

KUALA LUMPUR

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WILLIAM L. BLUE
Principal Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1948-1949)

William Blue was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1914. He received a master's degree from Vanderbilt University in 1936. After studying at The Fletcher School, Mr. Blue joined the Foreign Service in 1941. His career included positions in Canada, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, and Washington, DC. Mr. Blue was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: *Next you went in 1948 for a very short time to Kuala Lumpur. What were you doing there?*

BLUE: I was the first consul in Kuala Lumpur. I went first to Alexandria by ship and then was in Cairo for a week and in Port Said for a week waiting for a ship to Singapore.

Q: *You were principal officer there, weren't you?*

BLUE: I was principal officer.

Q: *Of course Kuala Lumpur in those days was part of...*

Mr. Blue. It was the capital of Malaya which was still a British colony. But within a month after I got there the communists came out of the jungle. If they had had better intelligence, they could have taken over Kuala Lumpur, but they didn't. It was a fascinating period. This was before Templar. The British were completely unprepared for this emergency. I had the Americans, like the head of the Pacific Tin Company, after me all the time to get up there and tell the British what they had to do. When I left, it was very risky to go from Kuala Lumpur up to the hill stations. Not long after I left, Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner, was ambushed and killed on his way to a hill station.

Q: Here you were and found yourself as principal officer in a place which in those days was of only modest concern to the United States. What were you expected to do with this uprising going on?

BLUE: You had to depend on British sources, although there was an interesting guy there--a labor advisor to Sir Henry. He had been a railroad driver. He was in touch with the commies and knew quite a lot about what was going on. Somehow we got along very well. So I did get some information about what the thinking was on the other side. The whole colonial apparatus was there and some of them resented the fact that we had a consulate there. I wanted to go up to the installation of the new Sultan in Trengano but the British political advisor there turned down my request. They wanted things to remain as they had been.

Q: Did you have the feeling while you were there that whatever happened the colonial system was on the way out?

BLUE: Yes. They had a legislative assembly which I went to regularly. And the Malays were becoming more important. I was pretty sure the British were on their way out.

Q: Were you getting any instructions from Washington or was it pretty much a matter of sending in your reports?

BLUE: Not specific instructions as I recall. Fortunately we had good relations with the British High Commissioner. He was a very decent man. He actually used to brief me and was fairly open about what was going on. But we didn't have any instructions saying, "You should do this and you should do that." There was no question that something was going to happen.

Q: But the United States basically exerted no pressure there.

BLUE: We didn't press them as I gather we did in New Delhi and places like that.

Q: Did the change over in India have any rumbling effect, I think India gained its independence about that time?

BLUE: No, I don't recall that it did. It was in 1947 when they had all those riots and got their independence, and I didn't get there until May of 1948. I don't remember that the situation in India had any effect on us.

Q: You left Kuala Lumpur around 1949.

BLUE: I left in September. My father was dying and I wanted to get back to the States. For one thing I wanted to get married. I was tired of being a bachelor and there was certainly nothing available out there. So I asked originally to return home at my own expense, but while I was back there I was called into Washington and told that I would be assigned to Personnel as I had requested a Washington assignment.

HENDRIK VAN OSS
Consul/Principal Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1951-1953)

Hendrik Van Oss was born in 1917 in Pennsylvania and graduated from Princeton University. He joined the Department of State in 1942 and the Foreign Service in 1945. His career included positions in China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Austria, Uganda, Mozambique, New Zealand, the Congo, and Washington, DC. Mr. Van Oss was interviewed by Lillian Mullins in 1991.

Q: We now move on to the period of 1951-53 when he was Consul and Principal Officer in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya. When did you arrive in Malaya?

VAN OSS: Well, I arrived in April, 1951. I was sent first to Singapore because Kuala Lumpur was a subsidiary post to Singapore, the Consulate General there. This was a somewhat strange situation because while the Singapore Consul General was my immediate supervisor, I was instructed to report directly to the Department and simply send Singapore copies of what I produced. This led to all sorts of problems because the Acting Consul General at Singapore was under the sway, or listened very closely to Malcolm MacDonald who was the British Commissioner General for the whole area. He had very pronounced views on what was going on in the Federation of Malaya. I, however, was under the High Commissioner of the Federation of Malaya who was actively engaged in the very things that Malcolm MacDonald was also covering but had a very different view of these matters.

