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

AMBASSADOR LARRY C. WILLIAMSON

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 26th of October 2006. This is an interview with Larry C. Williamson. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by Larry.

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: Larry, let's start at the beginning. When and where you born?

WILLIAMSON: I was born in Fort Smith Arkansas in 1930.

Q: Let's get a little about the family. First of all, can we talk about your father's side? What do you know about the Williamsons, what were they up to, and how did they get there?

WILLIAMSON: The Williamsons and the Williams (the two families intermarried) were early settlers in western Arkansas. They arrived there in the 1830's and were dirt farmers. After the third generation, they began to move into the town. Fort Smith was the second largest city in Arkansas, but it was only about 35,000 people in those days. My grandfather was a Marshal in the Indian Territory and later a city detective. My parents chose a very unfortunate time to get married in view of the depression coming up, but they couldn't see it. They got married in '28 and I was born in '30. By that time the depression was on them, and Dad couldn't find work. He was sort of an engineer or would pass for an engineer in those days—civil engineer—and he found work over most of the 1930's by supervising WPA (Works Progress Association) gangs on the roads and working with the Arkansas State Highway Department. He was on detail to the Highway Department. We weren't poverty stricken, but we weren't very well off, either.

Q: Did your father, was he a degreed engineer?

WILLIAMSON: No.

Q: In those days, this was in the...

WILLIAMSON: Yes, the 1920's. Actually, he started out as a surveyor.

Q: Had be gone to college?

WILLIAMSON: He had three years of college, but apparently he managed to drink his way out during his junior year and never went back. I grew up in Fort Smith. After the Second World War we moved to a place even smaller but probably better known: Fayetteville. It is up in the Ozark Mountains. All of those people were long-time settlers in western Arkansas in the mountains. I had a great-grandfather who fought for the Confederacy, for all five years during the Civil War, and a lot of relatives who carried many grudges coming from that era.

Q: How about on your mother's side?

WILLIAMSON: My mother's side was a little bit different. My great-grandfather was the dominant influence there. Her mother and father seemed to have had a real tempestuous

relationship. They married each other twice and divorced twice. My great-grandfather raised my mother and her brother, and their mother. He was a Division supervisor on the Frisco Railroad. He'd started out as a telegrapher at the age of 13 and worked with a variety of railroads. He ended up being the superintendent of the southwest section of the Frisco Railroad which in those days ran from Springfield, Missouri, down to Paris, Texas. That paid very well. He was in pretty good shape and had his own car but was the sole support of his wife, his daughter, my uncle—who never did keep a job very long—and my mother until she married my father. My father wasn't doing too well in the 1930's, so we all lived in a huge extended family in big old southern houses in Fort Smith. My great-grandfather retired from the railroad sometime in the late '30s. The whole family existed on his railroad retirement checks plus whatever my father was able to pull together from the federal government.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Fort Smith and Fayetteville. Through the elementary grades, what it was like being a kid then?

WILLIAMSON: It was great stuff. That part of the world's hot—physically—and from the middle of May to the first days of school, we boys just ran around in a pair of shorts and underwear, barefoot and bare-chested. We did a lot of things, ran in packs (those days we weren't worried about being run over by cars too much). We had the protection of being in a group, so nobody ever bothered us. My parents thought it was the most natural thing in the world to turn us out of the house after breakfast. We came back for lunch, and in the heat of the summer we were made to take naps (when we were little) , but after 3 pm we were away till dinner time. After dinner we'd go back out and play. In the winter, there was school, but still you'd hang around in gangs as kids do, or as kids used to do. We didn't ever get into any really bad mischief, but we certainly tried to from time to time! If my parents had known what we were doing, they probably would have died. For example, we used to put up huge bag swings. The town was fairly well wooded. We would climb up a tree and put a platform up about 20, 30 feet up in the air, and then played chicken. Who could get that bag swing going the furthest from the platform...

Q: A bag swing is a what?

WILLIAMSON: A tow bag. A bag that you kept potatoes and things in.

Q: A burlap bag.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, a burlap bag. You'd stuff it full of straw usually stolen from somebody's manger because a lot of people were keeping cattle around still. Then you would do things like see who could stay up longest before he jumped and how wide the gap was between the platform and the bag. On one or two occasions pretty close to catastrophes happened, but most of the time we made it. We did all sorts of strange things. We entertained ourselves.

Q: I assume there were swimming holes?

WILLIAMSON: There were swimming holes. There was a public swimming pool which wasn't too bad. The problem with the public pool was that in those days, of course, polio was a great scourge, and the authorities closed the pools and the movie houses and everything else after about the end of June and they did not reopen until well after school started. There was nothing else to do.

Q: What did girls do? Did girls fit in your equation at all? I'm not talking about dating but...

WILLIAMSON: There were a couple of sisters who were hangers-on. There was one who had a wicked left hook. Her name was Delores Hinton. I haven't thought of her in 50 or 60 years! We'd push the girls around as boys would, and they'd take it pretty well except for Delores who was constantly pushing us back. Since she was one of those girls who got their growth early, she stood about four or five inches taller than the tallest of us and was a real menace when she put her mind to it! Hanging out with girls was not stuff boys did in those days.

Q: Of course not.

WILLIAMSON: With one exception! We all went to dancing school. There was a lady who was a friend of my mother. On Saturday nights with the aid of three or four high school girls, she ran a cotillion.

Q: I went to Miss Lazenby's Cotillion in Annapolis.

WILLIAMSON: You'd show up on Saturday night. Boys would go to one side of the room, girls to the other side, giggling and carrying on. Girls would point at us, boys would try to smuggle in mice and stuff like this. The two or three high school girls who worked for this lady had their hands full just keeping us going. She was pretty insistent on it. We would go out, and I learned to do the routine dances. In fact, we even learned the jitterbug toward the end, but that was after the war had started. That was our one touch of culture.

Q: How about things like the movies or the radio?

WILLIAMSON: Radio was a big thing in our lives. We had a station in Fort Smith, and we picked up the stations from St. Louis and from Tulsa. The St. Louis station was a National affiliate.—I can't remember which, NBC (National Broadcasting Company) or something like this—so we could get Jack Benny, Fred Allen, all those programs at night, or over the weekend usually. Tulsa was a different thing, indeed. Tulsa sponsored Bob Wills' Texas Playboys who were a well known—still are—western swing band, and we listened to endless songs about people who were having trouble with their girlfriends. I also heard my first Woody Guthrie songs on that station. It was quite good. The local station was just that -- local. One of their chief announcers was the older brother of a friend of mine. He must have been all of 16 in those days. We had the news, and we had lots of serials which I still remember. The federal government in those days ran a very

good education series on the radio: things like, "How do you get ringworm?" "Watch out for trichinosis," cooking all the meats. These were very widely spread around, and I found them interesting because people around me were dying from this stuff. I had two acquaintances who died of polio. None of these things were jokes in those days. We went through all the childhood diseases. I can't remember who came down first. Either my brother or I came down with chicken pox. Mother bundled the other one of us into the same bedroom and called her sister-in-law, and my cousin came down to stay with us until we all had chicken pox together. The measles were the same way. I was terribly proud because the health authorities came up and quarantined our house, so we had a great big yellow thing saying, "Quarantined. Keep Out!" Mother was a little peeved about it, but I thought it was hot stuff!

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

WILLIAMSON: They thought that Franklin Roosevelt was God and, indeed, he was. My grandmother had six sisters. The men all smoked and drank far too much, and they died pretty young. No one owned a home in those days; only the wealthy could afford to. In 1937 when the first Social Security checks came, these ladies were saved from going to the poor farm, literally. The city ran an old fashioned poor farm house on the edge of town. It was full of older ladies who had outlived their husbands and who had hardly any life insurance. There was no spare money to go around in the south after the First World War because the bottom dropped out of the cotton market, and in 1929 the bottom dropped out of everything else. We lived right through the dust bowl. We would wake up in the morning and find two or three inches of dust against the doors.

Q: We used to talk about the Okies and the Arkies.

WILLIAMSON: That's us. I remember streams of cars going through town.

Q: Heading to California.

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: Somebody who's interested in this can go to the Woody Guthrie songs.

WILLIAMSON: That's exactly right. Even the young kids were going around singing, This Land Is Your Land.

Q: How about religion? Where were your family and you?

WILLIAMSON: Whew! I had a grandmother who was a powerfully primitive Methodist, belonged to WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Movement) and everything else. In fact, I think most of the family...

Q: WCTU is the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. Her sisters all belonged to either a Baptist or Methodist church. This was strictly a female thing. The men went along under duress. My grandfather never got the message of the Temperance Union stuff. On my mother's side, my great-grandfather for some reason became an Episcopalian, and I was raised in the Episcopalian church from the cradle on. We had a wonderful minister who was a veteran of the First World War. He had his jaw shot away and had a big prehensile sort of jutting reconstruction. He was a man of great passion and took an interest in me because I was the first baby that he ever baptized. I kept thinking he was picking on me, because he kept watching me and talking to me about what I should be doing. He was a great man. I really admired him.

Q: What was his name?

WILLIAMSON: The Reverend Carlton D. Lathrop. He never married. He had a sister who lived with him as his housekeeper. He was from New York someplace. He died young and is buried down there in Arkansas. I saw his grave not too many years ago.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

WILLIAMSON: Yes. That's one thing. My mother was an escapist with reading. She used to have all kinds of books around. My great-grandfather was a history buff. We had all the old books about the Civil War with photographs and everything else. The Spanish-American War was very real to me because I think during that war he must have bought every book that was published about it. I would sit upstairs—we usually had a two-story house—and read forever once I learned how. My mother had a complete set of the Bobbsey Twins and all those kinds of things. I read by preference. I was not particularly fond of athletics because I was never that good at them. I was always among the last chosen to be on a scratch basketball or football team.

Q: End of the line?

WILLIAMSON: That's right. Somebody's got to do it. But I read everything I could put my hands on and especially the newspaper. I guess I had an early curiosity about things and picked up a real interest in foreign affairs largely as a result of several teachers in my public schools who, unlike today, were not at all worried about taking stands on issues. They all thought that what Hitler was doing was just a terrible thing. I can remember 1937 when the Germans took over Austria. I think of my English teacher who broke out a map and gave us a long harangue about all the bad things that the Germans did before the First World War, during the First World War and now, "look what they're doing again!" The Reverend Lathrop—God bless him—got up about the same time and started preaching sermons that sounded like Winston Churchill had written them. We were very upset about what was going on.

Q: How was the war treated? I'm talking about THE war: the war between the states.

WILLIAMSON: Oh, that war! The old confederate veteran's wife was still alive -- my great-grandmother, she was. She had been married quite young to the old man. They had these eight aforementioned great aunts of mine, and she used to come in and tell me stories. Her father was apparently some kind of big deal in the local government before the war broke out, and he threw in his lot with the confederacy as did the whole family, apparently. The Confederate Army of the west did not fare well in the big battles they had, Pea Ridge being the largest one. After the Federals beat us at Pea Ridge, they came down and occupied Fort Smith which was a strategic point on the Arkansas River. My great-grandmothers' folks moved down south to Washington, Arkansas, where there was a government in exile, more or less. While they were moving, their caravan was ambushed by bushwhackers. Here the story gets a little murky in my mind or hers, I can't tell you which, but somebody purporting to be a Union bushwhacker or...

Q: The bushwhackers...Quantrell?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, Jesse James and the Quantrell gang.

Q: It was a real wild west.

WILLIAMSON: It was, indeed, and with live ammunition. She had her ears pierced, and she apparently had gold earrings in them. She was quite a little girl. One of these guys grabbed her earrings and ripped them out of her ears. Hell, when I knew her, she must have been in her '80s easy. Ninety, probably. She'd flap her earlobes at you and say, "Don't ever forget this!" I'd say, "OK." I tell you, if she had known I was going to marry a northerner, she'd have died. She was a bitter ender. The rest of the family took it up, too. Grandmother—my father's mother—was a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Apparently my father was signed up at an early age as a minor, as a Son of the Confederacy or whatever they're called.

Q: Sons of the Confederacy.

WILLIAMSON: Sons of the Confederacy. We had various things around of great-grandfather's. No flag, but we had a Winchester rifle which he had, in turn, taken off a dead Yankee trooper (so I was told), and various pieces of uniform. The civil war was pretty romantic for us. We had all kinds of books about it, of course, in which the noble southern ¬¬¬soldiers fought to the last, finally succumbing to sheer numbers. Overwhelming money was what did it! It was a point of honor in that part of the world. Robert E. Lee was as good as they come as a general, and Franklin Roosevelt was as good as they come as a president.

Q: How about in that area, two things: Indians and African-Americans. Did they enter the picture at all?

WILLIAMSON: Not too many African-Americans up in the mountains. They weren't liked; they weren't wanted. The kinds of farms in the area were small plots of land which just didn't lend themselves to extensive agriculture. There were some urban blacks, and

they dug ditches or were house nannies and housekeepers. After the Second World War, Dad was a city engineer for Fort Smith. A lot of his senior foremen were black guys. I gather from that that there were hierarchies here. A barber in town was a black barber. My uncle went to him faithfully, a guy named Tom Bailey. He moved. His sons got to be high school age, and there was no high school, so he moved to Kansas which everybody thought was just terrible! What am I going to do? Made sense to me although I really did miss him. A good man.

Q: Were there Indians?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes, we lived on the edge of the Cherokee Reservation. I went to school with lots of Breedloves, Tenkillers and people with names like that. The ones that were in the city were not too different from anybody else. That part of the world was very interesting. We had a rather large Jewish community. We had a number of Lebanese. You may remember in "Oklahoma!" they had a...

Q: Oh, yes, the sales guy.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, the sales guy. There were a lot of them around. They were Christian Lebanese for the most part. They had a bank which they ran, and they had lots of shops.

Q: It was the musical.

WILLIAMSON: The play.

Q: It was the musical "Oklahoma!" Ado Annie's boyfriend. I can't think of his name.

WILLIAMSON: I can't think of his name, either, but he was Persian.

Q: He was called Persian. He was actually Lebanese.

WILLIAMSON: Like many of the Lebanese I met again in West Africa years later. They just started out pushing a cart down the town selling women's jewelry and stuff like that.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about elementary school. What was it like?

WILLIAMSON: I had an advantage. My mother had decided that since I liked books and stories that I should learn to read. The only place where I could go and get immediate training in reading and writing was a Catholic school. For two years I was in the clutches of very earnest Catholic nuns who among other things thought that being left-handed was a mark of the devil, and they beat that out of me. My brother who followed me after me was a "lefty" and he never did give up writing with his left hand. I did, and I have penmanship problems even now. Anyway, I just took the reading and writing. That was all there was to it. By the time I hit first grade, that was hot stuff for me. There were two or three of us who were really good readers and cared about it. I was always trying to see

what was on the next page and what's going to happen to Bert and Nan. Reading was good. Penmanship and mathematics were not. The rest of it—geography and whatever else they taught in those days—seemed to come pretty naturally to me. I was a good scholar.

Q: Was it a fairly small city, about 30,000. Were classes large?

WILLIAMSON: Classes weren't terribly large. If I look back on it, don't suppose there were more than 20 or 25 people in them. You had several levels of first grade. Again, there were no bones about being egalitarian. You had the smart ones and the dumb ones. The dumb ones didn't get much in the way of high level attention. The smart ones got access to a reasonably good education. We used the library as kids. I would estimate we had about six grade schools in the public school system, maybe six or seven, then one junior high and one high school. That's the way it was until well after the Second World War.

Q: How did you find junior high?

WILLIAMSON: All of a sudden I noticed that girls were different than boys.

Q: Let's talk about that!

[laughter]

WILLIAMSON: I was just fine, too. I had a good time with most of the stuff, and we got into more serious civics. We got into current events. We had a current events program. Current events in those days was mainly putting pins in maps about where the Americans were fighting with the Germans and how things were going. The war was all-consuming in those days. A big military camp was established outside of town. It's still there: Camp Chaffee. There were three or four armored divisions that went through there and went on out to the European theater. We all knew people. It was a very traditional southern town. When the war broke out, the 18 year olds to a man had all enlisted. We had very few people who could not go. We took some casualties among them. The kid next door got killed—his plane was crashed, went down in Germany—and two or three other guys.

Q: Were there German prisoners of war around?

WILLIAMSON: There were. My big memory of them was out on the farm land where they were used as laborers. You'd drive by and find big groups of them. Occasionally there would be German troops and Italians doing manual labor of one type or another in town, but basically they were out on the farms. We didn't think anything of them though we did envy those Africa Corps caps. Two or three guys got one. I don't know how the hell they did it.

Q: Did you find World War II a great geography lesson?

WILLIAMSON: Immense. You asked about movies at one stage of the game. We had four theaters, and the movies changed on Saturdays. That meant that, if you played your cards right and could get the nickel which is what it cost kids to get in, you could see four shots of Americans winning the war, one way or another. We thought it was grand. It was well before television. I'd go to some of them twice. I remember Sergeant York which was a Gary Cooper movie in which he portrayed Sgt. Alvin York who was a great hero of the First World War. As a matter of fact, I was watching that movie on Pearl Harbor Day and when I came out from the movie, my father and mother looked very grim. My small brother was on hand, and we were chattering away about Sergeant York and killing the Germans and things as kids would do. I was all of eleven. I remember both Mother and Dad saying, "Oh, shut up. Be quiet. This is serious business. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor, and we're going to be in a war." The next day in junior high the teachers all brought radios in, and we listened to President Roosevelt's address to Congress and asking for a State of the War. We were all thrilled we would be going to war very soon! There was no place for drummer boys, but we waited around, and several of our colleagues did go off toward the end.

Q: What was the name of the high school?

WILLIAMSON: In the tenth grade I was in Fort Smith High School and then eleventh and twelfth grades we moved up to Fayetteville and I was in Fayetteville High school.

Q: What was Fayetteville like?

WILLIAMSON: Fayetteville was a university town, and it's got some culture up there. They had movies on campus where people could go. They had music, which I discovered I quite loved, and I started singing in the church choir. I'm not sure I would have if there hadn't been a girl named Ann Milburn who was also singing in it, but there we were. It's a very small town about one-third of which was in one way or another connected to the University of Arkansas, and the other two-third were mostly people who were servicing the agricultural area around there. There's not much in the way of industry. Raising chicken and eggs was just beginning to catch on, on a commercial basis. There were big farms outside of town. Fayetteville was a very pleasant place. Good weather. By that time I really had noticed that girls were there.

Q: Tell me about dating habits in that era.

WILLIAMSON: Dating habits were limited to hanging out after school usually with a group of girls. We'd all pitch up when the movies changed. We'd all try to squeeze in the rows of the movie house, and make noise and carry on, and occasionally we'd get to walk them home but nobody had a car in those days. So we'd walk them home, and there would be giggling and kissing and whatnot, all pretty innocent as you look back on it: not quite Booth Tarkington stuff, but pretty innocent. More importantly, we got opportunities to travel a little bit more when two friends of mine went off to some little town up in the Ozarks, and bought a used fire engine. It was an old fashioned fire engine which had had a big boiler on it at one stage of the game. This had left a big concave hole that was

covered over, which was ideal for throwing ice and beer and cokes into. We all chipped in, including the girls, on Friday nights. How far we drove depended on how much money we had contributed to the kitty for the gasoline. We had gasoline usage down to a pretty fine line. We would drive out going exactly up to the odometer mark, stop wherever that was, get off the road because in those days it was all country out there. Fayetteville's up in the Ozarks, so there are mountains all around. We'd stop and we'd party till the beer and the cokes ran out. You were terribly heavily chaperoned by your peers, so there was no real bad hanky-panky that could go on. Then we'd get out and turn it around. It was a 1908 LaSalle fire truck. I still have pictures of it! It was grand. On high state occasions we'd take it out and drive in the homecoming parade. We'd go out to the woods, to the parks in the spring and summer, and turn around. We were quite the guys! One night, however, we parked it in front of a guy's house, and we woke up to find we really hadn't set the brakes and she'd taken off and committed suicide. It ran into a telephone pole. There were no spare parts for a 1908 LaSalle anyplace, plus we had broken the damn telephone pole, so we had to kick in some money to replace the telephone pole. Some guy undertook to carry it away and sell it for scrap, so that was the end of our adventure there. Dating was a lot of fun.

Q: In both elementary through high school, were any books particularly influential or any series or anything?

WILLIAMSON: I would say there's a whole bunch of books written in those days for boys. There was a guy named Henty.

Q: Oh, yes. All the G. A. Hentys.

WILLIAMSON: He wrote all of these wonderful things which...

Q: With Clive in India...

WILLIAMSON: By Pike and Dyke with William of Orange. It was always about a teenage boy all mixed up in some great historical moment. I was much taken by Jack London a little later on and, although I shouldn't say it, I found Mark Twain in those days a dead bore. Nothing much happened. Comic books were big in those days and as I got older I particularly appreciated Sheena, Queen of the Jungle.

Q: Oh, yes. She had a voluptuous figure.

WILLIAMSON: Very voluptuous. She made Rita Hayworth look emaciated. Rita Hayward, by the way, was a great film actress in those days. Not great, but she was well publicized.

Q: She was a sex symbol.

WILLIAMSON: She was, indeed. As for the other books, I sound a little snobbish, but I did read the complete three or four volume history of the Civil War from the confederate

side, and I read almost all the books about war sooner or later. I liked mysteries. Mother loved mysteries, and I read Chambers.

Q: Raymond? It was Raymond Chandler?

WILLIAMSON: I never got into detective stories. Chambers wrote things about the white knights and nice ladies being spies for Robert E. Lee. I had a grand time. This one girl that I was dating for a long time and thought the world of, I think was a bit of a show-off. She liked classical music, and she played the piano quite well and sang quite reasonably well. But she also liked poetry. My acquaintance with poetry had been Rudyard Kipling, and that was about it. I loved Kipling in those days. But she got me to read some poetry, the romantic stuff; you know, Byron and Browning, and all those guys. I read that pretty carefully, as much to impress her as anything else, but I liked it. I have had a particular love of poetry since then. Other books? Dad had Compton's Picture Encyclopedia, all bought sometime in the 1920s, and I read that thing, all volumes of it. It was illustrated and had things like the old woodsman series of vignettes, and the old woodsman would talk about Indians. I just thought it was amazing stuff to read. It showed me a whole new world. It wasn't Arkansas, which was very small.

Q: Speaking of poetry, did you get into John Brown's Body by Steven Vincent Benet? It was on the civil war.

WILLIAMSON: I got into that later on. I got into that in college, really.

Q: Were you into music, drama, or other things?

WILLIAMSON: There wasn't much drama around. Drama was something that was on the screen: movies. As I got older I liked some of the things that were out there besides cowboys and Indians and double features. I had forgotten about that. I had a job. I got a job delivering invoices for a firm named Morris, Morton, and Chap. They were pharmacists. I got paid the going postal rate when I delivered which would leave me in those days a pretty tidy little sum for the weekend. I would hop on my bicycle and go down to town and go to the bakery—the only bakery in town—and buy day-old sweet rolls. Then I'd haul off to the movies in time for the double feature, always one western and always an adventure serial, and two or three cartoons. The place was full of kids. They would turn us out and make us buy another ticket if we wanted to see a rerun of the whole thing. That was a high moment in my life when I was 12 or 13.

Q: I remember lining up for the movies and the ushers would come down and search the boys for bean shooters.

[laughter]

WILLIAMSON: Seriously delinquent boys!

Q: While you were in high school, were you pointed toward college? How did the family feel about this?

WILLIAMSON: Dad used to talk about it, but he wasn't making any money at all. He became a serious alcoholic in '46 and '47. It was quite clear to me that college was going to be a do-it-yourself operation. I wasn't pointed toward it, but I looked around. I could see what was happening to people. This was a typical southern town. There were four or five families who were quite well-to-do. They owned the furniture factory or the bank or something like that. If you were connected with those families, you could get a job in the area; if not, you weren't going to go anyplace. By the time I was 16, I knew I had to: a.) get out of Arkansas because it was stifling; b.) do it myself because Dad didn't have any connections and neither did Mother; and c.) I had to have a lot of good luck.

In 1947, I graduated form high school and joined the Marines. I went to boot camp, got my head shaven, was yelled at, and generally beaten about the head and shoulders. I was told: "Sit down and take this test!" So I sat down and took a half day, whole day maybe, multiple choice, fill in the blanks kind of test: yes, no, maybe. I passed! I didn't know it at the time because I went through boot camp, and I was well on my way to China it looked like, when I got called up and told, "Williamson, you passed the scholarship program. Congratulations!" I said, "I did?" And they said, "Yup. You're going to report to the Naval Air Station in Memphis" (I guess it was, because I was at Paris Island), "and you're going to be mustered into the NROTC (Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps)." It covered your college expenses, and I think it was $600 a year in all. "You're going to go to one of these schools." I thought, "Why not?" In fact, I thought of a lot of reasons why. I was having a labor management dispute with a PFC (Private First Class), and he was winning. So I went off and ended up going to the University of Louisville for four years, actually about three and a half because the Korean War broke out. As I say, I got to college.

Q: You were at the University of Louisville from '47 to...

WILLIAMSON: ...early '51.

Q: A good time to come out.

WILLIAMSON: The Marines threw me out! They needed second lieutenants badly.

Q: Let's talk about the University of Louisville.

WILLIAMSON: It was a funny place. It was a commuter school. It existed because it had a wonderful basketball team and a not bad football team. Johnny Unitas played for it several years after I was there. The thing was attractive for me personally because by this time I had no backing whatsoever. My parents couldn't afford to send me money, but the university did have four or five barracks that had been built for the various programs for training World War II officer candidates at Louisville, so those barracks were available. They had separate rooms, and I got free room. All I had to worry about was board. I got

six hundred bucks toward that, and in those days six hundred bucks went a long way. I did have to go to NROTC, and I took a number of other courses that you would expect naval officers to know something about: two years of physics and two years of math, and things that I was just terrible at. I was going to go back and get a commission in the Marines anyway. I had already decided that. I stayed there, had a good time, met a lot of good people, mostly like myself, NROTC folks because there weren't any other boarders around. Hardly anyone came in to the University of Louisville except a bunch of us, some really good basketball and football players from the Appalachian Mountains, and that was it.

Q: The rest were commuters.

WILLIAMSON: The rest were commuters. They would come, and the campus would be full. About 5:00 it would be empty except for the library. We found our own amusement. There were a couple of places around the university that weren't too careful about ID cards. We had a lot of Arabs. It's not true that we were biased, though. Louisville in those days had a wonderful medical school and a wonderful dental school, so we had a lot of older guys who were there for that. And a good law school. A bunch of guys were in law. We had that kind of niche. We were all kids, and they were all hardened veterans. They weren't really. There was this perceived vibe between us. We had a good time; we enjoyed ourselves. I had to go off every summer to six weeks of training.

Q: What sort of training were you getting?

