived ideas of their ways of doing things.

Q: The Derg seems to have been somewhat of a mystery to the Americans. Did you use it for your regular communications?

LEWIS: I talked with them. As some of my Eritrean employees were arrested, I would go to the Derg. Nothing ever happened, but at least I had a contact in the Derg. Most important for me was that the Embassy was given a diplomatic note on a Saturday which expelled me and all the Americans in USIS. My contact warned me about that note on the previous Friday night.

Q: That was in 1977. You had been in Addis for sometime by then. What were your views of your program between 1973 and 1977 as the local situation was changing?

LEWIS: The impact of the change on our operations was significant. First of all, my center in Asmara was bombed twice. Then Asmara was put under siege by Eritrean Liberation Force (ELF) and I was caught there for three weeks. It became clear that we could not sustain that operation and we closed it down temporarily. The fighting in Welo and Tigre and Gondar closed down my reading rooms there. From time to time, my center in Addis Ababa was harassed--once a fire-bomb was thrown through the window.

Q: Who were the perpetrators? Eritreans? Tigrenians? Members of the central government?

LEWIS: It was probably the Eritreans and Tigreans who wanted to use the incidents as an opportunity to bring to public attention their dissatisfaction with the Derg.

Q: How about the local employees? Were they harassed?

LEWIS: Certainly my Eritrean employees were harassed. A number were arrested and imprisoned. The secret and military police would come to the center to take people from their offices. We tried to stop them, but it was impossible. Across the street from us was City Hall which was bombed, shattering the glass in our offices.

We did not operate a normal USIS program during this period. We published and distributed a lot of printed material.

Q: With all the various factions in Ethiopia in those days, were you not charged by one or all as putting incendiary propaganda?

LEWIS: The charge that was levied against me in support of my expulsion was "conduct inimical to the growth of socialism".

Q: Sounds like you were doing the job right.

LEWIS: That was what was printed in the newspaper when my expulsion was announced.

Q: Did the Embassy try to use AID or USIS to bolster our position?

LEWIS: I don't think so because we had a large military contingent in Ethiopia which was being reduced rapidly. We had a Naval medical team who were at the Pasteur Institute. The Embassy had at its disposal a number of elements which were in the community and which were not closed off as the Embassy itself was in its compound. We had a large compound in Addis in which the Chancery and the senior officers' residence stood. These people did not live in the community, while the rest of us lived and worked did. The military was sent home fairly quickly. It became clear to the Derg that they were not

going to get ammunition and military support from us. A lot of that took place in the context of the Somali attack on the province of Bale in the south. After the Derg came to power, the Somali nationalists attacked Ethiopian positions in the southern part of Ethiopia. The Ethiopians went through a most perilous period during which they almost lost all of that area--the Ogaden. Because of the relationship with the U.S., we did not make the kind of efforts that normally would have been expected to be made.

Q: Was the Embassy recommending some actions and not being given any guidance from Washington or did the Embassy prefer to stay out of Ethiopian affairs?

LEWIS: To the best of my recollection, the Embassy's recommendations were to be more activist than the Executive Branch wanted to be. A lot of it had to do with the way policy-makers in the State Department perceived Ethiopia--how important was it in a global context? We know that during the Kissinger period we saw things in a global context rather than regional. Therefore, Ethiopia became a "second-hand" player or less of a player because of the globalization of foreign policy.

Q: In retrospect, was there anything that could have been done, public affairs-wise, that might have made a difference and perhaps improved US-Ethiopian relationships?

LEWIS: I doubt it. What happened was that we changed places with the Soviets. We sided with Somalia and they left Somalia and came to Addis. The die was cast at that point because Mengistu was emerging as the power in the Derg. There had been two major shoot-outs within the Derg: the first was when General Addam, who was very popular, was killed supposedly by Mengistu or his aides and the second when General Bayu, who was the acting head of state, was killed. After this second shoot-out, it was clear that Mengistu was getting advice and counsel from the Soviets. Within a short period of time, there was a flip in Ethiopian foreign policy.

The Soviets had responded very quickly to Ethiopian requests for arms, which they felt would profit them. They certainly were not profiting in Somalia. Somalia had been a morass for them. The Ethiopians had been able to maintain military superiority with our assistance until we stopped providing that assistance with the advent of the Ogaden war. Once we went to Somalia and the Russians to Ethiopia, the possibility of any positive actions in a public affairs context became even less possible. The most positive thing that ever happened in that period was when the Soyuz and Apollo space-crafts hooked up together. We showed the movie at the USIS center. The Soviet Ambassador and couple of his staff came and we had a public handshake between Americans and Soviets. But that was about it.

Q: Were the Soviets active in the public affairs field?

LEWIS: Not really. They weren't doing much because they were busy making certain that the politico-military relationships were staying in good shape. There was a political struggle going on concerning the direction of the revolution. There was the creation of

(inaudible) which required the transfer of young people from Universities--Universities were closed--to parts of the country to educate farmers and provide literacy and agriculture training. The purpose of this forced migration was to break down the various ethnicities that had developed in the feudal context of the country. The Showas and the Amharans had become one thing, the Tigreans and the Eritreans another. The Derg sent Eritreans south to the Aroma country, the Aromians north to areas where a different language was spoken. There were cultural differences which manifested themselves in physical violence against the students.

All of that was going on at the time of declining US-Ethiopian relations. So it was not a propitious time for a public affairs program.

End of interview