Anyway, I stopped off in Singapore and was assigned first to attend as U.S. observer a regional rice conference there sponsored by the British. I did this for about a week and reported on it. Bob Huffman was Economic Officer in Singapore and he was an observer along with me. We wrote a long despatch on it. The conference was highly interesting. I had known nothing about rice, but I learned a lot and came to realize how important rice was to the countries represented at the conference. For example, the Ceylonese representative would try to figure out how much rice India wanted to import. He wanted to be sure they didn't import so much that his country wouldn't be able to get what it needed. There was quite a bit of bargaining and negotiating.

When the conference was over I prepared to go up to Kuala Lumpur. Those of you who were in the Foreign Service, may recall that at one time informational material on what the Foreign Service was like used to say, "Now you may be posted to London, Paris or Rome, but you also may be assigned to Kuala Lumpur." Well, I was assigned to Kuala Lumpur and at the time was not at all happy about it; I wanted to go to Vienna. Needless to say my wants were not paid attention to and I ended up in Kuala Lumpur.

This had been a very small post, opened, if I remember correctly, by Bill Blue four or five years earlier, possibly around 1947. Dick Poole was my immediate predecessor there. He and his whole staff lived in one house which was also the Consulate office. It was on Ampang Road, right next to tin tailings and an open pit tin mine. A nice old house with four large bedrooms

upstairs, it was completely open with only shutters to keep out the elements. We slept under mosquito netting. Larry Nichols was the public affairs officer and was in one room with his wife and a young daughter. One of the clerks was in another room and another clerk in the third room. Dick Poole himself was in the fourth bedroom. The office took up all the downstairs except for the dining room.

Dick Poole asked me if I would mind if he left his seven dogs with me. All of them except one were of the female gender and able to breed, which they did regularly. I said, "No, please get rid of them." He tried and got rid of about three of them, but there were four left and I eventually ended up by keeping three of the four. Then I got rid of another one and retained two, including the one male. The female bred several times to our dismay, although I tried to keep her from doing so. So we ended up with a third dog, one of her puppies.

It was an impossible situation because here was this whole small group jammed together, all of them living right on top of each other and working in the same building. I protested vehemently before I went out there and finally got the Department to agree that Anne, who was expecting our first child, and I would have the house to ourselves. They were planning to move the office down town anyway, which they did a few weeks after I got there. We found much more suitable housing for the secretaries, clerks and the USIS head.

The new office was in what was called the Loke Yew building. The Loke Yew building was the skyscraper in Kuala Lumpur. It was seven stories high and far and away the tallest building in the place. Now, I understand, nobody knows where it is and there are dozens of buildings that are at least three or four times taller. But in those days it was the giant. It was right beside the river from which Kuala Lumpur got its name. I think it means something like "muddy confluence of rivers." Two rivers met forming one river just at that point and there was a mosque right in the angle of the Y.

Q: Do you remember the names of those rivers?

VAN OSS: I would have to look that up.

This was in the pre air conditioning days. The only concession we made to the hot sun was to have tinted windows. But I remember that in those days we were much more formal in our working habits than the Foreign Service is today. We all wore suits and ties. Sometimes we would take our jackets off, but I perspired through at least three suits a day, especially if I went out in the evening. It was very, very humid. The heat was perhaps in the 85-90 range, but the humidity must have been close to 100 percent.

Q: Is Kuala Lumpur close to sea level?

VAN OSS: I think so, yes. There are hills around it but it is almost at sea level. There is a spine of mountains that goes down the center of the Malayan Peninsula, but Kuala Lumpur was not very high up.

The reason that I think of Kuala Lumpur as one of the most interesting posts I have ever had and, perhaps, one of the most important posts as well, is that it was then the scene of the third hottest war or military conflict in the world. The Korean war was going on, next came the Vietnamese conflict, and then you had the Malayan "emergency" which was a very, very troublesome affair for the British.