WILLIAMSON: ROTC courses three times a week, and that was the usual stuff you'd expect for Naval officers. We were all going to be... Even in the Navy, in those days the Marines were as much a sea-going outfit as they were a land outfit. I took navigation; I took engine dynamics; I took general history of the Navy. By my junior year I was a full scale Marine studying Marine history, a Marine program, riflery -- stuff that the Navy guys never had to do. The thing was pretty well run. There was a Marine colonel and a very good sergeant major in charge of us, and they saw to it that we didn't get into any trouble. The training we got was marvelous as far as I was concerned. The first summer we were given TRs (Transportation Requests), and we made our way to San Francisco where we got on the battleship Iowa, by God.

Q: All four midshipmen!

WILLIAMSON: Yes! [crosstalk]

Q: ...from the New Jersey clash. They're still around.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. As a matter of fact, the Iowa was firing gun support in Korea which was an irony. We took off and went up to Seattle, and the people in Seattle turned out in great style and did a dance for us. We had all kinds of young middies running around. We went to Pearl Harbor which was a genuine experience. I had a wonderful

time. We went down to San Diego and did some amphibious warfare training, then back to school.

Q: Considering where you were ending up, were you getting anything in the way of foreign affairs?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. That was my major. I took political science as agreed. I started out like most 17 year olds. I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, but in those days there were a lot of books out about microbe hunters and scientists who had made great advances in medicine. I thought that would be a good thing to do. Then I ran into advanced science courses at the university. Because my name was Williamson, I was among the last of the registrants for that session. The only science course in the daytime I could get myself into was botany, and that was run by an 80 year old guy who had been at the university forever and ever. It was deadly, though, plus the microscopes were very, very old. You had a hell of a time focusing them. So that didn't work out too well, but I'd always been interested in current affairs, so I took political science. Got my degree in that and specialized in international affairs. I did all the prerequisite stuff, American politics, etc.

Q: You were at Louisville on June 25, 1950. This is a date that I think all...

WILLIAMSON: Yes, I was. As a matter of fact, I was in Quantico on training.

Q: I had just graduated from college.

WILLIAMSON: Guess what!

Q: Yes. What did that do to you all in the Marine ROTC?

WILLIAMSON: The first thing they said was, "Gentlemen, you are going to go out from this protective system of yours at the turn of the year. If you're in shooting range of your bachelor's degree, you better double up your courses." Sure enough, that's what happened. I went home for Christmas holidays, got my bachelor's degree in theory that year—actually in June—but I wasn't there for it. I went out to Quantico to the basic school in February and went off to Korea in July of that year.

Q: How did you find the Marine Corps officer basic training?

WILLIAMSON: Very challenging physically. By that time I was sold on the Marines. I had the gung-ho spirit and I was ready to go. In fact, I said, "I want to go to Korea as an infantry officer." They said, "Get in the line," so I did. Most of my class went out as replacements. It had been kind of a bad summer for the First Marine Division as far as second lieutenants went. They have a short usable lifespan in the Marines. I finished basic school in the late spring, early summer, went over to Camp Pendleton, and they had the winter warfare school.. It was warm, southern California. "Where the hell are the mountains where there's still a lot of snow?" We had about six days of playing around in

the snow with helmets and heavy gear. It was physically very demanding. Then they took us down and put us on an airplane—a big airplane—and flew us to Honolulu. From Honolulu we went on separate airplanes—smaller airplanes—and ended up in Korea.

Q: Did you land in Wake?

WILLIAMSON: I think we landed on Guam.

Q: I landed in Wake. Honolulu to Wake because the planes didn't make...

WILLIAMSON: If you were at Wake, I probably was, too. That gets a little slippery. It was one thing when we were all together because we knew each other or knew of each other, and that lasted until we got to Pearl Harbor. Then they threw us into what were loosely termed BOQs (Bachelor Officer Quarters). This was alphabetically. That's how I got Third Battalion, Seventh Marines. W's are always at the end of the line. I really wanted to be in the First or the Fifth Marines because those were the World War I regiments. Very famous. But the Seventh Marines did very well by themselves that year. That jumps ahead quite a bit.

Q: What was the situation when you got to Korea?

WILLIAMSON: The division had come back from the Chosin Reservoir in very bad shape as far as casualties. They lost a lot of equipment up there. By the time I got to them, we were on rice paddy patrol looking for guerillas and infiltrators and not finding too many of them but finding a lot of mines which was the other thing that was bad that summer. It was decided that we were going to make one last push to try to straighten out the lines and get what advantage we could geographically over the North Koreans and the Chinese. We went into the eastern part of the Korean peninsula—the Punch Bowl area—tied in first with a ROK (Republic of Korea) division on our left...

Q: Republic of Korea.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, on our left, and our right was up in the air. The ROK guys had been reinforced with the Turks and the French. I think there was no more than a battalion of each, but they were very good. This was really two real professional armies, and they really won the Battle of the Punch Bowl. We went around the side. They went right into the punch bowl. The poor old ROKs were sent in there, too. They just weren't well led. Nobody broke and ran or anything like that. They just couldn't go anyplace. The French got around at one flank, and then we came on the other flank and drove the Chinese off. I got through the fall offensive, and we got up to a ridge line. We were really up there! The right flank had a row of trenches that the North Koreans had put in, and we took up line there and discovered to our horror that at the end of our trench line there was a strong point of the North Korean army! They stayed there all winter. We stayed there all winter, too. There we got into trench warfare. I had a rifle platoon, and I was up on line till around my 22nd birthday in May when the whole Division was transferred over to the west coast in front of Seoul because there was a rumor of a huge last push by the

Chinese. The Eighth Army got smart. They moved us and the Commonwealth Division over there. Somebody once described a situation as, "When the Army of Northern Virginia gets settled down and plans to stay in the same place,, they're uncomfortably hard to move." They had us and the Commonwealth who were really good soldiers, and we got "settled down and planned to stay." The Chinese made a number of probes, but they thought better of it. They never came at us.

Q: This was when that you moved over there?

WILLIAMSON: That was in the summer of 1952. I celebrated my 22nd birthday by carrying about 75 lbs. of stuff on my back, but by that time I had lost my rifle platoon. They had said it was time for me to go to the rear and be rotated, and I thought, "Great. Mess kit repair in Pusan, perhaps, at the end of the Korea peninsula." But it was not to be. I was just sent over the ridge line, and I got the 81 mortars which meant I didn't take much direct small arms fire, but I got a lot of incoming.

Q: By the way, I want to thank you. I was in Seoul at the time as an airman second class, I think, with an intelligence outfit summer of '52. So thank you very much for keeping those other people away!

WILLIAMSON: You're quite welcome!

Q: It's greatly appreciated.

[laughter]

WILLIAMSON: Believe me, it was enlightened self interest.

Q: How did you cotton to being a Marine officer?

WILLIAMSON: To tell you the truth, as I look back, I didn't have the heart for it. I did very well, as far as I know didn't lose very many people because of mistakes I made, and I did everything I was supposed to do. I didn't get too scared. I got scared every so often, but I didn't get so scared that I couldn't operate or anything. I was losing too many people. Nobody's fault. Just because it's war. That really tore me up, so when I got back stateside I had a regular commission because of the scholarship program. The Marines said, "Well, we're going to send you off to..." Where the hell were they going to send me? Some sort of school. I said, "You know, I'm going to finish out my obligation, but I'm not going to make this a career." They were pretty upset about it, but I didn't. It just takes a certain inability to empathize to do that for a living as far as I was concerned.

Q: When you were in Korea, what did you think about the war?

WILLIAMSON: It never occurred to me to think one way or another. That's what I was supposed to do. I joined the Marine Corps. They said go that way, I went that way.

Q: How about when you came back? What was the attitude of people you met, or did you go back to Fayetteville or what?

WILLIAMSON: My folks had moved back to Fort Smith by then. I went back to Fort Smith, and everybody said, "Oh, my! It must have been terrible! Tell us all about it." You've gone through this with your Foreign Service career. I would sit down and tell them all about it. They couldn't have cared less. They wanted to tell me what Aunt Minnie had done.

Q: Particularly that war was... [crosstalk]

WILLIAMSON: The only people who really wanted to talk to me about it were parents of other guys who had been out there or who were still there. A school mate of mine named Tom Wimberly was the only son of a piano teacher. What was her name, Oriella? Something like that. Strange southern first name. She would go around and just berate people because her son—he was in the infantry, too, in the Army—was in Korea getting shot at. What the hell was your son doing? When I came home, she whipped over to the house and asked me had I seen Tom. I said I didn't believe I had, no. Some people, I think a lot of people, came back and had pretty good wars. They thought it was okay, and they joined the veterans associations. It never occurred to me to do it.

Q: Okay, Larry, we've got you back in ...

WILLIAMSON: '53.

Q: We were beginning to demobilize, too. What had you been thinking? You had a degree.

WILLIAMSON: I was thinking about going back to graduate school.

Q: You had the GI (Government Issue) bill.

WILLIAMSON: I had the GI bill by that time. And teaching. Then I met a young lady who I thought the world of and, indeed, married eventually. Her parents were pretty well-to-do or came from families that were well-to-do. They were just terribly upset because I was going to go off to become a teacher. They told me, "That's pretty slow business." I said, "Yes, that's one of the things I like about it. I've had enough excitement." They asked if I would take two years and try private business and see how that went. I thought, "OK, two years, what the hell?" I shot two years in Korea more or less. What's this? And we got married. We went back down to San Francisco which was a ruinous decision in many ways, and I went to work for a coffee importing firm and found out—which should have come as no surprise to me—that I didn't have any talent in that field. They needed salesmanship and attention to fine movements of coffee markets. It needed to have an educated palate. All of this, and I didn't have it. I didn't have any of those and had very little interest in acquiring them. I did my routine two years. I look back on it, it was kind of silly.

Q: This was in San Francisco.

WILLIAMSON: This was in San Francisco. I talked to my wife, and I said, "I think I want to go and talk to the people in Berkeley about getting an advanced degree." I had kept all this to myself. She wasn't too upset, but she said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Sure. I know I told you that I'd stay in business for two years, but this isn't my stuff." So I went over and talked to the Dean in political science. They looked at my record and said, "Well, you got good grades. Why not," so I went to graduate school.

Q: This was at Berkeley.

WILLIAMSON: This was at Berkeley. After about six, seven months, the political science department was going through this awful turmoil about can't we mathematize all of this stuff? I was really interested in analysis of what people were thinking about how they liked something, but this other stuff was somehow making it into a political "science" because that's legitimate. I went through that, didn't waste my time because I didn't think much of it at all. I didn't want to do it, so I went over and transferred to history where I found my field. I had a wonderful time. I had taken Russian in college at Louisville. I was far from fluent in it, but I could read it fairly well. I already had a resource there, so I signed up and went right through. I got a master's degree, I got all my work done for a PhD, I passed my doctoral exams, got all my coursework in and then some, and got a thesis advisor. We sat down and started talking about what I could do and couldn't do. I wanted to work in something in modern history analysis. I was always taken by the Spanish civil war and thought I might like to do something there. This guy, who was a Middle European from the word go thought, "Spain? Why would you go to Spain when you've got all of German history to work with?" The fact that I didn't read German didn't seem to cross his mind. We were talking about it for a long time, and my wife was getting a little tired of all of this. We kept meeting guys who were spending ten years at Berkeley writing their dissertation, and I hadn't even started. Then a friend of mine—a very good friend Bob Hershler—got his doctorate, got his dissertation accepted. He went off to the American Historical Association annual meeting which was down in Memphis in those days, looking for work. Bob was really my ideal of a professor. He was smart, he had three or four languages, he had published a couple of articles. He was a really decent guy to boot, and I thought he'd be a brilliant teacher. He did a lot of TA (Teacher's Assistant) work, and the students all loved him. He came back as pleased as punch. He'd gotten himself a job with tenure, or he could get to tenure, at some two-bit college in Mississippi—Mississippi A&M or something like that—paying just a little bit more than I was making with the GI bill. I thought, "God, if that's the best he can do, what the hell am I doing here?" I'd taken the foreign service exam just to see if I could do it. If my memory serves me right, and I think it does, in 1956 and '57, Foster Dulles plus any of the McCarthyites whoever they were had not taken any recruits into the Foreign Service at all.

Q: You're absolutely right. The first class, there had been at least a two-year gap. The first class, Class I, started in July 1955. I know because I was in that class.

WILLIAMSON: Then there was another gap! There was about a two-year gap after you guys, so I didn't have much faith in the whole damn system, but my name was on the rolls, I did pass. I passed the oral, too. At this time I began to look around for what else I could do, and how long would this poor woman stay with me? By God, they called and said, "We're hiring," or words to that effect.

Q: How did you hear about the Foreign Service?

WILLIAMSON: I was at Cal, and a lot of people talk to you about that. There were a couple of professors who had worked for the Department during the war. Ray Sontag who did the German papers had a whole host of guys who had been with the Foreign Service and a bunch of former OSS guys, so it was very much in the history.

Q: Were you at all attracted to the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)?

WILLIAMSON: It never crossed my mind.

Q: I was wondering because you mentioned OSS. Incidentally, just to capture the thing. Grad students are a different breed of cat than the normal undergraduates. How was the campus of California in those days?

WILLIAMSON: It was a grad student's paradise, and if you were an undergraduate, God help you because the professors were busy writing, the grad students were busy writing, and the grad students were supposed to be teaching you. Very unfortunately, the legislature of California had passed a bill saying that any graduate of an accredited high school in California had the right to enter the state college system. That meant you got all these kids—17 and 18 year olds—who had passed but with no great distinction. You throw them in this great mill in Cal. It is a huge campus, as you know. The upshot of this was that the only way to weed this bunch out was to start giving midterms in October and flunking them out before they even had their damn clothes unpacked! It was just awful for undergraduates, but for graduate students it was fine. We had cliques and groups. I ran with a bunch of guys who had been there for about five or six years. We had a Wednesday evening pizza and beer party where we'd all sit around and lie to each other.

Q: What was your wife doing?

WILLIAMSON: My wife was working at the Emporium, a big department store. She was a buyer and was making pretty fair money. I had the GI bill, and I was a research assistant for two years and a teaching assistant for two. We were actually doing very well. We were in subsidized housing, and the expenses were not bad. We had our own car. We had all of Northern California to play in which is grand.

Q: The written exam was a day, was that right?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, it was a day.

Q: When you took the oral exam, do you recall any of the questions or how it went?

WILLIAMSON: I recall the one I bilged on! They said...

Q: I might put to somebody who's not familiar with Marine/Naval terminology, to bilge something is to fail.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. It was towards the end. They asked me all sorts of questions: What did I think about this? What did I think about that? How would you handle this problem? How would you handle that? I didn't find it all very difficult. Then somebody said, "What do you think about Lake Mead?" Well, my mind went blank. I had just been to Lake Mead that summer which the...

Q: Hoover Dam.

W ILLIAMSON: Hoover Dam. I had no idea what he was talking about. I looked at him, and I had the common sense to say, "I haven't the faintest idea." And he laughed. As I left, that's when he said, "You have passed. Do you remember where Lake Mead is now?" I said, "Yes! It's down there in the southern part of the state." He said, "Yea. You handled that pretty well. You just said flat you didn't know." I really didn't!

Q: How do you handle something that you don't know anything about? Do you try to bluff? "I've always been in favor of water."

WILLIAMSON: Something like that.

Q: If it's in a lake, it's even better for swimming.

WILLIAMSON: I knew it. I don't know what I knew about it, where it was, and I thought it was going to be very unproductive in trying to follow that thought.

Q: Did you get any feel for academic politics while you were in there?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. One of my favorite professors was an associate. He was German, and he'd fought in the American infantry as an interpreter during the war. Very dangerous for a German. And Jewish to boot. Werner Angress. He was a very nice guy, and he was my consultant on my master's degree. I just thought the world of him. Werner was a diplomatic historian, Central European, but we were on a campus which had... I don't know if you remember Raymond Sontag, but he was the German man in the entire United States. Two of his associates were trained by him. We had a whole group of Slavs, most of whom were exiles. Werner just couldn't get an article out that suited them. He just went off finally. I don't know what happened to him. Never heard since of him. I suppose he ended up at some state university in Nevada or something like that. I had a good feel for that. Didn't bother me too much, I guess mostly because I didn't have to deal with it. I could see that everything was not beer and skittles.

Q: How did your wife feel about the idea of going into the Foreign Service?

WILLIAMSON: She was, I think, both excited and appalled. She'd never done much traveling. She went to Smith, gone back and forth from Washington State, and the west coast she knew very well, but she had never been out of the country. She was really excited about it. Her parents, her father was dead by that time, her mother was ecstatic. "This is my daughter! The wife of the ambassador!" I kept thinking it was pretty premature, but it's OK. They all thought it was nifty keen and so did Joan. We sat down and we said I was going to make $6,000 a year or whatever it was in those days and discussed having babies right off the bat. Finally. We'd been married five years. In fact, we did. She was pretty pleased about the whole thing. She was thinking as was I of the Western Europe foreign service but maybe—because I had Russian—just maybe, the necessity of a tour in Moscow or Warsaw.

Q: This was considered the big game.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, it was a big game. You have to pay your dues to get in there, but they would never send a guy like me to Bulgaria or those places. We were very excited. Went off on that.

Q: You came in when?

WILLIAMSON: I came in in July of '58.

Q: How was your basic officer course, your A100 course?

WILLIAMSON: The A100 course was quite interesting. I had discovered that I was older—I was 28—than a lot of them. This was still an Ivy League institution in those days. These guys were from good schools and were well aware of it. They were able to move into little places in Georgetown and Alexandria, and I was in a damn apartment in Arlington hoping desperately to be sent overseas right away so I could afford all of this. By that time we were having a baby. They were decent guys. Nobody would snub you or anything like that. There were other people who took it pretty hard. I think people from the west—college graduates from the west—had a different attitude toward life. They still do. Life in California is very different than life out here. Your mores are all different, and I much prefer the Californians', frankly. I thought it was pretty good. We had a decent monitor. He was the first guy from the Foreign Service who was drafted in 1943 or something like that. I thought it was reasonable, as reasonable as you can get. We didn't have any of the fancy things we have now. We had lots of stuff on protocol, and we had the consular section which was run by the guy Frank Auerbach who wrote the book.

Q: He wrote the book on immigration. He was very German... [crosstalk]

WILLIAMSON: I said, "If I could escape this fate, I'll be very glad." I knew I was going to have to do it sooner or later. That went pretty well. The big disappointment came, of course, when we were told at the end of the course that...

Q: This would be still '58.

WILLIAMSON: Early '59...that none of us were going overseas. We were all going to stay here for at least two years.

Q: You didn't join the Foreign Service.

WILLIAMSON: We didn't join the Foreign Service and, frankly I was looking forward to the augmentation of the allowances. We were not doing well. We weren't doing badly; I've never done badly, but we were not doing as well as we'd hoped we would. Two guys, one fellow who had, I think, three kids, and another guy who had several sought and got exceptions. The first one went to Cuba just before Castro came in. The other guy went to Santo Domingo or something like that and resigned after a year down there. I, on the other hand, got into the EUR (European) crowd. I was a junior staff assistant. Later on I got to be the deputy UN (United Nations) advisor.

Q: You went up to New York?

WILLIAMSON: No.

Q: You were...

WILLIAMSON: In the front office of EUR in those days.

Q: Oh, EUR.

WILLIAMSON: You had a labor advisor and you had a UN advisor and you had several other specialists. I helped the UN advisor who was a decent guy.

Q: Who was he?

WILLIAMSON: Bill Nunley. He had a taste for booze and he was very high strung. He didn't get along with the IO (International Organization) people and particularly didn't get along with Joe Sisco which was easy to do.

Q: Joe Sisco was an elemental force. I've interviewed Glenn Cella, he worked with Sisco quite often. Sisco was an extremely effective bureaucrat.

WILLIAMSON: He takes no hostages.

Q: No. You did that for how long?

WILLIAMSON: I did that for two and a half years.

Q: This would be from '59 to '61.

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: I realize you were not in the...

WILLIAMSON: I was carrying messages. I was carrying telegrams.

Q: What were some of the issues?

WILLIAMSON: The big one and the one that I got involved in which later formed my career was the Belgian Congo. The whole thing blew up in the late 50's. I was called into Foy Kohler's office. He was the deputy assistant secretary in those days, East European type, later ambassador to Russia. He sat us all down and said, "Look, guys. Too many things are happening here. Ken Cromwell," who was the Dutch desk officer, "is going to take over. These are his duties. As a desk officer he's going to take over the bulk of the Belgium desk, because the Belgium desk officer (who was Bob German, later very well known, good guy), is going to have to be all wrapped up in the visit of King Leopold and is just not going to have any spare time for any of this other stuff. You, young man, have got to take on the burden of all of this stuff at the UN about Congo."

Q: You had to search for the European hands. What the hell is this?

WILLIAMSON: What's this? It's OK, an FSO-8 can handle that, and he's a good guy. There's not much handling because Joe Sisco holds the other hat. Then, of course, we got into the fact that the Belgians were doing all kinds of things. The European bureau officially said, "Yes, we've got to help the Belgians because of NATO (North American treaty Organization)," and what was then the incipient OAU (Organization of African Union). What about the Congolese?

Q: It was part of the Near East at that time, I believe.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, it was, and other kinds of people running around and wringing their hands about missionaries and monies and all kinds of things. I got really into that stuff and got up to New York more times than a junior officer should go. On per diem. I loved it! I had a grand time. As you can see, we really solved the issue.

Q: That's why it's such a peaceful, productive place.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. You can thank us all! But anyway, it was a great eye-opener, and it got me all tied up with the African bunch, and I liked them. They were good people: Joe Palmer and several other guys. The hell with the African bureau reputation, he'd say, "Why don't you come and work for us when you get out of that stuff?" I said, "I can't. I've got to go overseas. I want to go to Eastern Europe, and I speak Russian." Of course, I

was lying through my teeth. I didn't speak Russian, but I read Russian very well by that time, and I figured I could be light on my feet. If not, I would be a paper officer in Paris. But I got treated like a bull -- I got job hijacked. I was going to go to Warsaw, play to the desk officer and the Eastern European hand. Then, by God, Loy Henderson went out. Loy Henderson was the under secretary, I guess, for administration in those days. He went out and made a tour of Africa.

Q: A very famous tour to take a look because they were all becoming independent, and what are we going to do about this?

WILLIAMSON: Yes. The idea was originally that we were going to have one or two big posts and then a lot of small posts. He got talked into having embassies in all those countries...

Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1 with Larry Williamson.

WILLIAMSON: Henderson decided we were going to have embassies in all of these places no matter how absurd it turned out to be and, of course, we still do. What was going to be done? Well, anybody who was in the flow was going to go to Africa. The African bureau was not all that happy about it because there were a lot of dregs.

Q: A lot of European hands who were... I don't want to say second rate, but anybody with a place in Europe who ended up there --completely aghast -- "What the hell am I doing in Chad?"

WILLIAMSON: I was the same way. I got Sierra Leone. By that time my wife was pregnant for the second time, and I went in and said, "Look, you guys. You got to give a little comfort here. Send me someplace that's at least got a decent doctor." Well! Henderson himself took an interest in my case. If you've ever seen Innocent in Action, it's another elemental force. "My dear chap, don't worry about any of this stuff." He said, "They've got an excellent doctor there. Her name is so-and-so, and I'll give you a letter to her. She'll be just fine!" Of course, by the time we got there, the doctor had taken a look, and didn't want to have anything to do with this bush place and got the hell out and went to Manchester or someplace like that. Anyway, that was it. I was going to go to Sierra Leone. The African bureau was not very happy about that. But I got several calls saying, "We're glad you're going there and, by the way, do you know who Tom Reiner is?" I said, "No." They said, "He's going to be your boss." I reckoned they'd talk to us about it.

Q: Who was this Tom?

WILLIAMSON: Tom Reiner. He was an old bachelor, wily old bird. He'd been in the OSS, been all over Africa, knew his way around, and had just the damnedest attitude towards things you ever saw in your life. We got along very well. But he did some strange things. I ran across Tom much later when I was in the Director General's office as his Deputy, and I got a call from... I don't remember who called. He said, "Who the

hell is Tom Reiner?" I said, "Well, I think he's CG (consul general) in Jo'burg." "Have you seen this telegram?" Of course, I hadn't. It was in the usual admin channel. Reiner had gotten pissed off. He got very excited and mad about the inspectors inspecting his posts. He fired off a telegram, didn't send it by way of the embassy in Pretoria, just sent it straight back saying, "I'd like to have my budget increased by X amount to compensate me for the time the inspectors used my vehicles." He dropped a copy of it to the Secretary of State and to everybody else. Here was a wild man whom I admired, I liked him. I'd been harassed by inspectors myself, but I thought that probably was not the way to go. I can tell you, nobody else thought it was the way to go about it. They yanked poor Tom out, but he was getting along.

Q: When you said before you went out there they said, "Let me tell you about Reiner." What did they tell you?

WILLIAMSON: They told me he was a very well prepared, well trained, and seasoned officer. He currently was a consular officer by cone, and he's been an admin officer in Monrovia. He got this job and he promptly moved into the ambassador's residence and picked up an African mistress and moved her in there with him, and that he was very rough on his staff. His staff in those days included Bill Clark who went on to be ambassador to India and all kind of good things.

Q: _____ soul.

WILLIAMSON: Bill's a very good man and couldn't wait to get out of there. Tom finally chased his wife off. He didn't think much of the wives of the post and let them know it. Since my wife had two babies, she didn't let that bother her in the slightest, but there were a couple of wives around including some AID (Agency for International Development) wives who had hopes of a different style of life, but a.) to have those kinds of hopes in Sierra Leone in those days was a little iffy, and b.) with Tom Reiner it just didn't work. So there was a great deal of heartburn all the time he was there. He finally got replaced by a political appointee.

Q: You were in Sierra Leone from when to when?

WILLIAMSON: I must have gone there in '61 just before independence, and I stayed there till the summer of '63. I was then given a telegram saying, "Congratulations, you're just cut out to be a West Africa type, and we're going to send you to Ghana where you'll have the consular section." I looked in the book and the consular section was just one guy! I said, "What the hell kind of stuff is this - another God forsaken hole for two and a half years practically. My wife is getting sick and tired of places where it rains all the time and nothing works and there's no food or anything – that's what Ghana's known for... Don't tell me that, I've been there." Then they called and said, "We're going to give you a great opportunity." I said, "You'll let me go to Warsaw." They said, "No, you have to stay at least one more tour in the Africa bureau, but you're going down to open up Lusaka." I thought he said Osaka, so I said, "I don't speak Japanese." He said, "What the hell has that got to do with it?" So I went down to Lusaka.

Q: What about Sierra Leone? You were then in what, '61?

WILLIAMSON: '61.

Q: What was Sierra Leone like?

WILLIAMSON: As a friend of mine who was Ivorian said, "It's a little 19th century. It might be a little 18th century." It had been a big slave port through which the British Anti-Slavery Society had sent a bunch of newly-freed African slaves. They got down there, and after just terrible, terrible casualties, they fought off the local tribes. They succumbed by the hundreds to disease, and they founded this little town—Freetown—and later on when the British and the French got to really slugging it out over who owns Africa and what parts, the British came in and conquered a bit of the mainland. Sierra Leone had 120 inches of rain a year, and it all fell in three months. It had no water catchment system. During the dry season, you were completely dependent upon cisterns on the roofs of the houses. There were lots of stories of people going up to look in their cistern and finding a dead buzzard or other live stock in it. The electricity worked in one-third of the town every two or three days. There were no European stores to speak of, so European food was in short supply. We all sent off to Peter Justesen in Copenhagen. You would buy six months worth of supplies, canned food and everything else. It was dangerous. Malaria was very rampant; I got it. So did my son who had just been born, but he came through okay. It was "bush." That's all there was to it, and everybody knew that.