The Federation of Malaya was then a British dependency. The British High Commissioner was the top man. He had been faced since 1948 with a communist insurrection which had been started by Communist Chinese who were holed up in the jungles of Malaya. For years they made the life of the British and the Malays miserable. There weren't very many of them. I think during the period I was there, there were some 2000 or 2500 Communist Party members. There was the MRLA or Malayan Races Liberation Army, which numbered about 4000. Then there was a group of from 10,000-30,000 called the Min Yuen comprising the supporting infrastructure which gave the MRLA and the Communist Party their provisions. The Min Yuen was the "water in which the fish swam," to use Mao's famous metaphor. In other words at the most there were 4000 or 5000 fighting guerrillas. These managed to keep something on the order of 150,000 to 200,000 armed forces busy until the mid-fifties, long after I left.

Q: These forces were British?

VAN OSS: Well, there were some British, about 25,000. There were another 25,000 from other countries in the British Commonwealth like Fiji Islands, South Africa, etc. Then there were about 50,000 police and 50,000 militia and say another 50,000-60,000 in what was called the home guard.

Q: And those were Malaysians?

VAN OSS: Yes of one sort or another, mostly Malays. The Communist guerrillas were surely 98 percent Chinese. They had what they called a "Malay" regiment stationed somewhere but these regiments were the size of battalions at the most...500 men, let's say. I don't think there were that many Malay communists. This was a Chinese movement and one reason why it never succeeded. It eventually failed because the majority of population did not support the communists. There are more Malays in Malaya than Chinese, not many more but about two and a half million Malays, to about two million Chinese and then another 500,000-600,000 Indians, Ceylonese and indigenous people. The Malays were always on the side of the British, so what little support the communists had, had to come from the Chinese community. Most of the Chinese community was pro-Nationalist China and supporters of Chiang Kai-shek. Many of them were businessmen and the city Chinese were certainly overwhelmingly pro-Nationalist and anti-Communist. So there wasn't very much support in the country for these guerrillas.

But the one thing they had going for them was the environment. They knew how to operate in the jungle. They had been trained to fight the Japanese...the British had helped train some of them. They made their camps deep in these jungles or rain forests. Malaya was in those days at least 80 percent covered by dense forests. For example, a plane flying over the forests would spot the trickle of smoke coming out of the trees and would assume that down there was some kind of a guerrilla camp. This would be about 20 miles from Kuala Lumpur, let's say. The plane would

go back and report the location and a detachment of troops would be sent out to get to the camp. They would get there about two weeks later because of the difficulty of hacking their way through the jungle and by that time the camp would be empty. So finding the guerrillas was very difficult and required a very strong intelligence effort on the part of the British. They had to be quite innovative in order to smoke these people out. Some of the tactics they adopted were used by us and the French in Vietnam in succeeding years.

The High Commissioner when I got there was a gentleman by the name of Sir Henry Gurney. A very fine gentleman. Very, very helpful. He told me when I called on him the first time, "Anything you want from us we will give you. Any information we have you may have." And he was as good as his word. I had weekly meetings with one of his assistants who would pass official reports over to me which I would take back to my office and use in my own reports to Washington. At that time I think we had just about as much information on military operations as there was to get. What the British knew, we knew. I don't mean every last intelligence operation and that sort of thing, but I think they were very forthcoming. Sir Henry himself certainly was very cooperative.

The security situation in Kuala Lumpur was rather sensitive. In fact, when I was in Singapore, Bill Langdon, who was then Consul General, offered to sell me one of his Mauser pistols. He said I would need it because every time I went outside Kuala Lumpur I should be armed. I bought this thing and have been saddled with it ever since. I have never used it or fired it in anger. In fact, I never carried it anywhere. But I also had a .38 caliber police positive which I did carry with me on occasion.

Q: *What is a police positive?*

VAN OSS: A police positive is a .38 caliber, short muzzled revolver, what the police used to carry in those days. A six shot revolver.