Q: What were American interests other than Loy Henderson saying we're going to have them in all of these places?

WILLIAMSON: We had a small missionary community there. The U.S. Navy in those days would flex its muscle and say, "That's the third largest harbor in the world, and we have to have constant access to it," as if we were going to have an invasion force of Marines going down to Nigeria or something. But really hardly any interests; hardly any at all. There was a rutile factory, a rutile mine, diamonds, but they were usually in the hands of the British and South Africans, an iron ore mountain, Maranga or Marangoo or something like that, which an American firm had an interest in, but nothing else.

Q: What was the government like?

WILLIAMSON: When I was there it was the first post-independence government, and it was ruled by an old man named Margai who was a really top-notch fellow. He was the first guy from the non-Creole, from the non-Freetown group—to be raised into power. He made his name as a doctor. He did it by going to the ladies' initiation societies and talking the ladies into having him or a midwife come in and give lessons to the little girls about what makes babies and what you do about them and how to take care of yourself and take care of your baby. He endeared himself to the ladies of Sierra Leone all of whom turned out and voted for him. He got into tribal problems. He was a Mende and he was a Christian. The Temnes in the north were Muslim, and there were more of them

than of the other tribes. It went on like that all of the time. He was a very pro-Western, very laid back sort of guy and easy to work with. The British were still there in great force. The British army, the theater of the old regiment was staffed at the top by either British officers themselves or by recent Sandhurst graduates from Sierra Leone. There was no Navy, no Air Force. The police was still in the hands of the British police advisers.

Q: Were the Soviets messing around there?

WILLIAMSON: No, they were in Guinea, and that was one of those comedies. A Guinean version of statehood was considered a great risk to western interests in Africa. As it turned out, Sekou Toure was a great risk to the Soviets and their investments there because they put in all kinds of stuff. It was bad. It was just bad. For example, three snowplows showed on the dock at Conakry. There were really no problems to speak of. It was a small, very poor, unlikely to go anyplace kind of country, of interest to the Brits because of their modest, commercial development investment there and because of the diamonds.

Q: What were you doing?

WILLIAMSON: I was it. I was the consular section; I was the econ section; I was half of the political section. Anything else that needed to be done, I did, too. I was a GSO (General Services Officer) for a while until we got a real Admin officer to show up. It was a great experience. I knew all about things.

Q: With Reiner, what did he do, and how did he use you?

WILLIAMSON: He called me in and he said, "This is what you have to do." He said, "You're employed. Read the..." The local staff, by the way, had just been hired in the last six or nine months. They didn't know things, either. I had an old naval stenographer as my consular aid. He was pretty good. I didn't even know how to put a visa into a passport. He had to come over and show me, and all that sort of stuff. Once Tom decided I could do things, he left me pretty well alone. I was also liaison to the military which involved catering to the occasional ship and going to a lot of good parties.

Q: How about the British? Were they basic support?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. We had very close relations with the Brits. Two of my best friends in Sierra Leone were British FSOs (Foreign Service Officers). A lot of British UN and Refugee kind of people. We had a great time with the Brits and good relations. Very good relations.

Q: While you were there, this was...can I use the term "the armpit of Africa?"

WILLIAMSON: Yes. Neck and neck with Monrovia.

Q: Did you feel Africanist at the time?

WILLIAMSON: I did feel, as a matter of fact, because as it turned out I was the only expert we had on Sierra Leone. When people wanted to come out and see the mine or talk about diamonds-- which happened very rarely-- I was there. I knew all about it because there was not much to learn. I started reading books about Africa, particularly about West Africa. I got to know a fair number of Africans, a fairly wide number of Africans, actually, more there than anywhere else. I went up country with them a lot, stayed in their residences. Traveled a lot. Traveled all over most of Sierra Leone before it was all through. At the time Reiner left, we got a good DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). He was a retired colonel! He and his wife had worked with Tommy Thompson on the Austrian Peace Treaty. He was ready for this one! By that time I'd been there for six months and could swagger a bit. He let me go do my stuff. That's a great thing about African posts—besides the fact that I really loved being in Africa—was that after you proved that you knew things, people were perfectly prepared to leave you go. I discovered that very few political officers could balance their damn checkbook. Therefore, if I was going to talk about economics, they'd go right along with me. "Sure. Yea, yea." If I want to go up country in the jeep, fine, go. "I've got an appointment with somebody. We're going to be for two days with the high commissioner," kind of thing.

Q: How about the tribal situation? Did you have much contact?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, quite a bit. The ruling party was the Sierra Leone People's Party, and that was really mostly in the hands of the Christian Mende tribe and, like most tribal politics, it was feast or famine. "This is ours, and you guys aren't going to get anything." I got to know a lot of the Mende population, and I got to know a lot of the so-called Creoles which are the Freetown people. I did not get to know too many Temnes till later on in the game when the Temnes got restless, but it was easy to get a hold of them. They wanted to talk to Americans. They wanted to counter-balance the Brits. There was always the hope that I would start an AID program for them. I had good contacts there. It was only later on in Africa when we were no longer seen as a counter-balance to the ex-colonial power that we started having problems with being Americans in contact with African politicians. Right through my tour in Lusaka and, actually right through my tour in Dar es Salaam, that was the problem.

Q: Larry, I think this is a good place to stop. We'll put at the end here where we are so we'll know how to pick it up. You left Sierra Leone in 1963.

WILLIAMSON: 1963 in the summer.

Q: And you're off to...

WILLIAMSON: Lusaka. I was in Northern Rhodesia.

Q: It was known as Rhodesia in those days.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, before independence. That's two I've seen through independence.

Q: OK, we'll pick it up then.

WILLIAMSON: Great.

Q: Today is the second of November 2006. Larry, I guess we were in 1964 when you went to Lusaka.

WILLIAMSON: Actually, it was '61. No, '64. You're right.

Q: You were there how long, two years?

WILLIAMSON: Two and a half.

Q: Really, '66.

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: Describe Lusaka in 1964 just prior to independence.

WILLIAMSON: Lusaka was what the South Africans would call a "one-horse dorp." A small town. It was because of its site on the railroad, it was mainly the administrative capitol of the... It was a protectorate, I think, in northern Rhodesia. It just stayed there. The other alternative was to go down to Livingston and the Victoria Falls down there, but that place was fever ridden during the '20s and '30s and to a great extent up to the present. That was never a serious contender. Plus, the balance of economic power was in the mines of the northern territories and the tribes up there—it was very tribal—insisted upon having their... You couldn't have their capitol on the copper belt itself which was a few mining towns along the Congolese border. They wanted us to keep it in Lusaka. It's flat. It's a high plain, very nice weather out of the mosquito belt. The temperature never goes below around 50, and it never gets above 95. It used to be a joke among the old African types that came down there that September was called the "suicide month" in northern Rhodesia because it was time when civil servants usually blew their brains out over monotony and whatnot, and the heat. For anybody who'd lived anyplace outside the African belt, the heat in Lusaka was terrible. But it never went above 100 degrees. You slept under sheets at night, and you'd use mosquito nets. You didn't take pills unless you were going to go on safari someplace. All and all, that was nice. When we got there the British protectorate was changing into a self-governing colony, so you had a whole new bunch of people coming in from the UK (United Kingdom), Commonwealth affairs people by and large to liaise with the government. You still had on hand a lot of old colonial office people, and there was some tension in the British ranks about who was in charge around here. The Africans were perfectly pleased to play all those two groups of people off as well as threaten the settlers who were as tough and as intense as the Rhodesians were in southern Rhodesia but much smaller in number and influence. When we started showing up... When I say we I mean western embassies because initially we

were the only western embassies there, ourselves and the Germans. The Japanese had a lot of people. The African politicians began to play us off, too, against everybody else. It was a great place to be a junior officer. I was the admin (administrative) section, I was the consular section, I was the political section, the economic section, GSO (General Services Officer), and anything else that happened to be going. I was not the consular officer for which I sent up praises to the gods.

Q: Who was the ambassador? When you went out there, this was prior to independence.

WILLIAMSON: Very much so, and because of other factors the British were upset about what was going to happen in Southern Rhodesia. We didn't staff it up as an embassy as such. It was mainly a consulate general, and a guy named Bob Foulon went out as consul general, and he was for all intents and purposes the leading American diplomat in the country, a very small embassy initially. We had a station chief. We had a couple of USIA guys and then a whole bunch of people who had been with the aid mission in Indonesia which was closed out about then. There were all kinds of people flocking in to do all kinds of jobs that weren't described as yet, and a lot of people floating around. We had a lot of people come along. We had the Peace Corps guys showing up. I was also Peace Corps liaison. In fact, I was it: myself and Foulon and a consular officer. A guy came in later to become admin officer which I was much relieved about. There was a time that I rented or bought something like 30 houses in about a three month period. It was pretty easy to do because a lot of the Northern Rhodesian settlers were South African, and they were getting the hell out. They weren't going to work under a black government. They were delighted to sell their bungalows and their houses for dollars, and give you a very good price on it, thank you. I think it was a very good job. I got involved in the embassy building.

Q: I'm a little unclear. When you got there, what was the situation? Was this becoming a colony, or was it accepted ever as being independent? What was...

WILLIAMSON: It went like this: The Rhodesias and Nyasaland had at one stage of the game been separate entities. Nyasaland was a colony. I'm not sure what the legal status was, but Rhodesia was considered part of the commonwealth and was semi-independent, and Northern Rhodesia was a protectorate. After the second war the three countries were jammed together by the British and turned into the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. This caused a great deal of pain because the bulk of the political power was in Southern Rhodesia which was settled largely by people from South Africa, and just after the war at lot of them moved into it, looking to better themselves. North of the Zambezi, which is where Northern Rhodesia was, was governed by the British Colonial Office originally and then... When you had these huge mining corporations—copper mining—up on the Zaire border, they were the sole money makers for the country and the real reason for the British to be interested in it. There were two American firms up there and the good old Anglos British DeBeers companies and all those people. They formed a distinct counter block. They were not as prejudiced and upset as the white settlers, some of whom had taken up farming. Quite a few had taken up farming, actually. The tobacco crops were very powerful and were very good in those days. The evolution was that the

Africans in Rhodesia and Nyasaland had started agitating for self-rule. This was anathema to white Southern Rhodesians who fought it tooth and nail through the federation and in London. Eventually, however, things got out of hand first in Nyasaland which is when Hastings Banda came back from 25 years living in the United States formed a country power, the Nyasaland People's Conference, I think it's called, and they were straight for independence, leaving the queen. The whole thing. This scared the mining magnates in Northern Rhodesia, and they were trying to ease this situation by making a separate kind of thing of Northern Rhodesia, not give it independence but make it into a self-governing colony much like Kenya was in those days. The Africans were having none of this and put up a great deal of street fighting and demonstrations. The British finally caved and agreed to independence. About the time I got there the British had announced a timetable for granting independence to Northern Rhodesia and to Nyasaland a year before the Southern Rhodesians had formed their own self-governing operations. Now we're starting to talk about secession and getting out of the British Commonwealth all together. We were there at a very particular time with a fair amount of rioting in the city mostly against the colonial government. but there were two major African parties in Northern Rhodesia, and they had a big struggle going on for who was going to be in charge after the freedom date. The purpose of the United States embassy there was to show the flag and follow the effects of independence on the Roan Selection Trust which is a wholly American owned mining corporation. We had maybe three or four hundred people settle there, some on the mines, but most of them were missionaries. That was the sum total of our interests for a long, long time. Later on as we get involved with the Southern African problems and the Chinese were coming in through Dar es Salaam, our interests became a great deal more global. Initially I was literally consumed with cleaning the place up.

Q: Were you picking up at this point that we were there to show the flag and not to get involved in, or were you there to push for independence?

WILLIAMSON: It was opposition. This is back in Soapy Williams's day. Kennedy.

Q: Secretary for African Affairs.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, and again the administration. We made no bones about our support for independence, but the British had asked us to stand back a little bit because they hoped to bring Southern Rhodesia along to independence, too, and not have them fall to the South Africans. Because of their other wide interests in Africa, they really despaired having an all-white government set up along lines of South Africa and Rhodesia. We were pushing pretty hard for independence. We kept our heads down. The British were trying to get some traction from the Southern Rhodesians. They lost all that eventually. We weren't there to replace the British under any circumstances, and we weren't there to work with the existing British Commonwealth office but to help where they needed it. We supported them in the UN, but our job was to sit around and watch and protect whatever American interests came along.

Q: Was there at that time a Soviet presence?

WILLIAMSON: No. Until independence, they were absolutely not a problem. On the copper belt up on the border with the Congo there were two Chinese restaurants. That, as far as I know now, was the extent of Communist infiltration. The Russians did come down. There were Russian diplomats and promises of largesse that they would set up. This was before the Russian/Chinese split.

Q: Talking about when you were setting the embassy, you knew it was going to be an embassy, is that right?

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: Did you run across the problem of one standard for AID, another for sate?

WILLIAMSON: The AID people plead several causes: One, they are a temporary agency so they ought to treat their people better than the slaves at the Department of State were treated; Two, their people were by and large quite a bit older than us, were settled in the various professions. We had agricultural people, and they were more substantial in their needs. They were quite unhappy. Many of them didn't want to be there, and so the AID director who was a really decent guy constantly said he had to buy them out to have them stay. They kept these programs going. That was not a major problem. It got to be more of a problem later on when we in turn got a lot more people in of more senior rank. When I was doing the purchasing, I was under a great deal of pressure just simply to get some housing that was decent that they could put people in. Representation didn't come along too much till the agency guy appeared on the scene ,who proceeded to serve some of the other potentates working with the British intelligence service over in the state house. The CIA's other people were pretty damn good. They weren't very pushy at all. I guess the biggest problem was with AID, and the mission was terribly overstaffed. There wasn't enough for people to do. They had a small AID program and as it turns out that they didn't have too many resources to work with anyway. All the agricultural sector is at the top of the monsoon belt so that they can depend upon the rains maybe three years out of every five, but every third year or fourth year the drought would set in, and there you'd be. You weren't in an agricultural program, you were in a famine relief program. That wasn't too good of an idea, but we had a lot of people doing that.

Q: What was the tribal situation there?

WILLIAMSON: Two big tribes. One of them down along the Southern Rhodesian/Northern Rhodesian border on down to the Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River. They had been the regional guys who had been agitating for freedom and had a record going back about ten years beating up on the British government about this. The other group, though, was the Bemba who were up in the northeast of the country and provided most of the labor for the copper mines. They were two separate political organizations and by the time I got there were busily engaged in arguing and fighting each other. They were confusing for a guy who'd just gotten in from Sierra Leone. Let me tell you, the police had—the governor general, really—had banned political rallies on

Sundays because they inevitably broke into fist fights and machetes fights between the two forces. He had, however, only the black police, the African police force, to use against these riots, so you'd go out and try to find out what's going on, and you'd have the usual, "Well, they started it." "No, they started it," plus you had the police who were completely confused about what the hell they were doing because these were their brothers. This is where they had come from. They weren't terribly enthusiastic about carrying out any instructions about breaking up meetings. The thing was—as you looked back on it—quite peaceful. The real trouble didn't start until the election after independence which is when you got into all kinds of problems about what are we going to do about Southern Rhodesia.

Q: What was the impression of Hastings Banda at the time you were there? When you got there, what were you picking up?

WILLIAMSON: Hastings Banda was kind of the good guy whom the State Department had adopted. He looked very American as you remember. He really kept calling us to respect our past and do things for him. He was a funny guy. He was very totalitarian and later dictatorial. He seems to have lived forever. He was an old man when independence came. He had a reputation which the white settlers built up dramatically as a man of great sexual appetite although to look at him, you couldn't see much going on there! He ran a pretty clean administration. Later on, he decided there were too many young bucks trying to get into positions of power in his organization, i.e., had intentions of replacing him. They were engaged in some pretty nasty coups and counter-coups. On the whole in those days he took a very difficult brief and ran it very well. Malawi or Nyasaland as it was has hardly anything in the way of economic resources. It made its great name in the world by constantly growing these enormous cocktail peanuts, and sisal, an entire small industry was built around hand sowing those peanuts which used to be very popular in bars all over Western Europe and the United States. That was about it. There was also fishing on Lake Malawi which was pretty good but suffered like fishing on Lake Banguela in Zambia. You get the fish on shore, and you're still half way across the African continent from a place to sell them. And no ice.

Q: Did Banda come around to what was at that time the Consul General's office?

WILLIAMSON: It wasn't Banda. Banda was in Nyasaland. I was in what was Zambia, and that was Kenneth Kaunda.

Q: Let me get this straight. Kenneth Kaunda was the mayor. What was he like?

WILLIAMSON: He was a great guy. I'm still a great admirer of his. He and Nyerere back in Dar es Salaam were blood brothers sort of thing. Both very reasonable guys, both very smart. Kaunda came from a family of African Christian missionaries. His father or his mother, I can't remember which, was from Nyasaland. By the way, Nyasaland is where David Livingston had his headquarters.

Q: Nyasaland turned into...

WILLIAMSON: Malawi, and Northern Rhodesia became Zambia. Part of it was to see what we were doing, but we were invited to his residence for parties. Whenever we had a visitor in town, that person would ask, "Why aren't you able to see him?" There were a lot of guys who wanted to see the big man. We had very good relations with himself, with his party, top people in his party and, indeed, with most of the senior people in the Zambian government. Half of them are British, or Afrikaner - they came to our houses and we went to their houses. It was all very even-steven. To the day I left we had, although not instant access, we could get in to see Kaunda within a 24-hour period, as soon as we had to.

Q: Did Kaunda come out of the same school as Nyerere which was sort of London School of Economics?

WILLIAMSON: No.

Q: This in a way destroyed Tanzania.

WILLIAMSON: It did, indeed.

Q: How about Kaunda?

WILLIAMSON: Kaunda was not well educated outside of Africa. I believe he did go down to Southern Rhodesia to a school down there for a while but didn't get this indoctrination that nearly got us a Tanzania with a British Labor Party program. He didn't have that much baggage. Almost all Africans in those days and many Europeans and Americans thought that probably planned societies were the way to go for newly independent countries. You've got to develop them, and development means you've got to have plans -- plans of government. It may turn out willy-nilly that you're not going to collectivize necessarily, but you're going to have a lot of input. Free markets is another idea that is very attractive down there. Still is, I gather. The other problem that Rhodesia did not have was that Zambia was completely dependent upon the wealth and the productivity of mines owned by the largest mining conglomerations in the whole damn world. Anglo-American was all over and still is. Rhodesian Selection Trust which is the American Firm had mines in South America and had mines in southern Africa and elsewhere, Botswana.

You can't do that. That's all there was to it. In order to give them their due, did they ever try? They did tax the hell out of them, much more harshly than the South Africans or the British ever had, but still not enough to drive them out of business. They were under considerable prodding to Zambianize—not Africanize, to Zambianize—because Zambia had a large population of resettled mulattos from South Africa, a lot of Greeks who had been shipping agents particularly who'd been there two or three generations. There were some Afrikaners who stayed there; some Brits had stayed there. The pressure was not on just to get blacks in there. The pressure was to get Zambians in there. That, in most cases, meant blacks. Zambia, like most African countries, had a real deficit of educated and

trained Africans, so the first ten years were tough to get the right people in the right jobs. Sometimes the wrong people get the right jobs and all hell breaks loose. But the Zambian government had pretty tight control all and all, and listened to the international AID programs, listened to the British, listened to ourselves, listened to the United Nations which is just as well because they really couldn't go anyplace. They're landlocked: totally surrounded. In the north, the Congo had fallen to pieces almost immediately after independence. To the south they had the South Africans and the Rhodesians who for the first eight years of the life of the new country –Zambia-- were pretty bad enemies. They had air raids and stuff like that over there, the Rhodesians kept bringing their army to the borders and raiding. To the west they had the Portuguese provinces which were going up in smoke. To the southeast they had Mozambique. Their choices were very limited. All of their exports, all their copper, went out through the South African Railway System and was exported eventually through the Port of Beira in Mozambique. They were among the first sufferers of globalization. We didn't know it then, but that is exactly what was happening to them.

Q: After you finished the settling in process, was there much in the way of political reporting?

WILLIAMSON: Lots, because very early on the British started to get very, very upset about the way the white Rhodesians were moving down there in terms of their other interests in Africa. The British Labor party to a certain extent, but mostly the right wing of the Tory party, was very loathe to put any pressure on the white South Africans or the white Rhodesians to do anything about any further mandates to their African population. On the other hand, the British were under tremendous pressure from the Nigerians and to a great extent from us and world opinion, the UN, and from their other African friends and neighbors: the Zambians, the Kenyans, the Ugandans. All of those people. Perhaps the British could be persuaded to "Make these guys give it up. It is a British colony. It's not like South Africa. They haven't seceded. You have real assets down there that you can use. Use them." It broke up the British Tory party initially to do anything about that. We got involved in all of that. In addition, a problem I have raised here, the United States government, God bless it, Soapy Williams and a couple of guys like that, decided that there's one thing we can do about South Africans and Southern Rhodesians even now at this distance: it is to start training up the next generation of African leaders. We established a scholarship program under the aegis of the African American Institute in Dar es Salaam at a high school, junior college sort of thing, to which invited kids from Southern Africa south of the Zambezi could get to, and get trained so they could pass the SAT tests and get into American colleges. There were plenty of scholarships for them. We didn't quite expect it to be as successful as it turned out to be. We in Lusaka became a major way-base on an underground railway that was taking people from Southern Africa and pushing them up to Dar es Salaam, over the protests of the governments involved. They were usually led through South Africa, all of Rhodesia, over to Botswana which was a British colony. They had a real group of cool guys, British guys for the most part, who were just terrific. They would drive these big 6-5 trucks down there, pick up these kids by the carload, and bring them up to Lusaka where they had gotten funds. I don't know from whom, but they got funds. They established great big dormitories. The

Zambians cooperated but were very uneasy having all of these guys floating around. Later on a lot of Southern Rhodesian anti-white politicians drifted up, and they also got into our... This is where they stayed, so we had a big program of handling—we had a junior officer finally who did nothing but this—handling these guys, the ones that were going on to be students in the United States—and handing these guys who it turned out, a lot of them were the future leaders of Southern Rhodesia! Myself, this young guy Clay and two or three of my guys went to parties and had parties. Here were these kids who were very nice people but who were just clueless. They came out of South African slums by and large and places like that. They'd show up, and here they were on our doorsteps. The Zambians were uneasy after a while. They had quite a few of them, may two or three hundred running around. They weren't a menace of anything, but they had the potential to get the white Rhodesians very cross and have the white Rhodesians take steps against the Zambian government which the Zambian government didn't want to face up to. We got them out of town as fast as we could. I ran a false visa mill for a very long time. The thing was that the guys had no traveling papers. They didn't even have identification papers many of them. They came with a piece of paper from our people in South Africa saying, "This is John Jones. He's going to over to Dar es Salaam and hopefully on to Penn State." That was it, a piece of paper! Not even on letterhead, but we honored them. We sent a bunch of them up, and they got turned back at the border. Across the street were customs people and immigration people, whatever country they represent, and the bloody Tanzanians turned them back. The Tanzanian government did not want to admit in the face of all the problems they were having with the Southern Africans that they were a menace. They ignored the fact that right in the middle of Dar es Salaam was this huge damn school full of kids speaking Shona and Indabeli, a lot of Ikudian. They said, "We can't let them in without some kind of papers." We had the problem then of onward transportation because no western airline would take these kids. Even after we said they have a scholarship, they wouldn't take them without some kind of identification paper or passport. I discovered this most wonderful thing, that if you've got a seal on anything, it looks good to the customs guys.

Q: As a consular officer, I used to make non-documents.

WILLIAMSON: That's exactly what we did. I got this long paper, take that grommet machine, put the holes in it, put the red tape through, and...

Q: The red tape is essential.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. Give it the old consular go.

Q: "This is to certify that we cannot certify this paper."

WILLIAMSON: This is certified, this is indeed James Johnson, and he's going to Dar es Salaam, and we understand that he may go on to the United States. I'd give a flourishing signature—and I could be really flourishing in those days—and I'd turn those things out by the carload. I got my comeuppance just about six months before I left when one of these little devils decided to flunk high school, flunked it flat, but he had somehow

accumulated enough money to buy an airline ticket to the United States. He went down to Dar es Salaam Airport, and he flashed this thing to the guys down in Customs and Immigration who were quite prepared for that. They said, "Get on board." He got on board. He showed up in New York with not a round trip ticket to his name and this piece of paper signed "American Consul." Oh, yea. I got a rocket. Everybody in the AF bureau covered up for me beautifully. I got no repercussions whatsoever, but they were shocked! "I am shocked that you're doing this sort of thing! You mustn't do that again and get caught!" That was my one really big claim to fame in that sort of thing. My name was all over Southern Africa for a while. We had been very active.

Q: How did you find the Zambians?

WILLIAMSON: Zambians were a disappointment to me, frankly. They had come from a different culture altogether than the West Africans. One of the great things about Sierra Leone was there was always a party someplace, lots of dancing and carrying on, lots of joking. Zambians are rather dour. Zambians tend to be very serious sort of people. I think it's because for one thing, the West Africans were not bothered by settlers. White men showed up there and they died. That's all there was to it. There were a lot of colonial service guys, but the West African chiefs were pretty much in charge of their areas. They did all this stuff themselves, so they had long history of West African missionaries and doctors. Zambians had nothing. They were kept pretty much in the South African style. Kaunda until a year before he became head of state, lived in this segregated suburb outside Lusaka and met the world press there. He got lots of pictures taken. The government figured that probably wasn't a good idea, so they gave him a house. It was just that way. They didn't quite know. There were some who were very sophisticated and knew their way around and were quite good. By and large what we found was unlike the Southern Rhodesians, for example, who were great guys for roaring around and drinking too much and having a grand, grand time, and dancing and carrying on, these guys were all much more subdued.

Q: How did you find both the British and the South African whites? Were they resenting you at all?

WILLIAMSON: There was a significant group of them that did. I think it was my third or fourth party, it was official. I can't even remember the function, but we were invited to the residence of somebody of importance, and we were told the chief minister was going to show up. Well, he did. He showed up, got out, he and his very nice wife. He walked up and somebody in the back of the crowd said, "Here comes the coconut!"

Q: Oh, God.

WILLIAMSON: There was a lot of animosity. These were really spoiled South Africans. We were later accused of all sorts of insidious things, and it got really intense at the time that the Rhodesians declared independence, the Unilateral Declaration, it was called.

Q: UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence).

WILLIAMSON: UDI, because we didn't recognize them. We fought against it. A lot of guys were really shocked about that because they had bought into this thing and thought that if we don't stop the communists here—and these black guys are all communists, obviously—then all of Southern Africa with all of its riches will go into the hands of the Soviets. You have to back us up. We weren't going to do that. I think the ambassador and I and the DCM were all on one line. "You guys had it all right for a long time. The British carried the can on all this, but you decided to come out from underneath the cover, and you've got to face the fact that nobody in the world is going to help you. South Africans certainly will help, but they're not going to run great risks for you." They really were upset about that because it never occurred to them they wouldn't.

Q: You were there during the independence. How did that go?

WILLIAMSON: The British threw a hell of an independence ceremony, let me tell you. I'll wrap up both of them: Sierra Leone, HMS (Her Majesty's Ship) Lion shows up.

Q: It was a...

WILLIAMSON: A big freighter. It was a cruiser basically. The Marines come off, the Marine band plays, there are all kinds of troops stomping and drilling out there, all kinds of dignitaries. Four months later, when the first guy after the election is sworn in, who comes down but the queen and Prince Philip. Everybody's invited to a garden party just like in London, and everybody went. My wife said she'd never wash her hand again! It went on like that. The Sierra Leoneans loved the whole thing. The Sierra Leone government army was not good for very much except mutinying every so often, but they could troop and stomp. They really could do the whole drill. They had a really good band. The Northern Rhodesian independence was much more of a triumph. It was quite clear what the election was going to produce. The Rhodesian Rifles who, like the Kings African Rifles, recruited from all three of the countries, had a very distinguished service record in the first and second wars, and the Malay and Korean operations. They had a big thing there. Somebody in the royal family came down. We had a great big stadium, big festivities, drumming, same as Sierra Leone. Dancers and drummers all over the place until hell wouldn't have it. Day and night for three days. As usual, however, at the embassy the top guy—whether he was the chargé or ambassador or what—was wrapped up in all of that. The rest of the peons were all dealing with official delegations, getting people from the airport. The usual thing was onslaught of official and political guests. In Sierra Leone they had Thurgood Marshall and the sister of the senator from Oregon and several other people like that. Thurgood Marshall was the president's personal representative.

Q: The Supreme Court justice.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. This is before then. He was not a Supreme Court justice yet. He knew a lot of people. The group who came to the Zambian thing was a little different. John Mosler, the guy who owned the Mosler safe business who we enriched no doubt,

was our delegation head. They were very big in one of the mining operations. And his wife came down. I later discovered she was called the Dragon Lady by everybody who knew her: exceedingly demanding. The Oppenheimers were there. We didn't see much of this stuff. We showed up at the trooping and stomping in the stadium, but I was busy worrying where the hell the embassy cars were, what's our next step, and who's going to be up in the morning to take these people to this or that. An official visit will just tear an embassy up worse than anything. A big official visit plus all the guys who think they're important coming along, can really wipe you out. The CIA people imported three guys from, I guess, South Africa just to do GSO work. They were something less than pleased. I guess you might imagine I was something less than pleased. The thing was peaceful. The trouble or violence starts usually sometime long after independence, and these guys start realizing this is now a partisan government they are working with, for or against, and the old thing of, "If we don't like them, let's go beat them." They do that. In Sierra Leone the first time we ever had any trouble whatsoever was just before the big elections after independence. The head of the opposition party found himself in jail for no particular reason, and somebody threw a Molotov cocktail at the back of our embassy. It didn't do much damage. It was very ineptly put together, but it spread oil and grease all over the place and burned for awhile, proving once again that our safety plan was not very well conceived. The fire wardens never showed up, and our two night watchmen ran off in the dark and didn't come back until the next morning. In fact, we wouldn't have known that the embassy was burning if somebody at the bar next door hadn't picked up the phone and called the girlfriend of the consul general and said, "You know your place is on fire?" He said, "No." So Tom got me out.

In Zambia they had a lot of problems before there came the question of, "When are you going to get independence and how is it going to come?" That led to a lot of government vs. politician violence. The first real election for Parliament was again run on very stringent lines. All these information people would have been very pleased with it except at the end someone started to realize if we don't win this, we don't get access to the treasury. All these good things that we used to get from the British... The colonial administration was pretty even handed about which dish to scrub. In Zambia where you have two major parties, definitely geographically distinct, it was quite clear that the ANC (African National Congress) which parroted itself on the South African National Congress which were the eyes down along the border, were clearly going to lose, so they didn't like that one damn bit. There was a fair amount of vandalism and burning of cottages—kayas they were called—in the suburbs. That was the violent stuff that we saw. We didn't have too many other troubles. Sierra Leone was always full of petty criminals. Breaking and entering was the national sport. In Zambia they didn't have that type of problem, at least in Lusaka, until well after we left.

Q: As the political officer, how would you go about getting information?

WILLIAMSON: We had a reasonably good press corps. Sounds odd, but we did. You had several correspondents for both South African and British papers. You had the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) guy. You had a pretty decent local paper, Lusaka something or other run by an ex-Reuters guy. I started out in Sierra Leone with some of

these guys. There was a whole band of British and French, Paris and London based guys who specialized in African reporting. They'd come down every three or four months and shake the trees, see what's going on. They always used to come in and see me. I talked to a lot of politicians. In those days there was no stigma involved in being with the American diplomats. You had your diplomatic colleagues, and sometimes, by God, you could even go to the government and ask questions, and they'd answer. It was particularly true on the economic side of my bailiwick because there were not that many people doing that kind of stuff, and most of them were expatriates supplied by one or the other AID programs. Because neither Zambia nor Sierra Leone had much in the way of statistics that were at all reliable, we all got together and pooled our knowledge..

The first development plan from Sierra Leone went as follows: There was a Sierra Leonean who had lived for years in New York and who was down in Sierra Leone on detail from the UN. He and his wife were very nice and we got along with them very well. His job was to put together a development plan because you had to have a development plan in those days. He put this thing together, and then he shopped it: shopped it to myself, the Brits and the Canadians who were there. Who else did he shop it to? A couple of international bank advisors!

The Sierra Leone development plan was finalized in my dining room over about a three day period at some little expense to my beer stock. This was all the economic brains in the whole country, and there were only two Sierra Leoneans with us. This guy went back and presented it to his minister and said, "That's very impressive!" There is was. It wasn't impressive at all. There were no statistics. The colonial government had not bothered, didn't have the wherewithal actually to bother. Almost the same thing happened in Zambia. Everybody got a shot at the economic information that was there. The big companies kept rather a closer watch on what was going on than we thought initially because they could see their future in this. They would come and feed us information and work it out with us. Nobody ever minded in those days because it wasn't considered sabotage. It was just trying to find out what the hell was going on in the economy. You knew what the Sierra Leoneans had imported last year. You knew what they exported, but it meant that you had about 70% of the reported statistics were something that was called "the balancing factor," and that's all there was. This was the difference between what was brought in and what was sent out, and we didn't know where it came from, we didn't know where it went, we didn't know how it was paid for. This was what the balance of payments looked like. It didn't make a difference what the hell it was because there wasn't anything you could do about it. A good portion of that in Sierra Leone was smuggled diamonds which went out through Monrovia. Information was not hard to get, but the question was the validity of it. By the time I got to Nairobi which was 15 years after this time, there was a whole industry devoted to, "How's Kenya doing?" The fact of the matter was hardly anyone knew what the hell was going on. You could go in and around. I spent the first six months of my time trying to figure out who did what to whom. After talking to some bankers and people like that, we got a group together that vetted what we'd get our hands on as far as statistics go. It was better than what anybody had before. It wasn't very good. The World Bank came in and asked if

they could see it. We said, "Oh, sure!" They said, "Is that the best you could do?" We said, "Oh, sure!" They went away.

Q: You left Zambia in '66.

WILLIAMSON: I left there in '66.

Q: Would you say the state was up and running by the time you left?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. In fact, we were already running into problems with the Rhodesians. You had this whole bunch of anti-black white settlers over the border who were moving heaven and earth to stay independent and to keep the Africans in bondage. They had a very good, effective, small army and air force, a nifty SAS (Special Air Services) bunch, Special Forces, who turned out to be really effective during the actual war in the later '60s, early '70s. This was already a major problem for Zambia. The Zambians were beginning to understand that not only were they at the mercy of the Rhodesians, but there was no way out because the exports of copper (their major export) could either go out in those days over the Benguela railroad from the copper belt up to the Angolan ports on the Atlantic Ocean or it could come down through the whole Rhodesian/South African system and go out through Beira. This meant that at any time they wanted to, the Portuguese or the South African whites could completely stop the major export support of the Zambian government. You had to be very careful. Also, they were all very vulnerable militarily. What was left of the Rhodesian Rifles, and the Zambian military was not terribly impressive, almost all expatriate officers, the bulk of whom were from South Africa. They all turned in their papers and left, didn't want to work for a black government, didn't see much future for themselves in working for a black government. It was all the usual stuff. If I'd been in their boots, I'd have left, too. They were running, but you could always see the storm clouds. The price of copper was still up. When copper's up and it's good, they've got lots of revenue; When copper's down, they have nothing.

Q: Where did you go in '66?

WILLIAMSON: I got shanghaied back to the Department of State. It turned out I went to the Secretariat, and I spent almost three years on the seventh floor.

Q: The Secretariat is a plum assignment because it's hard work, but it also is very often a training ground for people to move ahead in the foreign service.

WILLIAMSON: I learned a lot and had a grand time up there. It was a little hard on the family quite often. I was just never home. I was on the SS (Secretariat) line. I was responsible for AF, bird-dogging stuff going in and out of the African bureau and IO and several of the functional bureaus, I don't remember which now. That was my day in and day out task. I was a departmental duty officer once every two or three months which was for a week. That was before we had an op (operations) center up and running. That got to be pretty hairy because you got all sorts of telephone calls. Then whilst I was doing all

that, I got a blank check—I did, actually—from the personnel people. I should have known better. When this is all over, I was going to go into East European work. I stormed a little bit initially, but then I discovered I was quite happy. I got involved quite a bit in the Indo-Chinese thing both as a Secretariat officer and later on I was the staff aide to the Counselor. He is still the Counselor of the department and a seventh floor figure and I got involved in all kinds of wrestling matches about what are we doing next and who's going to do what to whom and dealt with all the egos involved and that sort of thing. It got very personal at times. I remember one night I was the departmental duty officer. It was during Tet.

Q: This would be around February of '68.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. I was the duty officer, and I was getting ready to go home. By then we had an operations center that did messages. This guy called me and said, "We've got a telegram here that's supposed to go, but it's awaiting, we understood, White House clearance. What do you know about it?" I didn't know beans about it. I called the White House—this was about 9:00 at night—and there wasn't anybody over there except Rostow's secretary who was packing up.

Q: Rostow was national security advisor at the time.

WILLIAMSON: One of them, yes. I asked her about the telegram. "Is that still there?" I said, "Yes. We're awaiting White House clearance. Can I speak to Rostow or somebody? Should this thing go?" She said, "They're all with the president at a party for some visiting firemen. You can't get a hold of them. They all think that cable's gone." I said, "Oh! What do I do now?" I worked it out that those ladies at that level are all damn good or they're not at that level. If she says that they think it's ready to go and there's no way I can check on her, I'm going to send the damn thing. So I did, and the First Marine Division unleashed its tanks more or less on my say-so. I didn't sleep too well that night. I woke up the next morning and walked in and nobody shot me. Nobody said anything about it, so I noted it in the log. It was only about two days later that they got around to looking at my log. "What's all this?" I said, "I don't know where the break down was, but I had this damn cable, and I had to send it." They said, "Who told you to?" I said, "There wasn't anybody around to ask." You know how senior officers get about all of that. They said, "You shouldn't really have done that." I said, "Well, it's a damn good thing I did." I was getting a little feisty. They said, "Yes." It was shortly thereafter that I went to work for the Counselor. It was, all in all, a sobering experience to see how the department really runs, to watch the human element in it, and to see us all struggling with what we're struggling with today, a decidedly untenable mission to which we were fully committed. What do you do now?

Q: By '68 you moved on to what?

WILLIAMSON: I was in the Counselor's office.

Q: Who was the Counselor?

WILLIAMSON: Bob Bowie. Robert Bowie. He was a big guy in the spooks. He had been on all sorts of task forces. Nice guy but a little bit out of his depth in this case because he kept thinking we were going to win this war and that we would do certain things in the Vietnam rundown. Things that he thought should be done just weren't done. He upped and resigned, so I was up in the air and looking for a job. The AF guys said they wanted me, and I went down and talked to them. Then, by God, the personnel system got a hold of me and said, "We understand you want to go to Warsaw." I spent a bad couple of nights thinking about, "Do I want to stay in Africa or do I want to go to Warsaw?" I talked to a lot of guys in Eastern Europe over the years, and it came to me that doing Eastern Europe in the economic cone was a dog's life for a mid-grade officer. You spent your time wondering who's standing next to whom within the hierarchy wherever you are. They said, "If you come to work with us in Africa, we can offer you several good jobs." I said, "I'll have to think about that, but I don't want to go to Polish language training." I spent two years in personnel working initially with Africa and economic officers, and there I got to be what was called "Washington assignments." All the jobs that weren't in geographic bureaus were mine which meant that I was plugging people into some awfully disparate holes. I got all sorts of problems dumped on me. I had a very good staff: very effective, very experienced. Do you remember when Lyndon Johnson used to get very upset about how our news media covered Vietnam? He got blindsided once at a press conference. I can't remember the exact problem he had, but it was about something that happened out in Vietnam which he hadn't been informed of. It was about a report from there on one of the major broadcasting systems, and he had not known about it. He called up Dean Rusk and said, "I want you to establish a twenty-four hour a day taskforce to watch the news day in and day out and let us know what's going on." They said to me, "You've got to find some people to volunteer for this." "Volunteer! I have to get someone to sit in front of a TV set for eight hours a day and keep a log?" They said, "I don't care how you do it. You do it." Do you know Pete Sarros?

Q: Yes, I know Peter Sarros.

WILLIAMSON: Peter's very ingenious about these things. He went down to med (medical), and they had a whole bunch of guys who were home for alcoholism who were drying out and were not gainfully employed because they couldn't be trusted. We said, "Peter, we've got a room and we've got TV sets," and these guys would lurch down there and watch the damn news for 24 hours a day. This went on for five or six months. The room... You don't want to smoke in there. Some of those guys were in bad shape. I have no idea how well it worked out as far as results are concerned. But it was that kind of stuff that we had to fly by the seat of our pants.

I got to go on a lot of trips. I went to Vietnam twice with Johnson, and I got to go to Africa with the vice president, and I got to go to one of those cap-in-hand where you do the whirl around to the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) states to see if you can't get some more troops. They put Vice President Humphrey and his staff on a plane, and we went and did Europe and seven posts in five days or something like that. I was the only SS officer, and I about lost my mind. I really did. It was the first time I ever took up

drinking at two o'clock in the morning. Starting at two o'clock in the morning! It was fun. As I said, it was a great experience for me because I did things and got to get on things.

Q: How about the trips you did with Johnson?

WILLIAMSON: Those were horrendous. It was three or four planes at a time, always the press, and Johnson and his staff. Johnson had everyone on his staff terrified. The only guy he would take any information from was Bill Moyers. Since I was the head SS guy on the thing—I wasn't the SS guy—my elders and betters were all bent out of shape trying to get next to the secretary and his staff. They didn't want to do anything wrong. Somebody had to do it, so I would go around and talk to Bill Moyers who always was very graceful about it and said, "I'll ask him." He had a military advisor who was a major general and who wouldn't go up and ask him about, "What time do you want to take off tomorrow, Sir?" The captain of the aircraft would come to me—this is Air Force One—and say, "What time are we taking off tomorrow?" I said, "The schedule says..." whatever it was, and he said, "That's not what I asked." I said, "Beats the hell out of me. I'll go find out." I got Bill Moyers back and he said follow the schedule!

Q: This is Tape 3, Side 1 with Larry Williamson. How was Hubert Humphrey?

WILLIAMSON: Hubert Humphrey was a doll. He really was a very, very nice guy. His staff were utterly devoted to him, and as long as you proved yourself able to do what he wanted, very cooperative, very helpful. He'd had some bad experiences, I think, with escort officers before, so they weren't expecting much from me. I don't think I gave anything more than I gave anybody else other than be pleasing to him. They asked me to go again, but this time my wife put her foot down. "You go on this trip, and you're not worth a damn to me." Johnson had lots and lots of people who had no obvious means of support that I could see, but they all thought they were important people and would come hobbling down to the control room with, "My heel broke," high heeled shoes and things like this, in the middle of the night in Manila, for God's sake. What am I supposed to do about that? Plus the secret service got very upset about people running up and down stairs and doing anything at night. I can see their point. Johnson was not fun to travel with. Humphrey was fun because he always took care of you. He gave two parties for us. He invited us over to a party at the executive office building. Just the State staff that was with him. He was very appreciative.

Q: When you left this, where did you go and when did you go?

WILLIAMSON: In 1970 I fled the Department of State altogether and went off to work for Donald Rumsfeld at OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity).

Q: Office of Economic Opportunity.

WILLIAMSON: That's right. The war on poverty. Frank Carlucci called me—I had known Frank over the years in Africa—and said he had just gotten on to the OEO staff,

and they were looking to staff a lot of vacancies right off the bat. This was a change of the administration. Could I recommend some people he might talk to? I said, "What do you need?" He said , "We really need to organize the front office here. You've had those secretariat experiences. Could you go take a look at it and tell me what I need?" We went and had lunch and went around and talked to people. It was really badly organized. It had Sarge Shriver who was a very pleasant guy but a little loose around the edges. He had a couple of tigers in his outer office. They ran the whole thing like a Senate front office. OEO was full of really fire and brimstone reformers and it was taken over by the Republicans.

Q: This was when Nixon came in.

WILLIAMSON: This is when Nixon came in. Rumsfeld came. Frank called asking for a year's detail to OEO to help them set up. I was interested in what they were doing and welcomed the opportunity. I got over there and it wasn't too long before I discovered that I was there not under false pretenses, but there I was, executive secretary at a political level, and the job was to wind the agency down as quickly and quietly as possible and not give the Democrats any sort of targets but not do too much for the poor. I found myself repelled with all of this. I wasn't doing it, and the agency wasn't doing it. Toward the end I got the thing organized. It wasn't a big job, and I had nothing much to do, frankly. I took a couple of special assignments and went out to the west coast to look into the... There had been some fighting between the Chicano and Chinese-American gangs, actual fights over who was going to control the local housing offices and stuff like that. I went out and tried to do something about that. Not much you could do. I can't remember all of them at this stage of the game. There were several places like that. I amused myself, and when I came back they asked me if I wanted to go to Dar es Salaam. I said I thought I did. I talked to my wife, and the alternative appeared to be to go to a European post as an economic officer as yet unspecified. But it would be the whole section out in Dar es Salaam. I'd had a pretty fair promotion record right up till then. I thought, "Why not? A fun place to be: game reserves, East Africa, beaches. I'll go out there and do two years and then come back and see what's around." So I did.

Q: Before we go there, what was your impression of Donald Rumsfeld while you were at OEO?

WILLIAMSON: Quite frankly, I found him very charismatic, very charming, as long as he got his way. The thing that sticks in my mind was a staff meeting. They brought in a very nice retired brigadier general who was doing public relations. Rumsfeld had gone on the radio or TV (television) or someplace and made a completely outrageous statement, some sort of gaffe, as he was prone to do. The question was what could we do about that? The general started out saying, "What we've got to do is find some way to cover up the director's mistake." The Rumsfeldians jumped on that: Rumsfeld didn't make mistakes. This thing was an unfortunate incident that came out both because the press was anti-Rumsfeld and OEO and anti-Nixon and because somebody on the staff had not briefed him properly. I remember the major general saying, "I thought we were all grown ups in this room,". Rumsfeld wasn't even there. Cheney was, I believe. I took that and tucked it

into my hat and was very careful about what I said even though I think that Don didn't make all that many mistakes. He wasn't that brash and outgoing in those days. I wasn't very comfortable with the ideological thing. The question was always when you wanted to make somebody a head of a legal aid program or other program – the question was, "What's his party? What party does he belong to?" These guys are professional working with the poor people. Some of them kind of eccentric, some of them not very good, but by and large their hearts were in the right place or they wouldn't be there, for God's sake. They wouldn't have been. I found this viewing the world in political terms distasteful. His staff, he had a bunch of young guys around, they were the same way. I said, "What if all this is wrong?" "Well, you know, it can't be wrong. That's all there is to it." I was very smug about Watergate when it came.

Q: You went to Dar es Salaam. You were in the capital of Tanzania. You were there from when to when?

WILLIAMSON: '70. No '78 I was still... I came back from Zambia in '74.

Q: We got you going to Dar es Salaam in 1970. You were there for how long?

WILLIAMSON: Three years.

Q: What was your job?

WILLIAMSON: I was the economic officer on paper. Basically, I was third guy in the embassy.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WILLIAMSON: Tony Ross for the most part and then Bev Carter came in. Paul Kreisberg was my first DCM, and Gordie Beyer was my second one.

Q: Talk about the situation in 1970 in Tanzania.

WILLIAMSON: As my son says, I have the rare experience of seeing a country commit economic suicide and living through it. We got there just after Nyerere had issued his then infamous Arusha Declaration which was calling for the nationalization of almost everything: farms, everything. It turned out later he wanted to do it all the way down to collectivizing the rental housing. It was a catastrophe. Tanzania was a very fragile East African economy, hardly any economic assets.

Q: They have tea plantations?

WILLIAMSON: They have tea plantations. Big, sizeable plantations in those days.

Q: That's where they make rum from.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. That's where they make rum from, and sisal was replaced even while we were there by plastic. Sisal was then and still is used for bailing hay because it's edible. That was about it. Some big tea plantations up country, various exotic spices and things like that. Zanzibar was cloves. And a hell of a tourism industry. Big game hunting, big game parks, a reef. The East African reef goes all the way down to Madagascar and comes all the way up to Mogadishu. It's one of the great wonders of the world. It's fairly shallow, great fishing, great snorkeling. The major result of the program that Nyerere announced was to collectivize and nationalize industry and farms. What actually it turned out to do was to ruin the livelihood of the largely East Asian Indian population—professional population—of Tanzania. It wasn't directed toward them, but what happened, everybody left.

All kinds of people packed up and shoved off. The economy was just left exposed without any confidence of replacements in view. You couldn't turn to an AID program to turn up that number of people. We had thousands of them. A bunch of them were followers of the Aga Khan, and the Aga Khan sent three or four major ships to take up these people, take them back to India where he resettled them. There went bang almost all of your small merchants—well, medium size markets, let's say—left. Most all of the professional class just picked up and left: doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs.

Q: This happened while you were there?

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: Nyerere was running things. He had this eminent advisor,, Lady Barbara somebody?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, Barbara or whatever her name was. She was an old-line Fabian Socialist.

Q: Nyerere was extremely complex...

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes.

Q: Did he understand what he was doing?

WILLIAMSON: I think so. The question which I still can't answer today is was it as much a desire to get rid of the Asian population as it was to nationalize things? Nyerere, just to summarize briefly, was educated by Jesuits in western Tanzania, was picked up by the British Labor Party as an up and coming young man, and sent up to St. Andrew's where he went to... There's a college up there which was organized by the Labor Party and was run by them. It was named after a famous British Socialist. He was educated in the British social model, Fabian social model, picked a bunch of Fabian associates and advisors then went down to Tanzania, was a teacher and well thought of, very articulate, very much a liberal man. Most everybody's favorite African leader.

Q: He was particularly the darling of the Scandinavian Socialist Movement.

WILLIAMSON: Scandinavian Socialists. They just swear by him.

Q: They got a lot of money for him.

WILLIAMSON: A lot of money. He had no problem attracting AID money. His problem was that the AID money that he attracted -- which was quite substantial -- was earmarked for things that they didn't need because they were starving to death. He went on, and he did nationalize all that stuff. He nationalized the sisal plantations, nationalized the tea industry, nationalized housing eventually. A landlord couldn't own more than one house. That's all there was to it. Everybody who was renting was in a house owned by the state, and the state was supposed to take care of it and do all the things owners do. The state had nobody—nobody—above the rank of a bricklayer to handled that kind of stuff. This was a massive thing. Later on they tried to establish collective farms but it became a real problem because the farmers just didn't want to become collectivized. There was some serious brutality. There were attempts to use troops to nationalize them. Troops didn't like that. The police didn't like it. A couple of district commissioners were killed. One regional commissioner was killed. Some areas, the Masai, for example, the famous cattle herders in northern Tanzania, opted out of the economy. They wouldn't sell their cattle to the government abattoirs in Dar es Salaam. They got nothing but worthless shillings for the cattle. They'd drive them up to Kenya and sell them to commercial firms up there. Smuggling of crops was a huge problem.

The tourist industry didn't disappear, but it certainly fell on bad times. The government did not honor contracts with expatriate firms, tried to renegotiate them with their own people in charge. Poaching picked up a lot. All the things you would expect from this ill-advised broad sweep change of direction. Nyerere kept hoping that somehow or other this would all sort itself out. Well, it didn't. When I'd take visitors up to see him, he'd say, "My development plan is to pray for rain," because they'd had three years of drought. The plus side with Nyerere is he insisted upon improving his educational system. Tanzania has one of the highest literacy rates overall in Africa. Really. He did insist upon doing what you could in a country like that to improve the health system, and he had the Chinese--remember the old days, the Chinese had barefoot doctors? Nyerere had the same thing.

Q: They were worthless.

WILLIAMSON: Worthless. The idea was that this guy would specialize in broken arms. If you had a broken arm, you would go and see this guy. If you had a broken skull, you'd go see that guy and all that sort of stuff. The whole public health system disappeared and was never reestablished. Still isn't.

Q: How was the African bureau looking at this? Were they seeing this as the disaster it was or were they caught up with the myth of Nyerere?

WILLIAMSON: I think the working stiffs saw it as exactly what it was, and God knows we didn't pull any punches. But Nyerere was greatly admired in the West and got a lot of newspaper coverage. You simply couldn't overcome the Nyerere charisma and the reputation he built up over the last 30 years before independence of being moderate, responsible, a little eccentric on social questions, but otherwise quite a decent guy and he was expected to run a model place. He ran a model place, and he discovered he wasn't getting anywhere, so he thought he'd have to shake it up and turn to other development models, and the Chinese did come in and put a fair amount of money into special projects. The Russians, oddly enough, didn't, but the Chinese built sports stadiums and roads. They limped along. They looked pretty good in places and by African standards they still have a very good school system and a good literacy program. Public health is still no better or no worse than Kenya's. The army just isn't there. The army was shot to hell. They're starting to rebuild their tourist industry.

Q: How were relations, and how did you operate with Zanzibar?

WILLIAMSON: We had a post on Zanzibar all the time I was there, but it was a one-man operation, and it was really hampered by the vicissitudes of life there. Zanzibar was a really beat up place. Getting food was a problem: a major problem. We did get visas to go over and see our own consular folks. There wasn't much to do there. The consuls became rather client oriented. Things that appeared to be a great problem on Zanzibar scarcely rippled the newspapers in Dar es Salaam and never reached the western press, and yet our consuls would keep reporting the stuff. What else were they supposed to do? They had no contacts, a lot of people sneaking around talking to them, but no official contacts. Not that ours were all that good. The president was okay, and I got along real well with the central bank and the economic advisors they had (though some of them were very strange), and with the Minister of Finance, a guy named Jamal. The central national bank was pretty incompetent. I knew a lot of newspaper guys. I found my relationship with the foreign ministry was rigid. Vietnam was there all the time, and the Cold War.