Q: *Was it that dangerous on the street?*

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. Well, not so much on the city streets, but if you went into the bush or forest outside the town. I didn't carry it everywhere I went, only whenever I went out on an expedition of some sort. There was one place you could go safely by car and that was Port Swettenham which was the seaport on the west coast about an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur. You could also drive up to Frazer's Hill, which was in the mountains. It was a resort which people went to to escape the heat. Indeed when you went there you found yourself in a little bit of merry old England. Lovely cottages with beautiful flowers. It was about 70 degrees rather than 85, dry, and went down to say 60 at night. It was really a wonderful change. There was afternoon tea and a log fire in the fireplace even though it was a bit too warm for that.

Apart from those two places, anywhere you went...when you went out to the tin mines or to the rubber plantations...you always made sure that you were armed and that nobody knew you were going...that you didn't tell anyone by telephone. If you went out into the countryside you were usually required to have a military escort of some sort.

In fact, my predecessor one time was sleeping soundly in his house when shots rang out right on Ampang Road. He got up and remembered he had locked his revolver in the office safe, so he made his way downstairs in the dark and managed to open the safe and get his gun out. But by that time everything was all over. It turned out that one of the guards had had a nightmare or something like that and had shot off his rifle. The other guards heard his shot and fired off in all directions.

Q: These 4000 or so guerrillas were able to harass this whole huge country?

VAN OSS: Yes. It wasn't so much actual harassment as the knowledge that they could do so if they wished.

They permeated the place. They were down in Johore in the southern part, in Malacca, Selangor, everywhere except the main cities. They didn't thrive in the cities and as far as we know they didn't have much support in the cities. But they did terrorize the rubber tappers, the villagers...I'll go into this a little bit later.

But I wanted to mention the security aspect because it was brought home to us with shocking clarity one day in early October when we heard the rumor that Sir Henry Gurney had been assassinated. It turned out to be true. He had been ambushed on his way to Frazer's Hill. It was determined that the people in the ambush knew, probably by tapping his telephone, he was coming up there because they were hidden around a certain bend in the road and several vehicles were allowed to go through without harassment. They knew exactly when and where Sir Henry Gurney's vehicle would be. I think he always had two military vehicles accompany him. One of them had to stop for some reason or other. I have forgotten whether it broke down or whether there was an obstruction on the road. The other one, the leading one, went through the ambush and then the ambush closed in on Sir Henry Gurney. They started firing. He had his wife with him and told her to get down on the floor. Then he left the car to draw fire away from her--I have no doubt that he tried to do this because he was a very courageous and honorable gentleman. They got him. He died in a ditch. If he had stayed in the car, according to the police chief at that time, he probably would have survived.

So that was a shocker to all of us. His place was eventually taken by Sir Gerald Templar, who I will have quite a bit to say about later on.

What I want to say about Gurney is that he and his director of operations, Sir Harold Briggs, were responsible for some very farsighted and interesting policies that were over a long period of time expected to win this guerrilla war. Briefly, the Briggs plan was to get the Chinese squatters...well I guess I have to go back a bit.

The Chinese entered this country about 70 years before this, mainly as businessmen or as tin miners. A lot of them came in and as the mines wore out they became squatters on land all throughout the peninsula. These squatters were the main people from whom the Min Yuen got their recruits and from which the MRLA got their supplies. These people had no protection, it was very difficult with them squatting all over the place. So the Briggs plan in brief was to bring

them into areas that would be fortified. They would be given houses, there would be schools and they would be protected by armed guards.

This eventually became the strategic hamlet program in Vietnam. Sir Robert Thompson, the famous expert who advised our people in Vietnam, was the man who actually drew this up for Sir Harold Briggs and Sir Henry Gurney.

After Gurney was assassinated, Sir Gerald Templar came in and applied muscle to this whole policy and drove it through to a successful conclusion. Sir Harold Briggs left shortly after Sir Henry Gurney was assassinated and his place was taken by Sir Rob Lockhart, who had been the international head of the Boy Scouts, among other things.

While Sir Harold Briggs was in effect the brains and muscle behind the Gurney policy, Sir Rob Lockhart was completely eclipsed by Sir Gerald Templar, Sir Henry's successor. Sir Gerald Templar was really quite a remarkable man, one of the most remarkable I have been associated with. He was a former hurdler, a slender person. He had been head of British military intelligence, I believe. He had been one of the youngest full generals in World War II and had been the only general to have been wounded by a piano.