Q: You had a lot of embassies there because of Nyerere. The British and the Scandinavians and the Germans of the Socialist party were pouring this money...

WILLIAMSON: They were, yes.

Q: Was the official representative saying...

WILLIAMSON: The official representatives, the ones I knew, the Germans and the Brits, thought this was just a crock, but they realized the Scandinavians, I guess were self-selected for the jobs. They were great enthusiasts about Nyerere. The professionals were all rather cynical, but the development side—not ours so much but the bulk of it—was very sympathetic.

Q: What were we doing development wise?

WILLIAMSON: It was like this, and this ties into Zambia: The Zambians finally came to us and said, look, we can no longer be depending on the Rhodesians or the Portuguese to move exports abroad. They wanted to build a railroad from the Dar es Salaam side of East Africa through Tanzania and down through Zambia to connect with the existing rail system so the copper could be shipped back out to be exported through Dar es Salaam, a simple enough scheme but fraught with difficulty -- like money for one thing! The Tanzanians came to us and asked for the port. Our people decided for better or worse, reportedly at the presidential level, that we were not going to get involved in doing the railroad. We would, however, look at building the road. We got a couple of American firms and started building an all-weather road from Dar es Salaam following an existing highway, but really improving it, down to and including Zambia. This looked pretty good, and they could export by truck, perhaps. Then the Chinese jumped in and said, "We'll build you a railroad," and by God, they did.

Q: So the famous Tanzam Railroad...

WILLIAMSON: The Tanzam Railroad, yes. They did a very good job of it, thank you. They could do it. They had thousands of PLA (People Liberation Army) engineers. They would disappear into the bushes and surface several months later, laying track through jungle and swamp.

Q: The interesting thing is the Chinese put so much into this. What was in it for the Chinese?

WILLIAMSON: The Chinese didn't have that many places they were friendly with at that stage in the game. They were just embarking on this huge "we don't like the Soviets" campaign. In fact, it paid off for us because every so often the Chinese would be nice to us. Shook up the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) station, but we liked it. To this day I can't tell you what made them decide to dump that kind of money into it, but they did build them a great huge sports complex, and the railroad which is still going pretty well. Our road's still going too. It wasn't too badly done. It wasn't well done, but it wasn't too badly done. Until the great Cultural Revolution, the Chinese had been quite friendly with the Tanzanians. Did a lot of military stuff for them, did a lot of support for the refugee groups from Rhodesia and guerilla groups who trained and rested, and trained and recreated, in southern Tanzania to a great extent.

Q: Do you have any reflections on the problems of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda?

WILLIAMSON: Lots. This was Idi Amin's day. They went through at least two massacres in Rwanda and Burundi while I was there. There was Idi Amin, and there were missing Americans, and we had all kinds of stuff going on which we and Nairobi reported quite fully. The Tanzanians really hoped that we would issue some sort of blanket protection for them against Idi Amin. That was never to be. Amin, however, was largely concerned until later on with cementing his own position inside of Uganda. We got into it because so many Ugandan refugees came down to us. There were three or four missing Americans, two of them, Stroh and Seidel. Stroh was the son of the guy who

owned Stroh beer, a man who could bring some pressure in Washington. The best we could find out, they were doing free-lance—very dangerous—reporting and got caught up in some sort of refugee hassle and got killed, but we don't know where. We were always getting into refugee camps and talking to people trying to find out what the hell was going on. It was a nasty business up there.

Q: What was your impression of the relationship of ambassadors Ross and Carter? We have a little tape problem here, so we'll pick this up before you left Dar es Salaam in 1973, and I'm asking what was your impression of Tony Ross and Beverly Carter, and then about social contact with the Tanzanians when you go off to London.

Today is the 29th of November 2006. Larry, Tony Ross and Bev Carter. What was your impression of how they operated?

WILLIAMSON: Tony was very much the old school, very proper. He had been raised on European and Middle Eastern problems and was very effective with that type of stuff. He was good with the staff. He really ran a good embassy. He also was very well connected with the senior levels of the Tanzanian hierarchy whatever that might be. He was a little less pleasant and less well connected with what you would call the "sub-ministerial" levels. Maybe he shouldn't have been, but Tanzania's a small country, and in such a place, like most African countries in those days and these days, personal relationships matter a hell of a lot. I think Tony came away with a stand off. His favorite group was the Chilean ambassador and the German ambassador. Did I tell you on this tape someplace that the German ambassador was one of the survivors of the Bismarck?

Q: No!

WILLIAMSON: A funny old guy. Not so funny, not so old. A big hulk of a guy. He'd been an officer on the Bismarck, and he was on as it went down. He had some amazing tales about all of that. As for Bev, Bev was very good about the personal things.

Q: He was one of our first black ambassadors, wasn't he?

WILLIAMSON: Cliff Wharton was the first, but...

Q: Early on.

WILLIAMSON: Early on, yes. Bev, of course, came out of USIA, and he always had one eye on public relations. I'm saying that in a nice way. He knew what the hell he was doing. Bev, I think, had gone in with some hopes that with a change of pace and ambassadorial style and with himself being a black fellow who got along very well in African circles here and his other posts, he had a leg up. The Tanzanians were having none of that and gave him... They told him just flat bluntly, John Malachella told him that, "We like you, you're a nice guy, but you're the American ambassador. That's the only thing about it. In essence, it gives you no cut with us." This was back in the days when Tanzania was going through its real, real Marxist kind of reorganization and

destruction of its economy. You had anomalies for an American diplomat. The Cuban Ambassador was the doyen of the Diplomatic Corps and stuff like that. We got a lot of static in the press and in parties about Vietnam. Somehow or another—I can't think that we really did it deliberately—we had leased the top two stories of the National Bank building of our embassy. Therefore, there could be no demonstrations. The National Bank wouldn't hold still for it. They had the troops out there to shoot them down if they tried anything, so we were spared all that which I found was quite a change in Britain when I got there. That was good. Tony had the feeling he was getting close to the end of his career, I think. He'd been ambassador at what, three posts? He was a little more relaxed about it. Bev still had hopes of going upward and onward, so he spent a lot of time on mending his fences as many political ambassadors have to do. Both of them were very good to work for. I learned a lesson about being an econ (economic) officer in a political officer's world, and that was that most political officers (Ambassadors included) can't add or subtract without taking their shoes off, and their wives all balance their checkbooks. Once you got it clear in everybody's mind that you knew what you were talking about, they would let you go. They would leave you alone pretty much. I kept them abreast of what we were doing. In truth, in those days the commercial job was almost malfunctioning. There was no commerce to be talked about, at least in Tanzania. That wasn't what stood me in good stead. I was out there by myself.

Q: I found this as a consular officer. I felt like I was sitting on the top of a garbage can, and as long as it didn't get too smelly coming up, you do your thing, don't bother me, which is a great feeling.

WILLIAMSON: Oh, it is! Yes. I had a number of standard reports to get out. It was quite clear they got a very, very cursory perusal at the top levels. Okay, and away we went.

Q: I may have asked you this before, but Tanzania was almost a prime example of the influence of the London School of Economics destroying a country. Were we reporting it at the time, or was it considered so sexy that we held back a bit?

WILLIAMSON: We were reporting it. We had no choice. I don't think we could have not reported it or even played it down because the World Press got a hold of it. BBC had a full-time correspondent. Well, he wasn't full time. He was a stringer for BBC. He was a stringer for a couple of British newspapers, so all this stuff was turning up in the European press. It hit the American press. Nyerere was well known and well liked in African circles in the United States, and it was a great disappointment how he was doing all this. I don't think we had any reason to pull punches, and we didn't. It was a mess. As I said earlier in this tape someplace, my son says he was always grateful for that tour because if nothing else, he had a chance to see a nation commit economic suicide.

Q: Having been in the trade in the Foreign Service, there's nothing like getting out there and writing reports on disasters. Did you find yourself walking down the street and seeing the fruit market or whatever it is and almost panting to get at it and show how it was destroyed? Was this happening to you?

WILLIAMSON: I had two advantages: One, I had pretty good Swahili, so I could go out in the countryside without too much trouble although it bothered the police no end. Two, we had an extra green jeep, so I could get the jeep pretty easily and go tearing off. I did a lot of voluntary reporting, going out and seeing what was happening on the sisal plantations, what was happening in the coffee areas, and this sort of thing. It got to be a lot of fun. Then, of course, I always arranged to spend my drafting days on the annual reports up in the shadow of the Kilimanjaro checking on the tourist trade up there.

Q: When I was in Yugoslavia when I would do a field trip, I'd always end up on the weekend on the Adriatic coast. I don't know why that happened. A big asset!

WILLIAMSON: Exactly the same syndrome. I've got to stay someplace, why not in the game park and Kilimanjaro area which is pretty impressive, I must say.

Q: You left Tanzania when?

WILLIAMSON: I left Tanzania, it must have been '73.

Q: And then you went to...

WILLIAMSON: I went to London.

Q: You were there from '73 to when?

WILLIAMSON: Four years.

Q: Were you the African man?

WILLIAMSON: No, no such thing. That was in the hands of the political officers. I was really kind of sweating around because it was the year of the first big women's meeting. Jean Wilkowski, Ambassador Wilkowski, had been down in Zambia, and she and I had had a chance to work there. We got along very well. When she got back, she needed somebody that she could trust to be her deputy, and that was to be me. The embarrassing situation was I didn't want to do that, but I couldn't tell Jean I didn't want to work for her. How do I do this? Talk about a problem. I got a phone call from the Department of Commerce of all places because I've always been an economic/commercial officer. They said, "We've got a terrible problem, and I wonder if you could help us? We know it's kind of cheesy of us and I'm sure you've got a wonderful assignment all worked out, but we'd sure like to send you to London as a commercial attaché."

Q: Did you say, "Don't throw me in that briar patch?"

WILLIAMSON: I gave it about three and a half seconds considered thought, and I said, "I'd be delighted to run for the office." I said, "How realistic is this?" I really didn't have good Department of Commerce contacts. It turns out I had really good contacts in the economic section, the personnel business, in the person of Charlie Jones who was the

liaison officer from Commerce. He and I got along like a house afire. Had a wonderful time with each other. He said, "Don't worry about it. You're on your way."

Q: Did you run across Frances Wilson?

WILLIAMSON: I ran across her, yes.

Q: She was quite an influential figure in economics.

WILLIAMSON: Very much a figure in economics, but she was really up with the big kids playing with the international funds, and I was still the gooney on the ground there. I horrified the European commercial clique all of whom had their eye on that job, but I showed up and had a wonderful time for four years.

Q: You were there '73 to...

WILLIAMSON: '77.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

WILLIAMSON: When I first got there it was that prince of good fellows, the all-around horse's ass, the rich guy.

Q: They're all rich guys.

WILLIAMSON: This guy was really rich. His father had...

Q: You mean the newspaper...

WILLIAMSON: Yes. All these foundations. Very nice guy, by the way.

Q: Annenberg.

WILLIAMSON: Walter Annenberg. A walking malapropism. Very pleasant and very good to his staff. Exceedingly good. As a sidebar, he gave a great sum to the American school in London. Cash and board. This was after he rebuilt the residence entirely. They would get that money on the proviso that no dependent of an American diplomat would be refused admission.

Q: It sounded like he was being ponderous or pontificating when actually he was just trying to overcome something which was a fiscal problem.

WILLIAMSON: That's what I think. Also, he was born to be the American ambassador to a Tory government. When the Wilson government came in which was in the first year I was there, it turned out the ambassador's social contacts in the Labor party were all very upper level and all very superficial. He knew nobody there. As a friend of mine who was

in the political section said, “It wasn’t a question of things going badly, it was just there were so many opportunities missed because the ambassador had already blotted his copy book in many ways.” Also, he simply didn’t know where to start with those guys. If they weren’t in Debrett’s Peerage, he didn’t care.

Q: That’s a real problem in some countries where the social side came almost... One can almost misunderstand where authority lies.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. He dressed extravagantly modestly. It was all hand made, tailor made. It was blue suits and pinstripes.

Q: Who followed him?

WILLIAMSON: After Annenberg was...

Q: Price or someone. Did the ambassador impede on your business...

WILLIAMSON: No. The shop that I ran was about 25 locals all of whom knew much more about the British economy and the British business thing than I did or any of the five guys I had on the American side working for me. The big trick in our game, one that became clear to me after about three months, was to just to get out of their way. Seriously. They had the contacts; they were always very good about copying me on things, and I could go to them for almost anything I needed and get it. They also had the trade fair bunch. I’m trying to think who the hell the person was that followed, and I’m damned if I can remember right offhand. We finally got Elliot Richardson for his entire tour with us. He was a delight to work with. He was all over the area, talked to us, came down to see how we were doing. All of us, not just myself, but the civil air attaché and all kinds of people. He was a really capable administrator and knew how to build up morale. He came to us with his fearsome reputation after the October massacre and had a wonderful time with him. There was a Texas lady, who was like Ann Armstrong was but earlier, and she came with a good reputation and turned out to be very, very sharp but she was always thinking about the home office and running for office back in Texas or wherever she was. She didn’t spend a lot of time with us at all.

Q: You were the commercial officer.

WILLIAMSON: Commercial attaché and head of the commercial section, yes.

Q: Did you fit into the economic section or were you...

WILLIAMSON: Yes. Every so often the department used to get excited because commerce was going to steal this job. They would make gestures. My first boss was a commerce schedule C who had screwed up royally apparently in the budget presentation.

Q: A schedule C being a political appointee.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, being a political appointee who had screwed up amazingly in making a budget presentation apparently and may have lost millions of dollars on the screen. He had great political clout. They took him, and they made him the Commercial Counselor. He's the guy I was technically reporting to. There was also an Economic Counselor and the minister for commercial and economic affairs. There was a status thing up there, not that it made a lot of difference to the grunts on the ground. The big thing with the Commercial Counselor was to give him things to play with. He loved to go on business calls, plus he was a ferocious member of the American Club. He was a decent sort of guy, but just was not super intelligent. He was not very intelligent at all, as a matter of fact, but he had his political clout. When it came time for him to be transferred, they tried to terminate him. He had that limited appointment. He fought the damn thing, and he ended up doing something over at Commerce for the next ten years or so as a career civil servant which is a wonder. The major problem for me was to keep him the hell out of my staff. He was always trying to go in there. He belonged to the old "count the minutes" school: How long does it take to do one paper?

Q: Time study.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, a time study, an Albright sort of thing. He was big on that in an area that didn't really lend itself to that. Businessmen came in and we dealt with them. We had lots of contacts. We went out to scout what was going on, and we had a lot of trade surveys. We had a trade center, so we would, in the season, have at least one trade show a month; probably more. We got involved in all of that, staffing that up and doing things. Thanks to the trade center we had the money to also go out and do little mini-shows. The other guy that could do that was the agricultural attaché. He had money to stage little shows, pushing American wine or pushing American beef or what have you. We went out and pushed American products, and how we could help them.

From that point of view it was great. From a personal point of view, it was the best assignment—it was the most fun—that I ever had because I had enough money and rank so I could afford to do all of this stuff. The kids were in good schools. I was still junior enough that I didn't get caught up in that dreadful cocktail party circuit that was floating around just above my head. There was an association of commercial officers from all the other embassies, and we met about once every two months. I was always at that, but I found my colleagues on the whole not terribly pre-possessing.

One good thing that came out of that was they were constantly trying to arrange for us to talk to British personalities. Margaret Thatcher, before she was the Margaret Thatcher, came and spoke to us. She was rad! She'd step in front of that microphone and say what she was going to do and how things were going to change. One of my colleagues, if he wasn't a German he was at least Germanic, stood up. He was one of those guys who'd pose a five or ten minute question from the floor which was really a speech. She clearly understood this kind of guy, and she gave him her best Cambridge debate treatment by cutting his damn throat in front of the whole group. The guy was so embarrassed he didn't realize he had been killed until it was all over! I thought, "That woman is going to go places," but I didn't want to go with her. She was really ferocious even then.

Q: We're talking about a specific period before Margaret Thatcher came to power, your dealings with the British United Kingdom commercial system. Obviously Labor was in there; Labor had lots of clout and this, "I'm all right, Jack." Do you have any insights?

WILLIAMSON: We all took a look at the thing and decided that the retail, if I might use that phrase, the retail business could take care of itself. There's no sense in our trying to help Sears & Roebuck. The areas that we could concentrate on and could make a difference in the government were North Sea Oil where we had this wonderful advantage of taxes and …

Q: We had all sorts of equipment.

WILLIAMSON: The Norwegians did, too. The Norwegians and the Finns were right in there. We actually had a guy in the economic section who did nothing but petroleum reporting. I had a guy who did nothing but North Sea stuff.

Q: When you say North Sea stuff, you mean basically selling huge equipment or the equivalent...

WILLIAMSON: Contact more than anything else. Up to Aberdeen quite often, meeting people, joining clubs up there. We had a hell of a fight with the budget people about getting a club membership up there. We did that one, and we decided aircraft was quite ripe for trade exploitation. Here we had the military helping us along with the civil air attaché. We were streaks ahead in electronics, so we could get on that job. We didn't try to do a lot of other stuff. I didn't have the staff to do that, but I had the staff to do this. I'm sure the consular section was the same way. Thirty percent of our time was spent dealing with the traditional Department of Commerce demands for information, board surveys, job surveys. "Mr. So-and-so makes dog collars. What's the market for dog collars?" That was grinding it out, and I had some Brits who could do that with no trouble whatsoever and whose grammar was far better than at least two of my American staff! I had a big commercial library, too. I convinced my first boss that these were the areas we should concentrate in. When you're in the business of receiving visitors from the States, you can't call the shots, but on a day in, day out basis, we stayed with communications, aircraft, oil drilling equipment. We got into tourism toward the end.

Q: And electronics.

WILLIAMSON: And electronics, yes. We got into tourism when that was a big thing in the Department of Commerce. We got into tourism because they gave us the money to get into tourism. I'm not quite sure what we were doing, but we had a big hunk of money to do it with. One thing about the British economic scene was that it was at a leisurely pace. The British Labor party was hell on working to rules, so there was no way you were going to hurry up because there's no sense in breaking into a sweat. At five o'clock when the bell rings, you might as well go home because you can bet that at five-thirty if you're trying to call somebody in their office, they're not there, and that includes the

government. I dealt very seldom with the Foreign Office. I dealt with the Foreign Office on strategic trade controls because I was co-com officer.

Q: This was keeping a good step away from the bad guys.

WILLIAMSON: Exactly right. I was a little dubious about it when I started out, but I was stunned about how many people work in gun-running business.

Q: One has the feeling that at the top of so many British corporations particularly in that period, they were loaded with not very effective people, but they had the right social credentials with the right schools.

WILLIAMSON: I have a classic story on that. I didn't deal too often with bankers because we had a Treasury Attaché, and he had an assistant. When a banker came to do real work or someone was dealing with the Treasury, they'd cut me out. This was just as well because I couldn't have done it; however, when bankers came around to shop themselves, they would call me up. It was always good for a great lunch with house wine. At two-thirty we'd all go home and go to bed. I can't even remember the bank or the bankers that I was with, but they were earnest young guys from the Midwest and they were hot to trot. They had their Brooks Brothers suits, and they came in.

When my staff made the appointments, with the appropriate officer level in the bank, they invited us as I hoped to lunch in the dining room. We went into the office first—business first—and sat down, did introductions all around and exchanged cards. These guys then started talking about the many advantages of working with the First National Bank of Milwaukee or whatever the hell it was. The British guys —there are two of them—in tailor-made suits, the whole thing, nice hairdos, and very, very well spoken with, "Hmmms" and "hums," and taking notes. No commitments; no comeback at all. About 30 minutes into the conversation, there was a knock on the door and a short redheaded guy, clearly not a public school graduate, with a London accent, came in and said he was terribly sorry for being late, and they said, "This is Mr. X" whatever his name was. Mr. Whatever-his-name-was, shoddy as he was, sat down and dominated the conversation from then on. He was the real brains! The two bankers, the young guys, couldn't figure it out. They kept trying to deal with who they thought were the bosses. They thought they were being stiffed by having to work with this guy who clearly spent his time sharpening pencils. I kept trying to get the conversation over there, and the two British guys trying to get the conversation over there, too. The two American guys wouldn't switch! We all walked out, and they said, "Do you have to go to the john?" I said, "Yes, I do." One of the other guys said, "Yes, I think I do, too." I went in to the toilet and I said, "Listen. You guys are barking up the wrong tree! It's the redheaded guy you have to deal with!" He said, "Huh?" I said, "That's the brains! The other two guys are going to have a hell of a good time telling you about their wine list. This is the guy you've got to work with if you want to work." He looked at me and said, "That can't be so." I swear to God, those two guys still walked out. They'd taken my best advice. They even talked to me a bit afterwards. I have no idea whether they would consummate any deals with these people or not, but they had no idea that that was how that bank worked.

That was a classic story. The same thing happened to me a couple of time in the British aviation industry. I'd be talking with one of the most impressive looking guys you ever saw in your life, and I'd have Mr. Bowie on my right flank here talking about intimate contacts with Barry Goldwater. I said, "This is not the guy to use that with!" As a matter of fact, I was wrong. He probably was the guy to use Barry Goldwater with. Eventually they came down and saw a real engineer who knew what an airplane looked like, might even be able to fly one. Then you could get some business done, but you had to get through that. It was a great way—I suppose it still is—for the Brits to go it, to just murder all kinds of things. You put Simon and Lewis up front, and Simon and Lewis take all the crap and all the boring stuff. If they decide that somebody should come out that can do the job, I guess they push a button someplace and the redheaded guy shows up, and their work gets started.

Q: Did you find yourself going head to head with the French from time to time?

WILLIAMSON: Not so much in Britain, no. I went head to head with a very, very nice guy from the Norwegian embassy, we were bitter enemies about some of the contracts. The guy in the Finnish embassy who was about 30 years old knew far more about engineering than I did. They were my big troubles there.

Q: This was in oil.

WILLIAMSON: This was oil; oil drilling specifically. The deal was they had all of these platforms sitting up in the Baltic, and they could run one of those mothers out in jig dandy time and rig it while they were going down. My big rigs were down in the Gulf of Mexico someplace being built. The competition was really intense. Our rig, I'm convinced, was a better rig, had more advantages. The thing is, it wasn't here, it was there. Their rig could be down in a week.

Q: Particularly in something like this but also in aviation, you run into political considerations where the British were saying, "We've got to throw prey to the Norwegians." Every country has that.

WILLIAMSON: This was back in the time when Britain was not in the common market and we had eight and the inner seven. Aircraft were particularly delicate. We had a small task force of myself and the civil air attaché and the political military guy and Hillary from the political section, and there was an FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) guy there. The guys on the other side were ruthless, and so were we, but you would walk in and you would think you'd be talking about DC (Douglas Aircraft Company) something or other sale. You'd find out halfway through that you were talking about DC something or other sale, but you were also talking about a squadron of F-150s. It was a shell game. We kept pulling cards out and looking at the sale. It's one of those things where you go on and on and on, when you're dealing with government procurement, government budgets, and everything else, plus any number of guys from the American community who were trying to bust in on already established relationships that Boeing may have had

or McDonnell may have had, and here is Grumman who doesn't have a thing, and they want to get in the action. You've got to be adamant about it.

Q: I understand the way the game is played in most other countries. The country says, "OK, we'll roll back a particular country for fighter planes or something like this. We would have Grumman, and we'd have Northrop, and we'd have a whole series, and you have to give equal treatment which means you're dissipating your strength.

WILLIAMSON: That's quite true, and we did on a number of cases. The only thing was that engineering-wise... That's not too true, either, because the British aircraft industry although not in a hell of a lot better shape, was a lot bigger than now. I was there for four years, so some of these deals came close to consummation. At the last minute the fact that you were going to throw three button manufacturers out of work in upper Marlborough would be decisive in making some decision. I understand that. It was a highly politicized thing. In the final analysis, all we could do was facilitate. We had nothing as an embassy to put on the table. It was up to whether Northrop wants to do it or not, or Grumman, or who have you, and how that works.

Q: You say retail.

WILLIAMSON: I use that term generically.

Q: They could basically take care of themselves. There are firms that are just used to dealing abroad. Let's say a microfilm company in Des Moines wants to break into international markets. Did you find that you were having to hold their hands?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. We had a whole process for that. We had these world trade directory reports, and we would do a market survey, a swift down and dirty one because they want to get some sort of feel for it. Then the guy would come over and we'd shuffle them, and I'd send one of my guys up with him to Birmingham or wherever the center of the paintbrush industry was. It wasn't entirely successful largely because American businessmen, particularly small and medium-sized manufacturers, if they're in the general sort of business—I'm not talking about a specific gizmo of their own—really aren't that sophisticated about international trade and don't have the banking connections. They usually drag along an American lawyer to start with. That's all very nice, and you should have an American lawyer. Far be it for me to ever doubt that, but you damn well better have a British lawyer, too. You're dealing with a whole different order of business. The problem is that it really is like Shaw said: two people divided by a common language. It looks so much like our system that almost every one of these guys came in thinking, "This is just like Des Moines!" It never was. It's not Kansas.

Q: Were the British throwing up a "we too were throwing up all sorts of taxes, tariffs." The Japanese are renowned for closing off their markets to all sorts of inspections. How about the British?

WILLIAMSON: The British were much more open traders. Where the British and we really crossed swords (I never had anything to do with this problem, it was way above my pay grade), was when they imposed the value added tax. That put ten percent right on top of everything else and skewed a lot of very closely pared contracts. The average paid two and a half percent more. Either there was an added tax and everybody else had to do it, too, or just throw your calculations right out. That was always a big trouble, but it was part of the deal for getting into the common market, and there was no way out of it.

Q: It was not designed specifically to throw foreign things out.

WILLIAMSON: Oh, no.

Q: It was money raising.

WILLIAMSON: It was a money raising thing. I'm not at all convinced that the Brits didn't think it was something to keep people out. It turned out to be a good way to do it, but not in the way that they had hoped. Big firms swallowed that and went right ahead on. They hoist themselves by their own petard because there was a huge battle with inflation that hit all of Europe shortly after the VAT came in. All these businessmen said they were going to collect their ten and a half percent, and they picked up a couple or three more percent extra profit. It's easier to divide by one and a half than it is by one – that sort of thing. Unfortunately, it was one of those moves that you couldn't undo. It was part of the price of doing business, in the Common Market. Once the commitment is made, politicians always say they're going to cut income tax, but you can't cut income tax because that's where the money comes from. There's a law here in the US about the tax they've tacked on, the alternative minimum tax. They can't cut that. There's billions of dollars coming into the Treasury because of that. Everybody says, "That's a terrible thing," and it is.

Q: Did you find Members of Congress intruding from time to time?

WILLIAMSON: That's an interesting story. Not very much; however, often enough the Farnborough Air Show was a great...

Q: That's the big one.

WILLIAMSON: That was a great attraction, and Congressmen descended in droves on that. They were usually the guests of Lockheed, who took care of them. Actually, the embassy in London in those days had a high powered travel section led by a person named Joan Auten who was a legend around Britain.

Q: Joan Auten was Miss Reception, wasn't she?

WILLIAMSON: She knew everybody. "You want tickets to the opera, honey?" This sort of stuff, and she knew people to call and deal with. Barry Goldwater thought she was wonderful, and he was always coming to the air show with an entourage of 50. She was

actually the control officer for these VIPs without going very far to inform me except she would call me and say, "The senator's coming in, and we need five cars from the motor pool." I said, "Pardon me?" She said, "Five cars from the motor pool, and he'll pay for them. Don't worry about it." I told my British locals, "How the hell do you find cars? You can't get five. You'll get ten maybe, but you can't get five. You have to rent." We did all that sort of stuff. They came in. Joan's mafia out there could handle almost anything.

Q: She was an absolute legend.

WILLIAMSON: She was grand. She and I got along very well. I'd met her years before when I was in the secretariat, and I'd come out with Humphrey. She took over the whole section there, so we got along fine. She was really very helpful to me over the years.

Q: Did Vietnam play any role, demonstrations?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, all kinds of demonstrations. We had three things going at the same time. Massive anti-Vietnam demonstrations, and the British police would come down on the horses and herd them along. There was the tried and true, "You can't cross the street here, gang" sort of thing. We had that as a recurring problem. Sometimes large demonstrations depending on what particular thing had attracted the attention of the press that week; sometimes small, kind of pathetic, people who were just upset about the thing and standing there in the damn British winter rain come hell or high water to let their position be known. Since I wasn't too wild about the war myself, I didn't bother about it. At the same time we had the IRA (Irish Republican Army) bombing campaigns going on. They took out a pub just down from the embassy. They took out a pub just around the corner from my apartment. My daughter was dating and I said, "What I would like you to do, dearest, is if you're going to go out and drink, go to some low class Irish working class pub. Take two big boys with you. They aren't going to blow themselves up." They occasionally did, but it would be a bad mistake. "Stay away from these downtown bars." This was the heyday of the Reverend Doctor Moon. The reverend Doctor Moon was very active. You probably had him someplace, too.

Q: I was in Korea at the time of Jonestown, and I was told they panicked and said, "Go take a look at what's he doing there." This is where it came from. He wasn't doing much there, but they were scared as hell when he would all of a sudden start...

WILLIAMSON: Agitated. Yes.

Q: ...because he was a cult, and they were afraid that his cult was like unto the Jonestown cult.

WILLIAMSON: Our big problem with the Reverend Doctor Moon was he'd have these massive weddings he'd schedule. He did it deliberately, I'm sure. Friday afternoon just before the consular section was set to close, some 300 brides would show up, all needing visas to be at their wedding ceremony on Sunday in Milwaukee or someplace. Just the

whole thing of dealing with that was a mess, but it made the embassy-- which was a very nicely placed embassy as you know-- made it very inaccessible at times. You'd go for a drink at lunch and come back, and there'd be a demonstration going on or they'd blow up your pub. But it was interesting.

Q: How did your kids find the American schools?

WILLIAMSON: They were in the American School.

Q: Were there mostly Americans there?

WILLIAMSON: It was mostly Americans, probably 50 to 60% American and the rest foreign. It was an international school.

Q: Were there any British reflections on Americans?

WILLIAMSON: My daughter, who had come from International Schools in Tanzania and Zambia, flat refused to go out with Americans. Right next to the American school there was a great big British high school, and her boyfriends all came from there. She used to bring them home just to get me going. She had one guy who drove a motorcycle.

Q: Long hair, I assume?

WILLIAMSON: Long hair. She dated a Jamaican guy for a while who wore snake skin boots. She had a boyfriend for a while whose father who had one of the original licenses for the fish monger businesses down at the fish market, Billingsgate, which is very lucrative, I must say. He had a huge house east of London. It definitely wasn't diplomatic corps kind of stuff. My son on the other hand fell in with a bunch of spoiled diplomatic and American business kids and discovered the joys of pot. Again, the kids, being 14 - 15 had absolutely no discretion whatsoever and he was busted by the police twice. They got into the British scene, and they both loved London. They just loved it. My daughter could—still can—say... "Let's see how puce we can turn Father's face tonight. What are we going to bring home tonight?"

Q: Did you get involved with presidential visits?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, Lord, yes. The embassy is well known for that. When Henry Kissinger came, when the president came, everyone came to, "Here's your spear, go stand over there," whatever it was. On the other hand, Arthur Burns—it was all during those terrible British currency crises—dropped into town at the drop of a hat. The Treasury Attaché was all distraught, but it didn't touch us in the slightest. Same thing with the military stuff. The political military guys—it's a huge embassy. There's all kinds of resources. But when the president came, we were usually all mustered including the locals.

Q: You left there in 1977.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. For Nairobi. I was minding my own business and negotiating again for a job. This time I felt it was about time I went home because my daughter was going to go to college. Again, the Department of Commerce called and said, "It's none of our business, Larry, but the Counselor job in Nairobi is opening. We'll back you if you want to go for that." I was in good shape with the African bureau still. I picked up the phone and called and said, "Who've you got going for that?" They said, "Nobody in particular. Do you want to go?" This is the shameful way personnel is handled. I said, "Yes, and I can get Commerce to back me up." They said, "We didn't think that was going to be a problem anyhow." Sold!

It worked out very well because my daughter went to college when she was just barely 17. She went for her freshman year to an American college on a campus in London. Actually, it was down by Brighton. Everybody else went back to the land of Jambo and Habari Gani, and I spent three years there. It wasn't quite three years. Actually, I got hijacked there, too.

Q: This was '77 through '80?

WILLIAMSON: About that.

Q: What was the situation in Kenya?

WILLIAMSON: Kenya was still very colonial, but in the hands of the Kikuyu aristocracy. It ran like a top from our point of view, not so if you were African, but from our view, and it had lots on interesting things to do. Lots of fun. The International School was built in the midst of an old, decrepit, and dying coffee plantation. Marijuana grows wild in Kenya and is widely used, so my son thought that was grand stuff, and I had more trouble with him. Plus by that time he discovered girls which distracted him somewhat. My daughter would come back and forth, and it was very nice. We liked it extremely well. The work was interesting. I was a senior commercial officer for Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya while resident in Kenya. My writ didn't run all that widely. I helped the people over in Uganda a lot because they were going through the Idi Amin stuff. I used a lot of my time on these problems.

Q: There was a time when they very quietly one by one departed. Did that happen?

WILLIAMSON: That was starting to happen. Yes. As I was leaving we were getting people out of there rather rapidly. One of the last guys to go was my junior officer - he wasn't a junior officer; he was a two or three, I guess, who hung on because: a.) he was interested; he was a very good officer, and b.) he was the only Swahili speaker they had left. There were a couple of spooks but we couldn't use them for the kind of work we had to get done. We were deeply involved in various problems with Uganda I won't even go into the whole thing, but that was a mess. Then Tanzania was starting to come back. They were so far behind the eight ball, it didn't really make any difference. We had several meetings, and I went down there a couple of times just to see what was going on. My

basic business was with the American business community in Nairobi which was big. I was called out on any and all occasions when their bosses showed up and invited to many a lunch. I had a patented briefing.

Q: What type of business? What were you pushing?

WILLIAMSON: There were three or four American banks. There was a car assembly factory. There were a number of people who had invested in real estate of various kinds. A lot of tourist business. Firestone had a factory there. It was a great place to have a factory. It was a great regional headquarters because in those days it was pretty safe, and the schools were good. A guy could go off and leave his family with some trepidation but not too much. It wasn't like he was leaving them in Freetown in Sierra Leona. We had a lot of regional businesses working out of there. The American Chamber of Commerce was about 70 people. Some were two people from the same firm. It was a good size group. A lot of investment in hotels and game parks.

Q: You say the government was working.

WILLIAMSON: In Kenya?
Q: Yes.

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. It worked like a top if you were a Kikuyu, particularly if you were a Jomo Kenyatta kind of Kikuyu. It was an oligarchy, and it was very efficient. There was a 10% graft factor; everybody knew that. Once you accepted that as a way of life, and I did report extensively on that, you could do quite a bit of business down there. There were the usual knifings and the betrayals. I say knifings; that's figurative. Somebody would invariably rent the wrong guy thinking he had the inside scoop.

Q: How did you there deal with business? This was after Carter, and we'd gone through the anti-corruption. You couldn't pay a graft note. In a society where you're implying it was accepted you had to pay a certain amount commission or what have you, how did you deal with that?

WILLIAMSON: Don't ask. Almost all of the Americans who were there: the Firestone guy, the bankers, all these people were very experienced businessmen. They didn't tell, I didn't ask.

Q: Did you find again, a man from Des Moines, brand new. Were they coming in or not much?

WILLIAMSON: They were coming in in droves. After they left the game parks, the name of the game was to collect my business card and go home and put my name down as the person they called on to justify the business expense. For themselves and their wives. In those days you could do it. We had a lot of those guys dropping in, but nothing serious. Serious investors, there were two kinds. There were a reasonable number of

sharks who hoped they could come down and cut some kind of deal with somebody building a Yugo car factory or something like that.

Then there were some people who just wanted to get in on the action. Kenya looked like it was really going to go places, and it has gone pretty well eventually. As to whether we were able to help them too much, I don't really know. We had some American lawyers there at the end who did a very nice business. One of the ways you get into business in Kenya in a hurry is you get yourself a Kenyan partner. These were guys you didn't buy: You just rented and maybe for no more than a couple of hours, just long enough to get your signature on a piece of paper. There was a ton of trade disputes and "who struck John," but luckily I was always able to push them over to the legal side because there was usually a question of, "This guy promised to do this and he didn't. In fact, he stole my factory." That was quite true. You've got to be careful around there. This is real shark water.

We also had three very sticky cases. Just after independence all the large European farms were nationalized in essence, and compensation was to be paid after the present owner died. Four or five of those guys had married American wives. They had died, and the wives were now living in Minneapolis or someplace, and they wanted their money on the dot. That wasn't the deal. The British government had guaranteed the deal, and one had to wait until the wife died before the money was available. If she didn't like it, she could come back and live on the farm. These were huge; whole valleys and up to the highlands of very good land and almost always full of squatters. If you weren't there you couldn't do anything about it. I had those kinds of cases, and they were messy.

There were three or four good lawyers, a couple of nice guys, who had been dealing with these women at great length. The women always came in, always wanted to see the ambassador. The ambassador who in my day was LeMelle formerly worked for the Ford Foundation. He was a very able guy and very good and got along fine with everybody, but the sight of a wealthy widow coming in, plunking herself down and rattling her chains rattled his, so he always would get me in. My role was always to say somehow or another, "Mr. Ambassador, we're supposed to be at the State House just now," and take the lady into my office and make sure she was duly soothed.

Q: Was there any reincarnation or residue of the old happy valley days?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, there were plenty of places up country still that had... The deal was that when those farms were taken over by the government, almost always they were looking for management, and they almost always rehired the guy who had lived there. So he got his money. Sometimes they returned to Great Britain but came right back down—one British winter did it for them—and then they would run the farms. The social life up there was pretty good, pretty effective. The participants were getting a little antiquated for it, but they still seemed to be interested. There was the Mt. Kenya club which was American owned by William Holden and a couple of guys, a very nice place with honeymoon cottages spread out. That place was always full of honeymooners and tourists and guys there for the weekend with their secretary. We had a fair amount of that.

Q: Had the street crime...

WILLIAMSON: Yes, crime was a big problem even then. You couldn't go downtown without help and in the dark. The embassy was in a building just downtown: not the one that got blown up but the one before this. We had an armed guard car park. Nobody ran around downtown. You'd go to a movie, and you'd arrange to drive up, and a guy with a pistol would come out and take you and your family in to the movie, and another driver would take the car off. After dark in Nairobi even in those days it wasn't very safe. Lots of crime down in the suburbs, too, but they usually picked on the Asians because they....

Q: Asians more than the Indians.

WILLIAMSON: Mostly Gujurati. Their families came over and helped build the railroads, and they stayed on as their relatives came. They had control of the retail trade and a lot of the farm produce.

Q: How did the ambassadors you had treat the commercial function?

WILLIAMSON: My major ambassador, William LeMelle, a Ford Foundation guy, didn't know beans about running an embassy. He'd never been in the diplomatic service or anything close to it, so he found me convenient again because I could speak Swahili and because I seemed to have a face that the wealthy widows trusted. I could also get out and about. Wilbur LeMelle is still around I gather. I've seen his name on a lot of pictures. He was my only ambassador there. My tour was shortened because Dick Moose got into a huge fight with his country director for East Africa.

Q: Who was that?

WILLIAMSON: A guy named Gordon Beyer who later got taken care of in a nice way. Moose came down—he was on a tour anyway—and one of his jobs was to recruit a new country director. He hauled me in. I had no idea this was going on. He said, "Could I interest you in coming back and working for us?" I said, "I'm due out next summer." He said, "I mean now." We talked about it. He said, "You'd be in charge of East Africa pretty much." I heard that "pretty much." He said, "The guy who was doing the job, the guy who is really doing the work is leaving. He wrote detective stories, so he quit the foreign service, and we need you to come right now." I talked with my wife, and I said, "It's a really good job, and we've got to go back sooner or later. We've been hiding out here for ten years almost, and it's time we got Timothy, our boy, into school." She said, "OK," so I came back early, came back the winter of 1980 and became the acting director of East Africa. Gordon was still around, still having his fights with the...

Q: This is, what's his name, Gordon?

WILLIAMSON: Gordie Beyer, later our man in Kampala. In his last job he was head of the George Marshall Foundation. I came back and did that for two years and went through the awful stuff about the Somali war and the Somali-Ethiopian wars.

Q: Ogaden.

WILLIAMSON: Ogaden. I had to get guys out of the embassy after it was almost closed. Some obstreperous people down in Madagascar which didn't bother me that much, and a whole host of problems with personnel.

Q: We're talking about '80, '82?

WILLIAMSON: '80 to '83. Maybe '82.

Q: Let's talk about Dick Moose. I talk about Dick Moose as head of East Africa. I've interviewed him. A very controversial figure.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, he is. I've known Dick for a number of years. He was in SS (Secretariat) just before I got there which was just after Sierra Leone. I knew him off and on. He is a delightful guy. He stutters, too. He's very bull headed. He gets himself in lots and lots of fights, struggles—even with Maggie his wife. At one stage of the game, Dick called us and said, "I'm in the lobby of the State Department." I said, "So?" He said, "You've got to come down and give me a hand. Bring anybody you can find." She'd kicked him out of their house.

Q: This was the famous moose head incident.

WILLIAMSON: Yes! The moose head showed up in the lobby.

Q: Let's explain what this is all about.

WILLIAMSON: Apparently he had developed a girlfriend whom he had sent off to a foreign post, and he spent a lot of time at that foreign post. A strange thing, one of the few consulates there are. It was Douala. She was in Douala, and he was traveling to Douala a lot.

Q: Douala is the...

WILLIAMSON: It's the port of Cameroon. The capital's up-country. Maggie and he had a huge falling out about this, and she threw him out. She threw everything out. Apparently she went up and threw things out the window. Dick had had a big moose head apparently given to him or he decided to buy it. He shows up in the lobby of the Department of State, poorly dressed, looking very worn, with a goddamn moose head and five or six bags around him. I said, "What are you doing?" Then Lannon Walker showed up, too, and said, "What are you doing?" Then somebody else came down and said, "What the hell's going on?" He said, "Shut up and take this stuff upstairs and put it in the

office." I didn't take the moose head. That was too big for me. I think Lannon grabbed the moose head. He said, "I've been exiled," or something like that. She flat threw him out. He wormed his way back into her affections after a while, but it took a little doing. She was not anybody to mess with. I was very fond of her.

Q: Tell me about the African bureau at the time. How did it work?

WILLIAMSON: Very professionally. The whole thing was staffed by people of my generation with tons of African experience. Dick himself had served in Africa once but as a third secretary, but he had Lannon Walker; he had Bill Schaufele. There would not be ambassadors all over the place, and we've all lived and done our time in the boondocks, and we were all enthusiastic but cynical of Africa and things African. We all knew each other, so it was just a question of picking up the phone and calling somebody you've known for 20 years. It was very much like the old British foreign service must have been. I had a wonderful time. Negotiations with Somalia over our base rights and the price was pretty much my job.

Q: At one point for my sins I was INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) officer for the Horn of Africa.

WILLIAMSON: You had it badly. You had really done something bad.

Q: This was in the early '60s.

WILLIAMSON: HIM (His Imperial Majesty) was still in charge then.

Q: I was his imperial majesty. My little speech was in Somalia, who could pay the most? Of course, it's true...

WILLIAMSON: Absolutely.

Q: It moved back and forth.

WILLIAMSON: I keep telling you. The military was hell bent to have a base in Berbera. This was just after the failed mission to rescue the hostages in Tehran. Jimmy Carter called in the staff—his military people—and said, "What can we do now after we get those people out?" Somebody said, "Mr. President, we don't have the resources to do that. We don't have the bases to do that." He said, "Get the bases." I got three guys who swear this happened. Brzezinski then strode in, laid out a map of the Horn of Africa, and took a piece of string. "What is the range of a C-130?" They said what it was. He said, "About like this." They said, "Yes." He put one end of that damn string in Tehran and drew an arc through East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. He then said, "Find something in there we can use." The Russians had built this half-assed air base at Berbera. It was not much. It had no support: It had a tower and a long runway, and it had four or five water wells which were used for the local camel drivers. Our eyes fell on that

for some odd reasons. That put us in the hands of the rug merchants in Mogadishu where we thoroughly milked.

Q: Let's pick up the various areas. Let's take Somalia. During the '80-"82 period, what were you up to?

WILLIAMSON: Up to that stage of the game we were very busily engaged in trying to keep the embassy open in Addis which was not easy.

Q: The DIRG was in.

WILLIAMSON: The DIRG was in and was becoming more and more anti-U.S. The Soviets were really nesting in there. The short lived and ill fated Somali drive for Ethiopia had burned itself out in the late '80s. "Maintenance" is not a word in either language. Both Ethiopians and the Somalis drove as far as they could get their tanks, and that's where it stopped. Then we had the civil war breaking out in Ethiopia.

Q: This was the Eritrea.

WILLIAMSON: The Eritrea and the Ethiopians. The DIRG was taking a creaming at that stage of the game. The Somalis decided that this would be a great time to take the Ogaden back again. There was a great hullabaloo in the Socialist bloc.. Fidel Castro came out and with the Soviets tried to talk Siad Barre out of an invasion. Castro argued that these were Socialist comrades. You can't go to war with them. Barre answered in effect, "The hell I can't. What's this Socialist brotherhood stuff? These are Ethiopians, and that's my land!" The Russians apparently told Barre, the president of Somalia, that if he went ahead with his plans to invade the Ogaden they would drop him as a client. By that time Ethiopia looked like it was falling to pieces internally.

Q: Was Kagnew station closed?

WILLIAMSON: Kagnew station was still intact. That was the other thing Fidel Castro raised with Barre. His brother came out and talked to him about Socialist brotherhood and uniting against the Imperialists.

Q: Raul?

WILLIAMSON: Raul. The idea was to form a great, huge Socialist power in the area: Yemen, Somalia and Ethiopia would all be Socialists together and protected by the Soviet Union. All that was fine but Somalia didn't want to be protected by the Soviet Union. They wanted and indeed Siad needed to reintegrate the Ogaden into Somalia. The Somalis took off and damn near occupied the entire Ogaden, but the Ethiopians with the aid of Cuban troops beat them back. The Somalis were left high and dry, the Soviets did drop them. Bam! Left everything. They lost the war, and the Ogaden: clans in Somaliland were pretty irritated about the whole thing anyway as well as the fact that what had been the old British territory up there in British Somaliland was in then a state of clan warfare.

We showed up and said, “We’d like to talk to you about Berbera,” and it was like manna from heaven as far as the Somalis were concerned. We had a huge effort to come to an agreement with Siad: Access to Berbera in exchange for a security package of some sort.

Dick Moose came in to do the negotiating. The first Somali demand was for, in effect, free access to the U.S. Treasury in perpetuity. We talked them out of that!. We were talking and talking and talking and talking, and we tried another agreement where we would come in and fix the airfield up and make it work. There was some land involved in it. We put a minimum amount of money into it. The Somalis began to talk about their brothers in the west, the benefits of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Alliance, etc. We accepted some Somali students in our military colleges around here.

The fact of the matter was when we got to Berbera and everybody took a look at what we had there, it wasn’t much. It was a hell of a long way to anyplace. Even your drinking water would have to be flown in. You couldn’t put a permanent base in there. The harbor was very shallow, and extensive coral reefs would need a lot of dredging. You could probably get destroyers in there but not much more.

I think we actually used Berbera for three or four exercises staged through Egypt, all of them satisfactory but nothing brilliant. In no way could you put in ahead of time the stockpile that you would need to mount an effective operation in Iran. You can imagine, every Somali tribesman in 50 counties would be down there pilfering and sniping away. Besides, I kept telling everybody --it didn’t seem to make an impression, but it’s true -- that the minute we started talking about using Berbera strategically, i.e., bringing the Soviets into the operation with a possible Soviet strike down there, you could watch that permission to use being yanked out from underneath you and the wells poisoned if necessary. It never came to that, but that was how I occupied myself. That was about nine months of work.

Q: The military at the Pentagon, were they as dubious as you were?

WILLIAMSON: I think at heart they were, but it was a whole different atmosphere. Dick Moose didn’t like the deal at all, and I thought it was stupid and told everybody including the military. The military however received orders to do it. Brzezinski said, “Get that airfield,” so that was all there was to it. There were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. I started talking about the price and so did Dick, and we actually got a price reduction. The overthrow of the DIRG brought the whole issue to a halt and we never consummated the deal. The next year Siad was overthrown and Berbera was forgotten.

Q: What about in Ethiopia. We had Kagnew Station. In a way technology was beginning to move away from...

WILLIAMSON: You know how the military is. Something like that’s always vital to the security of the U.S. – faced with a fait accompli they discover that they can live without it after all.

Q: We still have forts to deal with the Apache.

WILLIAMSON: That's exactly right. Actually, the rebels had some of our guys kidnapped and that cooled our contractors down no little end. You probably know there are several substations out there. They were inviting trouble, and finally one of the rebel forces got well into Asmara. There was street fighting, and we decided to evacuate the thing and never got back in.

Q: By the time you were there, had we essentially written off Ethiopia?

WILLIAMSON: Officially, of course not. Unofficially, there was nothing much you could do. The DIRG was dependent on the Cubans and the Soviets. It wasn't until the up-country tribes decided that they didn't want any more of this stuff...

Q: Tigrean?

WILLIAMSON: Tigrean! The big problem came when—and I don't know enough about the internal workings over there in Ethiopia—somehow or another, Mengistu and his merry men seized upon land redistribution as the wave of the future. This is what a good social state does. That's what set the flames burning out in the districts. Pretty soon there were three or four good sized rebel armies marching on Addis Ababa, and the Tigreans are relatives to the Eritreans, so they joined up forces right off the bat. The Eritreans came out of the trenches and came on down to Asmara. The Tigreans marched down along the border beside them and outflanked the Ethiopians who were not too charmed about the whole thing anyway.

Q: Being the Soviets and the Cubans had thrown their hands in with the Ethiopian government, the DIRG was a military consul..?.

WILLIAMSON: It was a military consul.

Q: Were we tempted or did we say, "Well, their enemy is our friend." Did you try to do anything to the Tigreans and friends?

WILLIAMSON: The spooks may have.

Q: When you say spooks you mean...

WILLIAMSON: CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). It was very low key and very small effort.. The big supporters of the Eritreans were, of course, the Sudanese. The Sudanese and the Saudis always kept enough stuff going in there to keep the insurrection alive. It wasn't until the Tigreans particularly but other tribes, too, starting mounting these militia attacks that news of what was happening on the land redistribution front reached a lot of the troops, and the troops were very affected. Their mothers and fathers were being thrown out of their farms. The army was very disaffected and mutinied. Eritreans and Tigreans met at the border, marched straight down and beat back the Ethiopians.

Internally the other militia had gone down to Addis Ababa. It looked for a long time like we were going to have a real debacle in Addis with the DIRG settling into the fight to the last man.

Q: At the time and, again, we're going back to '80-'83ish, did we feel that we had any real interests in that? From your perspective, what were American interests and concerns?

WILLIAMSON: Our concern was that the biggest geo-political factor in East Africa was Ethiopia, not Somalia, for God's sake. It wasn't then; still isn't. Ethiopia is well worth our time, an essentially viable country, which is hard to come by in Africa. We were very interested. In fact, you know the Irv Hicks story.

Q: No.

WILLIAMSON: You don't know the Irv Hicks story? I don't think it's a secret. The Somalis were again trying to do something in the Ogaden, and it looked like they might succeed in reuniting the Bantu and Nilotic Ethiopian tribes against the outside aggressor. But the Somalis blew it and Siad was pretty well castrated by then. It did look like there was going to be a hell of a battle for Addis Ababa with the militia and the Eritreans outside; and the DIRG, and what was left of the army inside.

Q: I know Irv Hicks.

WILLIAMSON: Irv was a deputy assistant secretary. He went out to the Horn. He was sent out there. We had gotten an agreement from the Rhodesians that they would offer refuge to Mengistu. Irv went into the city with all that fighting going on. God bless him, he went in there, and he talked to Mengistu, and he said, "We can get you and your family and anybody else you want to take out of here, but you've got to get out now before the fighting starts because we can't abide that." Mengistu gave it about the same consideration that I gave the assignment to London, and we got some unknown aircraft into the airport, packed that whole bunch in, sent them south, and the next thing you know there's a triumphal entry into Addis Ababa by the Tigreans and the Eritreans. We worked hard at that one.

Q: What did we see coming out of this from our perspective?

WILLIAMSON: The place was a potential Soviet human base. It was certainly a base for exporting trouble. The Saudis were very interested in getting the Soviets out of there. This was a cheap, easy way to get about.

Q: Basically we weren't looking at this as a base but trying to strategically deny that area to the...

WILLIAMSON: Yes. The Soviet Union was beginning to look a little shabby. We were not able to put a lot of resources into this thing. We could handle it without doing that.

We didn't want the 82nd Airborne dropping in for God's sake because nobody likes foreigners as we're learning once again in Iraq. We had a lot invested in that. By the way, the Hicks thing happened after I left AFE.

Q: That was later. While you were there, one of the potential problems in that area was the perennial draughts. Did that happen in your time?

WILLIAMSON: With great regularity, I'm afraid. What's happened is the growing population pressure has moved towards the north. There's no more land down south. Destitute and poor people moved north looking for new land to farm, into this really bad part of the world where rain is not as regular as it is in the south, face more and more failures of seasonal monsoons. When the rains fail, the people don't have any way out or anywhere else to go. They go up there and although they know people will starve to death over a period of time, they have no other option. We have a very extensive network of European and Japanese and American philanthropic NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) who are very accomplished at drought relief. Being up there begets its own problems because once you start putting in great stores of food, that becomes a cash crop as it were for bandits and thieves and everyone else. That got us in trouble in Somalia later on.