He was riding in his staff car and there was a truck in front of him carrying a piano. The truck rode over a mine and the piano went up in the air and came down on top of poor Sir Gerald Templar. As a result he always had trouble with his back. He wasn't crippled, but he was rather physically frail. But spiritually, very strong. He was very outspoken, lavish in his use of profanity, and quite an interesting person in every respect.

I remember him telling me at one point that he should have been born in the 18th or 19th century. He said, "If indeed I had been born at that time, the first thing I would do would be to invade Siam, and the second thing I would do would be to invade Singapore and take over Phoenix Park."

A little explanation of this. The communist guerrillas had safe havens in Thailand. When things got too hot for them in the Federation, they would just disappear over the border and go to their safe havens in the jungles of Thailand. So you just couldn't put your fingers on them. First of all they were dispersed and secondly, even if you knew where they were, they were much more mobile than the British forces so they couldn't really get at them. Thailand did not look kindly on hot pursuit or anything like that, so Sir Gerald was always having trouble with Thailand.

Phoenix Park in Singapore was Malcolm MacDonald's headquarters. MacDonald was on a completely different track from Sir Gerald Templar. The son of former Labor Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald, he was a liberal, a very nice man. He was very much interested in the Chinese and had very good Chinese contacts in Singapore from whom he was getting a pro-Chinese point of view. Not the point of view of the communist guerrillas, but that of the Chinese merchants. Sir Gerald Templar had little patience with any Chinese. He wanted them to shape up or ship out. Every time Malcolm MacDonald had suggestions as to how one should be careful about Chinese sensitivities, etc., Templar would gnash his teeth, dig in and do what he darn well pleased anyway. The two weren't actually hostile to each other, but they were just thinking along

different lines. Templar was a pragmatist and military man and he wanted to wind up the guerrilla war quickly. He was going to protect people and force them into these new villages and make sure they went there whether they wanted to or not. He had little patience for Malcolm MacDonald's liberal, anthropological approach.

Q: So after you moved into the new Consulate premises in the skyscraper in Kuala Lumpur, what was the size of your staff?

VAN OSS: I will have to count it up. It was a pretty small office. I had a young Vice Consul named David Dean, who was consular officer, and deputy political reporter. Kuala Lumpur was his first post and he later went on to fame and fortune and became head of our mission responsible for relations with Taiwan after we recognized Communist China. My economic officer was first Bob Myer and then Dick Peters. We had a political attaché named Bob Wall. We had two secretaries and a code clerk. The head of USIS was Larry Nichols and later Jack Gertz who had a deputy, whose name I can't remember at this point. Then we had an administrative officer. There were about eight or ten local employees.

The office, itself, was certainly adequate. We had a security area where only Americans were allowed to be because even in those days we were very security conscious. At one time at Bob Wall's urging, I ordered some carbines so that when and if we ever had to evacuate our post we would have a means of protecting ourselves. As you know all offices in those days had to have an evacuation plan and we had one. Unfortunately, the Department or somebody went overboard and we found ourselves the proud possessors of no less than sixteen carbines, all of them packed up in some foul smelling grease. Under Bob Wall's tuition, because he was the only one, I think, who knew anything about weaponry, we locked all the doors, pulled the blinds, because no one was supposed to know we had these carbines, and started to clean them up. I think we got through four and by that time I was thoroughly sick and tired of the whole business. We all stank of this oil, our clothes were ruined. I called a halt and said that we would keep twelve as they were and use the four we had cleaned. After all there were probably only four of us who could shoot anyway.

We were on the third floor, but my memory may be faulty there, and the USIS was downstairs on the second floor. The work that we did...I was delighted with this post because I could get up in the morning and say to myself, "What am I going to do today? Shall I cover the guerrilla emergency? Shall I go down and get briefed by the military? Shall I go downtown and talk to some of my Chinese and Malay contacts?" It was like an embassy in microcosm. It had everything that an embassy had except that there wasn't as much of it. I just was happy to be in charge and responsible for what was going on.

We did a lot of economic reporting. Malaya in those days exported tin and rubber to the United States. These were their main exports. They also had palm oil and the usual other tropical products. But those two were far and away their main products. Kuala Lumpur itself was right in the middle of important tin mining operations. We had a fair sized American community...several dozen at least. They were largely concerned with tin mining.