Q: At the time, how entrenched did we feel the Soviets and the Cubans were?

WILLIAMSON: I don't know what the official line was in those days. I was always under the impression that the Ethiopians didn't like the foreigners, period and that the only reason these foreigners were acceptable was because Siad Barre of Somalia, the idiot, had taken the one step that could unite the Ethiopians behind this group, the DIRG. They invaded the motherland. No Ethiopian worth his salt could deny the call to spring the colors and shoot the first Somali you see. Self-inflicted wounds -- the Somali inability to be self-critical at all!

Q: By the time you left, the place was still...

WILLIAMSON: It was still a fiefdom of the Soviets, but it was at a very shaky stage.

Q: These forces were beginning to gather.

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: Where else? You mentioned Madagascar.

WILLIAMSON: Madagascar had President Ratsiraka. We had a NASA satellite tracking station on the island which became invaluable -- not that anybody said, "Can you do without it?" Of course, they had to. A very nice place, Madagascar. We had a station in the Seychelles, too, which was another problem. Ratsiraka was viable, and we didn't like it. The military flew in an entire pre-fab gymnasium. Ratsiraka was entranced with basketball, so we flew in an entire goddamn pre-fab basketball court for him. We did

insane things like that to keep this thing going. I think Ratsiraka really didn't have that much in the way of ideological leanings. He was a straight old-fashioned dictator and was busily engaged in enlarging his holdings. His big problem was getting his gold into the Swiss bank. We had the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) people who had this tracking station on the Seychelles which I was personally loathe to see go because I had a perfect reason to visit the Seychelles. We have one man there. Two, actually. We also had troubles in Uganda. There was the whole post-Amin thing which we never have put back together again. It's still that whole northern portion.

Q: Was there any movement of the Asians, i.e., the Indians to go back? They were part of...

WILLIAMSON: They were expelled.

Q: When they went and never really got back together.

WILLIAMSON: I think that's right. I've heard stories about Indians going back to see it for old times sake, but that was quite a trauma. It was also terribly expensive. Those people lost everything.

Q: Uganda never...

WILLIAMSON: And Uganda never....

Q: They were the merchant class.

WILLIAMSON: They were the merchant class that left. Ugandans are pretty commercially minded themselves, so the infrastructure's still there. The people who lost the most were small shopkeepers, and they had no way to regain those assets. They didn't have money to invest. Most of them came to UK or places like that. That never put itself back together again. Maybe it's all for the good.

Q: How about Tanzania and its relation with Zanzibar? Was this post-Nyerere by this time?

WILLIAMSON: Nyerere was still in. Tanzania surprised me. I came back to it after 10 years , and the last time I'd seen it, it was decrepit. When I got back in the early '80s, there were still some vestiges of the old tourism industry. You could get a decent hotel room. You couldn't get any water, but you could get at least a hotel room. The Tanzanians started doing the right thing. I think cooler heads were prevailing. Ben Mkapa who later became the president and was a good friend of mine became head of the central bank, and he got rid of most of their left wing advisors—a bunch of funny people—and some real bankers in from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) got the fiscal situation straightened out. But Tanzania is a dirt poor country any way you cut it with the best of management. The Tanzanians themselves realized they had been lead astray.

Q: How about Zanzibar? Was that...

WILLIAMSON: Zanzibar has turned into a tourist paradise. I had no idea! It's historic. You go see the house where Livingston's body was laid out, the old slave marker, and stuff like that. You can see the old American consulate: the oldest consulate in Africa. It's no longer there, but it was. Zanzibar's got nothing but tourist attractions, good beaches, really good snorkeling reefs, but not much in the way of infrastructure.

Q: That pretty much covers that period, would you say, in Zanzibar.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, pretty much.

Q: We'll pick this up the next time. We're talking about 1983.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. In '83 I had a delightful year as head of airline negotiations: civil air.

Q: We'll pick up airline negotiations. One other question I want to ask you next time was how did the advent of the Reagan administration and Chester Crocker play in your career perspective and the whole South African situation, how much effect did they have. We'll pick that up.

You mentioned airline negotiations. What had you been doing prior to that?

WILLIAMSON: I'd stayed in the African bureau. I was with the East African desk job for about two years. Then they asked me to take over the regional affairs office just about the same time Chet Crocker came in.. In regional affairs, we had military training and agreements under our responsibility, labor, some Peace Corps, some AID (Agency for International Development) and Congressional Relations -- because Chet was big in getting Congress in on this new South African thing. Just a lot of dogs' work of various kinds that could be spread out over the whole African continent.

If the question was, "What difference did Chet Crocker make in my life," he made a great deal of difference. With Dick Moose we had a stand-off with the South Africans. Crocker wanted to become engaged with the South Africans in encouraging change to apartheid by the regime down there. I, frankly, at the time didn't think he stood too much of a chance with getting that done since we'd been dealing with the South Africans in one sort or another for a very long time. They showed very little inclination towards moving off the dime on the apartheid division in their nation and, furthermore, they were greatly engaged in intervening in the struggle in Angola against the Portuguese government originally and later in the civil war in Angola between the two factions there.

My job and that of my staff became much more oriented toward congressional relations, talking to the right people, getting our message across, getting Chet's message across, and also in trying to get the AID people to deal in a more direct fashion with the South African government. Chet Crocker may have changed the African policy of the African

bureau, but he did not change the views of most of the professionals in AID toward what the hell could be done in South Africa. They looked on it as a place in which any assistance that went there would almost surely be hijacked by the Afrikaners in favor of their own group. I think they were probably right.

Q: When Crocker came in—Reagan came in—was there a feeling of suspicion at first that okay, here's a regime that really is not very friendly toward black Africa and is not that upset about Afrikaners and what they're doing in South Africa.

WILLIAMSON: There was some of that. Certainly Crocker and his people when they first came in were very suspicious of most professionals, especially professional Africanists. They went smartly about changing bodies in the country directorate jobs. As it turned out, however, what the Crocker regime meant was that the front office at the highest level—Crocker and his immediate deputy—were totally wrapped up in South Africa. The rest of Africa could have fallen off of the edge of the world. The professionals were left pretty much to run the shops in East and West Africa without hindrance or even interest. We had a deputy secretary watching us.

Q: Who was that?

WILLIAMSON: Lannon Walker and Bill...

Q: We can fill this in later.

WILLIAMSON: We had three or four professionals and Africanists, guys that knew the beat. We did not have very many resources. We used a lot of military assistance, money for the Nigerians, for the Kenyans, a little bit with the Somalis toward the end because we had promised to do something for them. Then we had IMET (International Military Education and Training) programs which was US military training for their officer corps.

Q: You said you could do a lot with the military. What were you doing? The people kept taking over the government.

WILLIAMSON: My view on that in a smug way is they couldn't do a worse job than they guys who were currently in office. The African governments were notorious—and are notorious—for being corrupt and ineffective with very few exceptions. They're poverty stricken, and they're talentless. They say everybody that's smart goes to school and leaves Africa behind as fast as they can and goes off and gets a job at the UN or anyplace else because of a variety of social and financial problems. We weren't dealing with coups as much. You have to deal with the government you have in hand. You had the CAR (Central African Republic), you had the old emperor of Bokassa, and you had an endless chain of field marshals in the Congo. Uganda for a time was a military dictatorship and, certainly, you always had to deal with Ethiopian and Somalia armies if you talk of the Horn. West Africa, well, the Liberian thing blew up, and that tragedy played itself out in the four or five years that I was there. That was less a question of working with the army than trying to keep some sort of government intact in running the

country. Ultimately the whole thing developed into anarchy with Taylor coming back from abroad and a civil war of really intense magnitude for about four or five years. We had plenty of those things on our plate. We had a chance of getting a hold of a fair number of junior officers and send them off to military schools and give them some idea of how to do things. We had much less luck and much less influence on the senior staff of the military services which usually meant the army. There were certain cases—Nigeria had a pretty good air force.

Q: Yes. In fact, what's his name, who was so often the ruler of Nigeria, was an air force officer.

WILLIAMSON: Jerry Rawlings. That's Ghana. Most of the former French territories had a large French liaison organization there, and they would have five or six experienced jet fighter fliers who were African, and then the rest of them would be French.

Q: Despite all our problems with the extremists or the French, as an Africanist it was kind of nice to have these little French military encampments throughout West Africa keeping the damn things down.

WILLIAMSON: It was not good policy to talk this way, but the fact of the matter is that the French were able to do things in their former colonies that we had no intention of doing ourselves and which on the whole were very positive, including their military programs. I must tell you that there's nothing that fills the heart of an American ambassador with such peace and quiet as to realize that his residence lies between the encampment of the French army at the airport and where the French ambassador's living, so you know damn well that you're in the protective center of the thing. I slept very well!

I think on the whole that the French influence was admittedly colonialist, neo-colonialist, in many ways. On the other hand, they were picking up pieces that we were not prepared to deal with ourselves. We were always being yelled at by Washington to go in and steal a few contracts from the French or do this or do that. I always thought it was terribly ill-advised, playing to an audience here in the States. It was not doing anything for the African countries with which we were dealing, and it was an impossible burden to bear because the French were prepared to put good money into it, and we weren't.

Q: We'll move to '83 to '84. How did this come about, and what were you doing?

WILLIAMSON: The rule then and I think still is, you do two years at a Washington job. I outlived my two years in regional affairs, and I turned to the AF Front Office,, and I'd been promised that they'd look for an ambassadorial post for me. About that time, for a variety of reasons, the White House started taking a very unhealthy interest—from my point of view—in African posts for deserving candidates. I'm not sure it was reward for long and faithful service, but they were sending people out and they were not automatically giving foreign service officers an okay to go to the "sweaty posts" as they say. I got caught in that. Both Lannon Walker and Jim Bishop who were my mentors were very regretful about it, but they said it was out of their hands. The African bureau

had lost control of placement. I was stumbling around, and I went over and played my other card in the EB (Economic and Business) bureau to see what was going on over there, and I came across a very old friend of mine who had been an FSO (Foreign Service Officer) on the aviation side all of his career. He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I'm looking for work over here." He said, "I've got a job. It's just an office director, but it certainly is a good job." I said, "Really? I don't have anything else to do," so we went in, talked to the assistant secretary (whom I knew) who said, "If you can come along and do this job, we'd be delighted." Tom Colwell was the guy who was in charge of airline negotiations, and there was an older group of guys who were really professional civil aviation people, and they had to play with the "big kids," although I found out later I got to play with them, too. They had a smaller office that dealt with everybody else. I became the office director for that smaller office and discovered that I had more of a knack than I realized for negotiations. It was great stuff. It was Bismarkian! "I will trade you three landing rights in Herzegovina if you will do this or that for me."

Q: Who were the big guys, and who were the other guys when you're talking about?

WILLIAMSON: The big guys were Britain and Japan. The bulk of our airline problems were that Heathrow was absolutely vital for the East-West trade across the Atlantic. Likewise, so was LaGuardia and JFK, and later Dulles. The major commercial activity, the real money, was based on that route, and the other one is Tokyo. The rest of them were important and certain airlines were terribly important, particularly the Latin American ones. The real big dollars and cents figures were across the Atlantic and across the Pacific. I took a turn sitting in on one big negotiation, and then they said, "It's yours."

My first negotiation was with the Dutch here in Washington. The Dutch were stiffing us on a couple of items, and I said to myself, "Why are we doing this? This is a three-day quadrille while they're doing their Christmas shopping, for Christ sake." I went in and I said to my boss, "I think we should tell them we're not going to play. They're not going to give us anything we want. We're not going to give them anything they want. Do you want to hold their hands, or should I tell them to cash in on their round trip?" I did the latter and I didn't do it in a terribly nice way. I was miffed at them. They lead us to believe that they would give us certain concessions, but when they got here, they decided to stiff us. So I stiffed them back.

I developed an interesting reputation. Our airlines all applauded me. The airline reps were all entranced that someone would stand up to the "damn foreigners." They're a chauvinistic bunch at best. I think our guys who are in the professional airline business were used to being more indirect with their clients than I was because the bulk of them, quite frankly, wanted sooner or later to be hired when they retired from the foreign service. It was their only source of income. I knew that I wasn't going to be a professional airline negotiator. I just didn't have the background for it. So as I said that that worked out very well.

The next thing I knew I wound up doing two go-arounds with the Israelis which was both fun and frustrating because the Israelis had no hesitation at all to call up their contacts on

the Hill to urge that I be given instructions to do this and do that. I would get calls from staff members on the Hill, and they certainly thought I could see my way clear to do thus and so for El Al which was a lousy airline and run very inefficiently.

Q: It's a national airline, and they are a Socialist type government.

WILLIAMSON: They are, and also they simply can't fly on the Sabbath. They cannot. Therefore, they lose a whole day of airline income every week plus having to shoulder a huge and ever growing security expenses, and on and on and on. I did Italy twice. I got involved in a wonderful negotiation with the Dutch Caribbean lines. Wish I had extended it forever! I would be flown down to Curacao and Aruba, and we would deal with the airline down there which meant three days at the beach and dealing with the tourist season rates. They had a small airline, and we two large airlines and a couple or three charters which were charters for the tourist season. The deals were easily arrived at and really Machiavellian.

Q: You mentioned dealing with the Netherlands. I can recall in the '70s going out to the Netherlands as ambassador and was told there was one major issue and that was KLM's desire for landing rights. That was it. That was his major problem. The Dutch put a lot of feeling into...

WILLIAMSON: They put a lot of pressure on us for that but didn't want to give us anything in return. I couldn't have that. Alitalia had rights in those days to fly into New York, Washington, and Florida, and they wanted onward rights to allow them to hook up to the Latin American service, but they didn't want to give us anything. They wouldn't let our airlines land in Milan, for example. Our airlines had to land only in Rome.

Q: Weren't you holding the cards basically? America is a real hub. The British are holding the cards with Heathrow, but we're holding a lot more cards.

WILLIAMSON: We're holding a lot more, but you've got to understand it. I'm not negotiating just for the nation. Each one of the airlines had a vested interest, and they can make this interest felt, and do when the time comes. You have to be very careful. One of the big problem negotiations I remember most was with Israel over the Flying Tigers route to the Middle East for freight.

Q: They turned into a freight outfit.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. The Israelis didn't want to give them any benefits, but they wanted to maintain their own. We had the cards, but we also had to deal with the desires of our people, our airlines, for inroads in foreign rights. That's hard. That's very difficult because our airlines in those days were very loath to show any consideration for their peers. As far as United was concerned, if they got what they wanted out of a deal, that's all they cared about. American Airlines could go broke for all they cared.

Q: How do you settle something like that?

WILLIAMSON: You don't.

Q: The American airlines were all bigger than their neighbors and at the same time they get something. Here you are dealing essentially with one airline on this side and a national airline on the other end.

WILLIAMSON: It's quite true. What I swiftly discovered—I discovered this in Brazil, too, where Flying Tigers again had problems with their freight route—no deal is permanent. No airline deal is ever permanent. What you're trying to do is get through season to season with minimal damage to our airlines' position and a minimum gaining of rights by the other airline, and even those are limited. You would say, "All right, between spring and fall, you can have five more landing slots in New York, but we'll have to come back and renegotiate in October." By that time the tourist trade is over, and so a lot of the urgency went out of the airlines, both Vargas or Air Brazilia, for example, or ours for a final settlement.

We'd been trying to do a final settlement with the Brits since, good Lord, the 1970s and never have come to a conclusion on that. We fly in season by season, and they fly in here season by season. We stiff them. I noticed in the newspapers this week an article on the oldest thing in the world: open skies. Anybody can come in and fly in the United States if the United States can go in and fly there. The Brits are good for that, love that side about flying anyplace they want to in the United States, but they don't want you to take up those spots in Glasgow and other places that they keep for their own airlines.

Q: It's pretty obvious the type of pressure you get from congress and El Al. This is probably the most efficient pressure group of any country.

WILLIAMSON: Absolutely.

Q: How did this translate from your point of view?

WILLIAMSON: The bureau—the Economic bureau—I think would just as soon have gotten rid of airline negotiations and given the responsibility to the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) or FAA (Federal Aviation Authority). There's no settling any of those things. Each airline's interests shift dramatically depending upon their physical and fiscal situation, new airplanes come up on line, new destinations open up. The Caribbean was just opening, getting wide open when I was doing this. Brazil is a straight forward trade thing. The Brazilian shoe manufacturers had pretty much taken over the American market. They were flying the shoes up as fast as they could. They were flying whole cargo loads of shoes up to Boston and New York. The Flying Tigers wanted part of that traffic. The Brazilians saw no reason to give it to them, so we danced around that one three or four times and, finally, the Brazilians had the grace to give us two more flights, enough to satisfy the Flying Tigers. Then, of course, three or four charter outfits came at us. "We want part of that action, too. You got to cut us into it." We had all kinds of

political pressures. I must say by and large we had very little pressure from the White House or anyone like that on these things.

Q: How did you find the Civil Aviation people? Did they relate as part of your team?

WILLIAMSON: The way it was made up—I think it still is—a state rep is the head of the delegation. You usually show up as a state rep, but we have a liaison office with the airline association, so you usually include one of those guys on the negotiation team. We have our own lawyers who specialize in air agreements. We had a whole hoard of people. In those days it was CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board). It's now CAA. Very accomplished technicians, good lawyers, and good people who had been through negotiation after negotiation. My co-leader was always a DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) from FAA. I was a State leader.

Q: What did you bring to the table that the CAA didn't have?

WILLIAMSON: One, just because State was zealously guarding its right to lead in negotiation of the treaties. Two, I had considerable experience with negotiating on a variety of things. Also, I think it comforted the other party to think they weren't in the hands of technicians who could be pretty damn inflexible. This was particularly true of the smaller Caribbean airlines and Malaysia and other airlines that are small and look upon us a market they've got to service but really don't have much to given in return. I negotiated with Salvadorian airlines. This was back in the Iran Contra days. I've forgotten the name of the Salvadorian airlines. Its headquarters were in Dallas, Texas. All of its officers—I mean all of the, the Salvadorians—had been to the States for college and had their graduate degrees. It was like dealing with a bunch of Americans across the table. They all lived there. What I expected to get from that negotiation was a call from the White House saying, "These are our guys. Give them whatever they want." I went in and I told the Salvadorian desk, the Latin American Bureau, "You tell your guys if they're going to try to bring in political arguments for giving Salvador what it wants, let's do it now and see who can win because otherwise we'll spend three days messing around here, have it all come unglued when somebody calls and tells me to do such-and-such. Furthermore, you may not want them to do so. Maybe on a political basis this is not the time you want to do a favor for that government." They thought about that for a long time. In the end nobody did anything, I think because I got the thing to come to a head early on. I have hundreds of stories about big surprises.

Q: Tell a few.

WILLIAMSON: Let's take the Malaysia negations which took place in Washington. As usual, with many foreign delegations, they like to be in Washington before Christmas. You go to the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly), you get your shopping done. This big delegation showed up including a retired air vice-marshal. They were bureaucrats, very pleasant people, and these negotiations all have a fixed pattern of happening. You meet for the first day and lay all of your demands out on the table and talk about them. Then there's a cocktail party given by our airline association on the first

night. Then we go back into negotiations again for whatever issues there are, and on the second night the embassy involved throws a party for us. After that we'd go back at it the next day. It was usually a three day negotiation. It had a rhythm to it. We were going at it hammer and tongs.

By the second day my people were getting a little worried about the Malaysian airline people. A little worried because this again was a question mostly of cargo because the Malaysian factories were busily engaged in assembling early computers; high prices, low weight, a lot of interest in getting onto that wagon. The Malaysians were hanging in there, and I didn't have any flexibility to speak of, nor did I have a great deal of support for the Malaysian position from anybody. I was dealing with this air vice-marshal. He was always going into consultations, and he would go off and caucus. The tactics of East Asian negotiators is to keep you off balance. It got to be the middle of the second day in the afternoon, and I was beginning to think that this was not going to work: We'll have to caucus ourselves. We were at the point of: What do we do, settle or throw them out? There had been this bright, handsome woman who had been at the table all of the time but had not said a word. I said, "Let me go back a ways. This is what your position is, and here's what our position is, and I'm afraid I can't go much further than that." This woman pipes up and says, "Okay, we'll take it." I looked at her, and I think everybody on my side of the table said, "Who the hell is she?" I looked down. I had seen her at the cocktail party, talked to her and been nice, but no big discussions. Turns out she was the decision maker! She was, unbeknownst to us, the power behind the throne in the Ministry of Transportation! That just blew my mind. Worked like a charm for us.

Q: In the negotiations, while you were doing this, how much was this negotiation -- or almost a kabuki dance -- did you know the way things were going to come out at the end?

WILLIAMSON: To a certain extent it was a kabuki dance. We had long, involved negotiations with the interested airlines before the other side even came to town. I mean, they went round and round and round about things. The smaller the airline involved, the more intransigent they were about their needs and desires and rights. After a couple or three days, you had a fair idea of where flexibility could be found. I kept in close contact always with the Airline Association who were professional airline negotiators and were trying to be helpful as far as they could. To a certain extent it was kabuki as I said. The first day was all kabuki. We had exchanged papers with them. They had exchanged papers with us. We had set forth our thoughtful and regrettably unyielding views on the matter. They did the same for us. We all agreed that we would meet again the next day. We'd stay until four or five o'clock.

We'd all meet the next day after the cocktail party. We'd come back together and reconsider these things. Usually by noon of the second day you knew where you'd be going. There had to be some sight of the end because the lawyers had to put this in some draft form to be signed. In a good negotiation—a fairly easy negotiation—you could, depend on having the fast shuffle done by noon on the second day, and that afternoon is when you really got down to what does it all mean in the scheme of things. The next day I didn't show up until ten or eleven o'clock because the lawyers had to write it up.

Sometimes there was no way to get agreement – you usually settled for the status quo and an agreement to meet again in six to nine months in such cases.

Once I was in Egypt, and the treaty we had with the Egyptians had been negotiated 10 or 15 years before: a codicil here, a little bit there. It was dated, and it was hard to sell the status quo. The considered opinion of the Egyptians was that we should chuck the whole thing and start from scratch. TWA (Trans World Airlines) had considerable investments in facilities in Cairo as did one of the other American airlines. They weren't about to go for that kind of deal because their entire physical plant would be held hostage. We just couldn't do that. Finally, some young guy looks up and said, "I think we'll just renounce the treaty." I said, "You will?" He was about a 13 year old child. He said, "Yup, we're going to do that." I said, "Does the foreign minister know that?" He said, "No. We'll tell him." I said, "I can't accept that. I'm sorry. There's a whole procedure here. You've got to give us 90 days notice, and I need to have something in writing from the foreign ministry. If you are really going to renounce the treaty, we'll start over again. You're certainly in your right because it's written in the treaty, but we just can't do it across the table like this." "What??? I have to tell the foreign minister this?" That one stopped him cold. There were a couple of things like that which were fun.

Q: With American airlines, would they hammer things out beforehand? Did you find you were dealing with them? Did they come to you individually?

WILLIAMSON: You were never quite sure, frankly, because most of these guys were theoretically supposed to be observing the negotiations by the airline association; however, many of the people came down just as hangers on to watch what was going on. They couldn't sit in on negotiations, but they could be on the side. They all brought their lawyers. There were maybe no more than 10 lawyers in Washington private practice who dealt with this kind of stuff. We knew them all pretty well and for the most part kept up good friendships with them. But they were always coming around for a drink after dinner to discuss just where we were. So yes, they put pressure on us.

Q: How about our embassies? Did the ambassador or the embassies get involved in these things?

WILLIAMSON: It did depend on the post, the ambassador, of course, and the issues involved. I guess the guy that kept his eye on me the most was a friend of mine, Diego Asencio in Brazil, because he was in delicate negotiations on other matters. I've forgotten what the issue was, but he and the Brazilians were not getting along well on a lot of other things.. He said, "I don't want you to come down and screw up this damn thing for me, Larry." I said, "I've got no choice in the matter. They've called a meeting, but I'll try not to get you PNG'd (Persona Non Grata). He didn't think that was very funny. Diego could laugh a lot at everybody but himself. Still can. In that case, yes, we were close to the Embassy. When we did the Israeli negations, you bet. The embassy was all over us. They gave us two liaison officers, one for everybody and one for me. It was all right. The ambassador was Sam Lewis whom I had known for years. I knew he felt that if he really wanted to get a hold of me, he'd call me. I knew my liaison officer, too. Embassies --

depending upon the issue. Italy you could fly in and out of without the embassy even knowing you were there, for God's sake. The economic section and the Civil Air Association would, but the political ambassadors in Europe were by and large not going to get involved in these things.

Q: What about the managers of the airports? One can get rather excited about passing out landing rights. This is the guy who runs the parking lot.

WILLIAMSON: That's true, but usually the idea would be that we would give them landing rights which we were perfectly able to do. They would then go and negotiate the slots. We can't allocate the slots for them.

Q: Did you know that Kennedy or something would say, "It's all very nice, but we just don't have slots."

WILLIAMSON: They would try, but the thing was if there was a deal, one of our airlines would gain something they wanted, and they were going to use their clout with the airport if it came to that. It just never crossed our table.

Q: Enough was enough.

WILLIAMSON: Enough was enough, yes. We're not going to go there.

Q: It was an international chess game.

WILLIAMSON: It was. It was great sport, and I found I loved the stuff. I had a grand time.

Q: Okay. In '84 where were you?

WILLIAMSON: I was minding my own business and Jim Bishop called me and said, "We have three posts, and we want you for one of them. What would you think of going to…" I forgot the other two, but Gabon was one. I said, "Can I call my wife?" He said, "No. We've got to know right now." I said, "All right. Gabon." He said, "Okay."

Q: You were in Gabon from when to when?

WILLIAMSON: I was in Gabon for three years: '84 to '87.

Q: You were an African hand, so you knew the territory. Describe Gabon, what it is bounded by and what were American interests? What was happening in Gabon?

WILLIAMSON: Gabon's a small ex-French colony, has about a half million people population, and is a pretty good size territory. It is mostly triple umbrella-ed jungle.. It's quite well-to-do minerals-wise. It has iron mines up- country. It has all kinds of lumbering prospects. It has uranium, and it has -- even more important in terms we are

talking about-- it's got off shore oil in great abundance. On a per capita basis, the population is one of the most wealthy in Africa. That's worked itself out as a pretty swell standard of living for almost everybody. In fact, most of the manual labor in Gabon is done by immigrants coming in from surrounding African countries. It faces on the Atlantic, and it's surrounded on the north by Cameroon, then you come around to the old Congo Brazzaville, whatever it's called nowadays, and across the Congo River, and the base of a triangular piece of landscape is the old Belgian Congo, and Kabinda. It's got about a hundred tribes; no one tribe dominates.

The first six years of independence it had a French pensioner as President who was pretty well controlled by a French viceroy. The first president died in his bed, and his deputy, a guy named Bongo, became the first elected president. He is still the president. He's a very clever man. He's seen that the wealth has been spread around amongst his people, that is, amongst the Gabonese. His cabinet when I was there consisted of 52 ministers which is one for every clan in the tribal structure. They've got the money for it. They've got Mercedes and secretaries and offices and houses. Bright young boys, bright young people, actually, are sent off. Almost invariably, they are sent to French schools, although over the last 10 years that has been changing quite a bit as they've tried to set up some technical facilities. The pattern nowadays is a French lycée and to France for the what we call undergraduate university. Then usually America, Germany and, to a certain extent, Nigeria, for technical training and post-graduate training.

There is no doubt about it, it is a one-party, one-man government, and the boss can be a little overbearing at times. On the other hand, he's a very able guy. He started out in life as a member of the French air force, joined in the second world war, and turned out to be extremely well liked and effective, and climbed his way up the bureaucratic ladder of politics and French colonial service, and now has been president since the '60s.

Q: What were our interests?

WILLIAMSON: Our basic interests were twofold: One was continued access to the oil. We had three large firms in Gabon when I was there: Tenneco, Mobil, and an exploration firm. You've got to realize what these guys had gone through with the Nigerian experience, so they were not about to put anything on Gabonese soil. All of this was done on off shore rigs.

Q: What was the Nigerian experience?

WILLIAMSON: The Nigerian experience was you went in, you set up oil exploration on the mainland, and you exploited the mainland possibilities. You did offshore, too. Once you started work on the mainland, you came under tremendous pressure to build hospitals and provide all the social services things. You also had hostages out there as you see nowadays. People are always seizing offices and valuable property in order to put pressure on the oil companies, even their own oil companies. That experience has been instrumental in the way the off shore oil in all of West Africa has been developed: strictly offshore, strictly services by expatriates, hardly any job opportunities on those rigs for

local employees. There's a lot of trafficking back and forth on the mainland in terms of supplies but hardly any signs of Gabonese or Africans at all.

Q: Does that mean that there isn't much in the way of exploration of mainland Africa?

WILLIAMSON: It certainly wasn't pursued. They pursued the offshore oil. There's no doubt there. More difficult to get at and more difficult to play with. They didn't have to stay on shore, that's the thing.

Q: You said twofold. One was oil, what's the other?

WILLIAMSON: The other was to keep Bongo as a friend of ours in dealing with the South Africans and dealing with a lot of other problems with the wilder politics of Central and East Africa. He was always a friend of ours for a price, but not a big price. He is a very conservative sort of guy.

Q: Were the Soviets involved there?

WILLIAMSON: No. This was a French chasse guarde, hunting preserve. All the mineral extractions—not the oil—were run by French companies, which have been there since colonial days. Total, the French oil company was the agent for the French government in a lot of... Not necessarily just business transactions. The Presidential body guard, for example, was composed in my day largely of fellow tribesmen of the President, officered and senior NCO'd by retired French Legionnaires paid by Total and I assume by the French government. They would send a number of jet aircraft for the use of the president and his wife. Scholarships were arranged. The life in downtown Libreville was easy. There were more French in Gabon than there were before independence, almost all associated in one way or another with minerals extraction or oil. A large military presence. A squadron of Mysteres in those days, a battalion of the old French colonial army and the marines, castile de bourdon, cops all over the place, and all the technical stuff: aircraft towers, controls, all done by the French.

Q: I would imagine then that half your representational thing would be to the Gabonese and the other half would be to the French embassy.

WILLIAMSON: It was. The fact of the matter is we didn't have very much there. Those interests—the oil companies—never came and asked me for help. Never once. They didn't need it. They had access to the president themselves. The president was clever, didn't make untoward demands on them. There were two private oil wells out there, one named for his wife and one named for the president. We were always under the assumption that there was another bank account in Switzerland, and I'm sure there was.

My job was to show the flag and be around. Frankly, it got very boring after a while. We were there for three years and there was nothing much in the way of crises to deal with. I got to know a lot of French military people who were always very forthcoming. Charming people. We would go to parties. I got to know the French embassy folks. I was

a good friend of the French ambassadors. I didn't want to crowd in on my... It was a small post, and they didn't have any contacts themselves, so I didn't want to crowd in on their relationship with the DCM. The French consul general—they had several consuls—had worked for years in Washington and spoke English very well and was a great admirer of the Americans. He and I got along like a house afire. I went to a lot of their parties. I went to a lot of lycée parties, too. You had very little interface with anybody outside of the foreign policy establishment on the Gabonese side. The president didn't want to encourage that. The French had the intelligence thing all tied up. They had a huge recording telephone tap operation going including my phone. After a couple of three years, I was pleased to leave. I had done everything there was to do twice, at least.

Q: How did you find Bongo? You had all these UN votes. How did that come out?

WILLIAMSON: We had those, but Bongo said he didn't want to get involved in that. If he did, he'd let me know. The foreign minister who was his nephew would let me know and did every so often. By and large, however, they preferred to work through the UN mission up there. He said, "You might as well make up your mind to it. We're going to vote as the French ask us to vote." I said, "Yes, but sometimes I've got to come in and make the effort." He said, "Well sure, but tell the foreign minister." I'm sure the UN people and IO would have died if they heard this conversation, but it was simply reality.

Q: You mentioned his wife. Sometimes the wives end up by running the business. What was going on?

WILLIAMSON: Mrs. Bongo came from a wealthy clan in Bongoville. He married above himself. He didn't let that stop him for a second. He had numerous girlfriends. Mrs. Bongo had a pretty active social life herself. The couple had three official children; there were other little Bongos around. The boy went off to Paris and ran a jazz band in Paris for a long time. His two sisters, on the other hand, went over to the United States to get trained, and they got MBAs (Masters of Business Administration) from USC (University of Southern California). They also bought a house just off Rodeo Drive. Mummy came along and fell in love with Los Angeles.

Q: Basically Beverly Hills.

WILLIAMSON: Beverly Hills. You bet! Eventually the boy came back and took over as his father's maitre d' politically speaking.

Q: The jazz musician.

WILLIAMSON: The jazz musician. He speaks very good English—excellent English—and has a collection of antique cars.

Q: So many of these African countries, there might be wealth, but it doesn't translate down to the people. I take it that Gabon was an exception.

WILLIAMSON: It was and it wasn't. The French for some time after the second world war-- I don't know exactly the chronology of the log here-- decided that they had to regroup the tribes who were living in very small groups. This was one of the last strongholds of clan settlements. By the way the Pygmies were up in there, too. They had to regroup these people near their supply roads so they could offer medical services and schools. And they did. They regrouped. They ripped them right out of the jungle. There is nobody living in nine-tenths of Gabon. Gradually, people trickled down to the city. The people who stayed in the bush, most stayed there by their own desire. They had a pension. They had money. He pensioned everybody over the age of 55 or something like that which in Gabon was not a big population. He had jobs for everybody.

Students occasionally would fire up a letter from the Sorbonne to a newspaper denouncing the dictator. The next thing you knew, one of the Cabinet ministers was going up to Paris and talking to the kids and pointing out jobs and Mercedes, and other things that came to people who were patriotic and want to do their best for Gabon but not to disturb the old man right now because he's a little touchy and he's busy. He bought out the bulk of everybody. There's no reason for people to be disgruntled over the government. As soon as the ashtrays in the Mercedes got filled up with ashes, they traded them in.

Q: Were you playing the game of "After Bongo, whom?"

WILLIAMSON: Yes, we were, but it was not pressing. Bongo was in his early 40s. It became quite clear that whoever it was going to be, the dauphin, was going to be selected by the French. That's all there was to it. There wasn't going to be any attempt to gild that particular lily. This is a major source of French uranium, French oil, and you don't mess with the French on those kinds of matters.

Q: Who was the president of France?

WILLIAMSON: Mitterrand.

Q: Some of these places became quite a source of funds for the Socialist party.

WILLIAMSON: I'm quite clear that it was. There's no doubt in my mind. I didn't inquire into it; it didn't seem be too politic to do so.

Q: Were you aware of a bank man descending?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. Charlie Bray once described Dakar as a place where they fly in the ice cubes from Paris every afternoon. Gabon was the same way. Huge marche. It's a place where you could buy wild European boar. The forests are full of wood pigs, but you could buy European boar over the Christmas holidays. Oysters were flown in for the European holidays. There were French people coming in all the time: ministers of state, ministers of this or that, all kinds of military people. Innumerable chances for bag men. Also, innumerable chances for bedding down young Gabonese ladies in the Palais and

having your activities photographed. More than a reasonable amount of that was going on.

Q: What you're saying is that French big-wigs would come, have a good time. There was a picture in somebody's file.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, usually. Not that it made a lot of... Judging by Mitterrand, it didn't seem to make a hell of a lot of difference one way or another. He would never invite Americans to overnight in the Palais. This was not to say that somebody could not come around to your hotel room.

Q: Did you have a problem with your officers in regard to the fact that it was, I assume, pretty expensive.

WILLIAMSON: Things were expensive. I had—it was a very small embassy—with a USIS (United States Information Service) mission of two. I had six American officers, two of whom were women. I had the world's worst admin officer, and I couldn't do anything about her. She had been Phil Habib's secretary, and I can reconstruct the conversation. "Well, what do you want to do, Charlotte, after I retire?" "Well, Phil, I always thought I'd like to be the admin officer." "Well, I'll arrange that." She didn't speak very good French—hardly any—and her managerial technique was to nag the hell out of people. She alienated the Marine Guard almost right off the bat. She couldn't run things. She didn't have any ideas and was hampered badly by lack of French.

Q: That creates all sorts of...

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. The other officers were all second or third tour officers, and I had a political officer, an economic officer, and I had a DCM.

Q: Who was the DCM?

WILLIAMSON: I had two of them. One of them was there when I came. He was a good guy. His wife had been around in Africa a lot. She was British, and he had several tours in Africa. He spoke excellent French. My second DCM also spoke excellent French. The other wives did not speak very much French, and it was ¬–not a language post. There was us and the Brits, and a few people in the diplomatic corps who spoke English, so for four years my non-French speakers had nobody to deal with except themselves.

Q: You mentioned gorillas and chimpanzees. Was there protection thereof, and how was that worked?

WILLIAMSON: They're completely protected. They're all over the place. Actually, the thing that is doing more damage to them than anything else is the logging that is gradually destroying their habitat. I can't emphasize too much how small the place is and how few people there are there. You can't get into those forests to hunt. You really can't. An army helicopter went down while I was there. They could track it. It took them four

days to find where the damn things were with high class French assistance and everything else.

Q: The administrative office can be a terrible burden... This is not, "Oh, dear." This is a pain in the ass.

WILLIAMSON: It was a pain in the ass. We had some good French locals. Reasonable French locals. She always wanted to Africanize. I said, "It ain't broke. Don't fix it."

Q: You left there is '89, was it?

WILLIAMSON: '88. I came back to Washington and I worked for about six – none months as head of performance evaluation, and then I became the deputy director general under Ed Perkins.

Q: Let's talk a bit about performance evaluation. What were you up to?

WILLIAMSON: It runs the promotion panels and the selection-out stuff. I had a set of ladies who had been doing this for ever and, again, once I decided they knew more about it than I did, I could relax. It was a big job. You ran all these promotion panels and had to do a lot of work in a six or seven month period, plus we had promotion panels for specialists. This was just the officers' promotion panel. I also ran the specialists' promotion panels. We provided officers (volunteers, by and large) for the USIA panels and for anybody else that wanted them.

Q: How did you find the promotion process at that time?

WILLIAMSON: It was rough justice, I would say. It's all subjective in terms of the luck of the draw and your reporting officer. I don't know any other way around it. I really don't. We thought about it a lot. Some people get screwed, there's just no doubt about it because of personality conflicts and everything else. They've got a right to appeal, and the appeals process is very good, time-consuming, but works pretty well. With time-in-class things it's even more brutal because it doesn't mean an injustice was done to you, it just means that your reporting officer was not as good as somebody else's.

Q: It depends on somebody writing up how you did, and some people are better at writing up than other people.

WILLIAMSON: It's hard as hell to gild the lily. With all due respect, if you're a consular officer sitting on the visa line in Montreal, there's not a lot to say about you. "He's cheerful. He's very efficient. He knows how to do things. He shows up for work." What else can you say? "He speaks French." Whereas, if you happen to be in some two-bit place and the balloon goes up and you're saving the governor general's daughter from a rabid dog...

Q: That's the truth! Were you protected from outside pressure, when some high person in the hierarchy would say, "You've got to take care of my boy or my girl over there," or something like that? Were you protected?

WILLIAMSON: I was pretty well protected from that although I must tell you that the Department of Commerce in their best club-footed style would routinely send me a list of officers they would like to see get a special look at using my background. I would say, "We'll take a special look at it. Don't worry about it, but they're going to get the same deal everybody else gets." "He's a good man. Maybe he drinks a little too much, but you know..." This sort of thing. I respected them for it. It was the only thing they had to give their people and, of course, all of that was done away with as time went on with the advent of the Foreign Commercial Service. No, that was not my problem. My outside pressure came when you got to the assignment process. That was the job as senior DAS in HR, which is essentially the chief executive officer. The DG (Director General) does the front stuff.

Q: In many ways the promotion thing can be problematic because of the writing ability. The real crux of the matter is the assignment process. You moved in '89. You moved to the DG office as Number Two there, and you were there from when to when?

WILLIAMSON: For two years.

Q: To '91.

WILLIAMSON: '92 actually.

Q: '92. First of all, your director general was Perkins?

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

Q: How did you find Ed Perkins?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, delightful to work for. Ed's got a nice sense of humor. He's an old Marine. He's got the same views on duty as I have. He's not afraid to stick his neck out. He knew he had a few decent tours left under his belt, so he wasn't looking for a hell of a lot. He left me pretty much alone to do the nuts and bolts stuff. He had his own self-imposed mission of showing the world what a black man could do in that job. And he did. I loved working for him.

Q: What piece of the pie did you have?

WILLIAMSON: I had the assignment system, and I had supervision over whatever was going on in the grievance board insofar as we could get involved in it at all. It was basically assignments, senior assignments particularly.

Q: Let's talk about senior assignments. How did you think it worked?

WILLIAMSON: I was always torn. It was put to me quite bluntly: I was responsible for seniors. A guy who was Assistant Secretary in those days said, "I'm an expert on one part of my area. I need to have three or four guys I can trust as my DASs who know the other areas and I can trust them to give me good advice. You give me those three or four guys, and I'll guarantee that nobody in this front office will ever wrestle with you about DCM's or political counselors or anything else. But you've got to do that for me because I can't run this job without that sort of thing." I started thinking about the whole thing and I gave him what he wanted. I got a lot of static from my people, but it also gave us two years of peace from that geographic bureau which was worth the price of admission.

Q: The European bureau has got a lot of cushy places. It's hard to bounce people out of a nice post in order to give it to somebody who's been sitting in the jungles of Africa or the Middle East, to get a relief and get away for a little while.

WILLIAMSON: That's right. But you try telling that to people who had been in EUR for a long time, and there are Mafias there. There's the mailed priesthood of the Eastern Europeans. There's the Italian mob. If you listen to them, only a person who's had training in the nuances of "how the Italians do this" can handle these posts.

Q: I spent a couple of years as Consul General in Naples. At a certain point I realized nobody gave a damn about this thing, but it's a great place to be.

WILLIAMSON: It was like London. Once I relaxed in London, I learned my locals could do as much as I could. I had a wonderful time! There is something about the system which assumes that we're interchangeable, and we ain't. If you think enough of a guy to make him the assistant secretary for a large bureau—or even a small bureau—or a decent embassy and then you give him somebody you and your friends, your colleagues, think would be just fine as a DCM, you're taking a big risk yourself. You're taking a lot on yourself by saying, "This guy is definitely qualified to be your DCM, and I don't want to hear from you." It doesn't necessarily mean the guy's going to go for his old college roommate, but it means he would like to have a lot more say about who he's going to live with for the next four years and run this wretched post. I was constantly torn between this view and my assignment officers who bought into the "one size fits all." They recognized there were turkeys, but they refused to recognize—and I don't think the system can recognize—the fact that there were people who are not turkeys but whose personalities would rub the wrong way, whose views on how things should be done, would be in constant conflict with the ambassador.

Q: You might explain for somebody who's going to be reading this what a turkey is.

WILLIAMSON: A turkey is an officer who can't fly, in essence: a guy who probably doesn't draft very well, who has trouble with interpersonal relationships. It's amazing to me how many people get through very senior ranks in the Foreign Service without those abilities. I think it's part of large post syndrome. If you're tucked away in the bowels of Rome or Paris, the eyes of everybody just aren't on you. That's all there is to it.

Q: There are a couple of trends you were dealing with, and I want to talk about that. What is the training of officers and, particularly, one thinks of Africa, of Latin American, Middles Eastern places where you want to bring up and coming officers and give them the chance to be a DCM, to give them executive experience.. Then there's the expertise thing of getting somebody who knows the territory. Then there was a very strong push to bring minorities—when we're talking about minorities, we're really talking about African-Americans.

WILLIAMSON: Those are all major problems. We were particularly unwise, it seems to me, in taking in a number of—this is going to sound very badly, but it's true—a number of people in their upper fifties whose life experience was on paper saying they could run a program or something like that but who had never lived abroad and who had not lived in bureaucracies.

My classic case of this was some lady who decided out of the blue that she really wanted to go China. She was in her fifties, and she demanded that she be allowed a post in China via Chinese language training. She spoke not a bloody word! She took me to the grievance board over the issue. If we'd had acquiesced in it, and I think we finally had to do it, this woman was going to take three years of Chinese and then give us two years service in some place, and then she would be out of the service for passing the age limit. It just made absolutely no sense to me, but we were constrained by what we had. I think that our major problem in all of this is that we never had the staffing that we needed to keep a certain number of slots open for trainees. We don't do too badly—we don't do too well, either—on hard languages. We do rather lousily on economics. We didn't always do it that way, but I think recently it's been hard. Language training is just really, really difficult.

I dealt with the military on a number of issues. In fact, I go over there and work for the DIA on their mock cocktail parties for attachés, and I'm always impressed with the number of people who know two years in advance where they're going to be and have signed up for two years of language training for difficult posts. We had no way of doing that. We need a way of doing that, but we don't have it. If you took that much time out given our mores, if you disappeared from view of the promotion process for two years or you took up Chinese language training, you're liable to find yourself seriously behind your classmates in terms of promotion simply because the records while you were doing all that which is virtuous and good, and we all know that, your peers are off rescuing American citizens and showing up on a piece of reporting paper looking great. The trainee just shows he's got a good ear for Chinese. There were a lot of anomalies in this thing. I think part of it stems from the idea that you've got to be fair. In the real world, there's no way that system can be fair.

Q: Let's take two of the things that certainly I think now things are easing off much more-- trying to get women into more career enhancing slots, your DCMs and all that. Also, African-Americans and minorities. Yet you're not supposed to pay attention to... That in itself is a no-no, but you're supposed to do it.

WILLIAMSON: It's like the "Don't ask and don't tell."

Q: For homosexuals.

WILLIAMSON: We just went ahead.

Q: I had one case with a man I interviewed who said he was suing the government or something because he'd been assigned to an African post as DCM—maybe it was a Scandinavian post—a cable went out for the ambassador to say, "No, I want a woman to be the DCM." So he was bounced for that. That in itself is obviously illegal, but at the same time it was fitting to the spirit of the times.

WILLIAMSON: That's right. Well, I must confess that there were times my Director General was unusually persuasive on some of these issues, and when things got really tough, I could get Eagleburger to do the job. Eagleburger talking to you about any kind of issue is, as you know, an experience that you don't want to go through too often.

Q: People have to have so many years of this and so many years of that. The system is requiring people to show all sorts of things on their record which means often we don't develop an expertise and are spending a great deal of time trying to figure the next assignment instead of lying back as I did, lying back relaxing and let the system take over.

WILLIAMSON: Any number of officers have risen to great heights by paying particular attention to what was in their personnel jacket and by seeing that they've got all the proper tickets punched. The military has exactly the same problem. They have many more ways to beat the bars. They had a lot more jobs to hand out. We have a system that has requirements that are skewed. We need expertise both in function and in area. At the same time we need people who can run things, can show leadership and manage things. The two as you well know are not run parallel to each other and have two separate requirements. We go through this periodic swing: Today it's the age of the specialist, tomorrow it's the day of the language officers. We can't seem to decide what we really want. As long as we're as starved for funds and personnel as we are, we're never going to be able to square that particular circle.

If I were going to advise anybody about the Foreign Service, I would advise them to find something you like to do, some place you'd like to do it, and relax. If you keep your nose clean, I can't guarantee you'll make ambassador. In fact, the odds are clearly against you as you come in: only X number of ambassadorial jobs, but Y number of people. You'll certainly have a wonderful life, and you'll have the chance to make a real difference.

Q: Do you have any good personnel stories?

WILLIAMSON: Nothing that I can use without any profanity or naming names. I had all kinds of personnel stories. I think maybe I'm a bit more rigid than a lot of my colleagues,

but when I caught guys or women trying to lever the system, I was pretty damn intolerant of that. I've had guys trying to recook their eligibility to get a pension; I've had guys refuse assignments on religious grounds when there were no real religious grounds.

Q: What sort of religious grounds could there be? "I can't go to an Arab country because I'm Jewish," or "I can't go to..."

WILLIAMSON: "I can't go to post X because there's no synagogue there." Post X is not alone in this regard. That's one. I can't guarantee you there'll be a Mormon church or a Christian Science church. You joined to serve wherever you are needed. I had the B'nai B'rith and a grievance on my hands which we won, but it was just disgraceful, I thought. A number of people thought they were much more deserving of consideration for jobs than I ever considered them deserving for and who were not at all loathe to go to the grievance board and bring suits. Luckily I was in the job when the Civil Service Protection Act was still in place so I couldn't be sued personally. In my official capacity, I was sued at least twice a week to right some real wrongs but more often than not to take advantage of the system, to make the system give them something that the system did not feel they needed.

Q: Were you having problems staffing certain posts?

WILLIAMSON: Of course, the African posts. Very little problem with first tour officers; some, but not much. Here I was sympathetic: When they got to the stage where their families were a certain age – let's say children older than eight or nine -- there were other considerations and they didn't want to go to Africa, for example, nor, indeed, some of the smaller Chinese and Central Asian posts. There you had to go with an excess of caution and make sure you weren't going to damage anyone permanently, but we had to find a staff of some sort of another.

You know Andy Winter. I had a big fight out with him because the doctors came to the conclusion that our anti-malarial pill was too potent and shouldn't be taken by people who either were pregnant or going to be pregnant and couldn't be taken by kids. Andy looked and me and said, "That means that nine tenths of my posts can't be staffed." I said, "Andy, I really cannot in good conscience send these folks out." He said, "How am I going to run my posts?" We went round and round about it, and I agreed he couldn't run his posts, but I was damned if I was going to be the guy who signed the orders. That fight never did die down. Andy is still pissed at me about that one. I regret it very much, but I didn't see that I had any choice. I talked to Ed about it, and he said, "I think you're right," so I thought I was covered.

Q: What happened?

WILLIAMSON: Andy had a hell of a time servicing his posts. We had to go to great lengths. Something I was always very loath to do was state: "If you go to such and such a place, your next post will be_____." I had no way of assuring them that the next post would be that post. Something in the file just didn't cut it in all of the cases.

Q: I heard somewhat later that there were jobs…like a political counselor in the Philippines that was not filled because it wasn't considered a full management position. Or they wanted to be a DCM at a small post when, frankly, the importance of going to a small post and having the title of DCM was really not a...

WILLIAMSON: Being DCM at a small post-- my DCMs always had a lot to do because I'm lazy. Both of my predecessors in Gabon were guys who did everything except issue visas, so their people never got trained. They never got a chance to do anything. We've done that to ourselves. We've talked up the need for management and for being able to run things, but we don't have very many jobs to train you to do that. Nor do we have very many jobs that need that.

Q: This is just it. Sometimes one looks at it, it sounds great to say one needs executive experience. But, damn it, you really need someone who understands the Thais and how the Thais react, the expertise there. Maybe not the best administrator, but they've got that sensitivity for dealing with the Thais, that's what we're really about, not administration.

WILLIAMSON: Nobody in the State Department Foreign Service runs very complex programs. We just don't do it. We don't have the manpower for it, we don't have the training for it, and nobody in his wildest mind would ask us to build a dam in Upper Volta or something like that. That's AID's (Agency for International Development) job. That is a management job they can hire for. But to run a motor pool? For God's sake. You usually have a four-man motor pool in small posts.

Q: We play these games which are really designed more to assuage the political administrative powers in Washington than for real life. We end up by taking somebody who is fluent in Mandarin and say he doesn't have enough experience supervising.

WILLIAMSON: And what's to supervise? People have personality problems. We should have found that out a long time ago. Supervising is, in our terms, nothing very complicated. You don't need a damn master's degree in administration for it. My humble opinion is that we have a lot of over-educated people in the Foreign Service anyway, all of whom think they should be advisers to the president on China policy and none of whom should be that close to the president ever under any circumstances.

Q: I want to talk about policy. I had somebody in here the other day who said he developed a slogan which is, "Expertise is the enemy of policy."

WILLIAMSON: Yes. I think that's right on.

Q: It's certainly true today.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, I know, as we can see it today, yes.

Q: We're getting close to a good place to stop. You did this in '91, or when did you leave?

WILLIAMSON: I retired in '94. I left in '91.

Q: What did you do?

WILLIAMSON: I stuck around for a while because Ed left very suddenly for USUN (United States Mission to the United Nations). Genta Hawkins came in, she naturally wanted to put her own person in in a hurry, and I said I'd get out, but I had no place to go. I had bummed around doing some boards for about two months, and then I got asked if I wanted to go to DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) as a liaison office over there. I said, "Sure." I worked for about two years, a good job, a lot of fun. I didn't have as much to do as I thought I might. On the other hand, they didn't have an Africanist, so they asked me to do the... They had a semester-long course on Africa for their incoming NCOs, so I did that for a couple of years. Then that tour was over...

Q: Essentially you were a professor.

WILLIAMSON: Basically, yes. Occasionally I did other things. That's when I started doing the mock cocktail parties.

Q: A mock cocktail party is what?

WILLIAMSON: Attaché training. After about the first three weeks they have a whole class of attachés, maybe 35 to 50 people.

Q: These were attachés from all services.

WILLIAMSON: Yes, and they hadn't served as attachés yet. They were in training. They get trained for a year. That's not bad; in fact, it's very good. Their wives are expected to take training, too. They get lots of language training. I did that for them, and I did the African course, and then that came to an end because they had somebody they wanted to put in behind me. I looked around, and I was about a year and a half away from mandatory retirement. I thought, "I've had enough of just bumming around," so I resigned, effective just about a year before I had to. That was it.

Q: What have you been doing since?

WILLIAMSON: I do several things. I've worked for the historic review section of FOIA (Freedom of Information Act). I work for Fairfax County's men's anti-violence group: My wife and I both do that. For eight years I taught theology, a course called Education for Ministry, run by the University of the South at Sewanee. It was finally got to be too much. I still do the men's violence program, except now it's just the violence program because we have women in it, and I do the historic review of documents. That's about it!

Q: Great. OK, I think we'll stop at this point.

WILLIAMSON: Excellent.

End of interview