Pacific Tin Company had its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. Norman Cleaveland was its President and Managing Director. He became a very close friend, was a great fellow. Eventually he wrote a book called "Bang, Bang In Ampang," in which he was kind enough to mention me once or twice. He had a big gold dredge outside of Kuala Lumpur which was working a tin mine. He had about a half a dozen Americans working for him and I was close to all of them.

We also had an American engineer on the east coast in the Kuantan area of Pahang. There was a big iron mountain there and he was in charge of the mining operation.

There were some American missionaries in Kuala Lumpur. One was a fellow named Gunner Theilman, who was a Methodist minister, a very fine fellow. He didn't drink or smoke, of course. But he was extremely kind and nice. And there were several other Americans attached to his mission. I would suppose there were several dozen Americans in all.

One of the first things we had to do when we first arrived was to throw a July Fourth party. This was 1951 and the 175th anniversary of American independence was being celebrated. Our party was a big one by our standards, with something like 300 guests. Anne was pregnant at the time and had to stand in the receiving line to greet all the guests as they came in. That was the first social event that we hosted. There was a very thriving social life, lots of entertaining to do. There were contacts to have lunch with. Lots of people were inviting us over. A typical Foreign Service post where you are on duty literally twenty-four hours a day. You get very little sleep. That, plus the heat, plus the fact that there was no air conditioning at all, and that the monsoons leach vitamins out of food, made all of us get physically run-down and lose weight. It was both physically and mentally wearing. I suppose the fact that we were constantly worried about security matters too, had something to do with the tension we were under.

There was always a great deal to report. We also had many visitors, important visitors. We had, for example, at one time Justice Douglas. This was quite amusing because he arrived and came off the plane (reporters were all out at the airport en masse to meet him) wearing an old fedora hat, a dirty old shirt open halfway down his chest, khaki pants of which one pocket had torn open, and carrying a canvass water bag. In other words he was dressed for the wilds. He was not there on a protocol visit. The reporters looked past him. I recognized him and greeted him. He had a friend with him, Gilbert something. He stayed about a week with us and was a delightful visitor. It is a shame that his last days in the Supreme Court were so unpleasant because when I saw him in Malaya in 1952, he was all man, vigorous and interested in everything.

One interesting anecdote: when Sir Gerald Templar heard Justice Douglas was in town, he invited him to dinner. I said, "Yes, I am sure he would like to come, but I don't think he will have brought his tuxedo with him." (All dinners at King's House were black tie affairs.) Lady Templar said, "Oh, I am sure you could find something for him." I said, "Well, I probably could, but I am not sure he would be terribly happy about wearing somebody else's tuxedo, but I will try." So I did try. He had a pair of dark pants and I found a white dinner jacket and a black tie for him. But we couldn't find black shoes. So we went to the dinner.

The format at King's House is that all guests assemble downstairs and then at the appropriate moment Sir Gerald and his wife descend the grand stairway and go around and shake hands with each guest. So, as Lady Templar came to...

[end tape 3]

...Justice Douglas, her eyes started at his face, then came down to his black tie, white jacket and black trousers. She said, "Ah, I see that you found something and all is well." He was blushing. Then her eyes fell down to his brown shoes and she did a double take and went on to the next person. He was trying, as he said, to get his shoes under the carpet to hide them.

One thing that bothered me about that dinner. The guest of honor was Lord Tweedsmuir, who was the son of John Buchan, the author of "The Thirty-Nine Steps." He was a mere lad in his early twenties. He sat at the Templar's right and Justice Douglas sat way down "behind the salt" opposite me. Justice Douglas had been a presidential candidate and was a Supreme Court Justice, and I thought surely British protocol could have done a little bit better for him. On the other hand he was an unexpected guest so I guess we had to make allowances. Anyway, neither of us said anything or even thought about it at the time.

We had other guests. We had Thomas Dewey but nothing of great moment happened there, except that he couldn't hear anything when he got off the plane. We had somebody or other Foster, then Under Secretary for Defense. I remember he was supposed to arrive at a certain time to go to lunch at King's House and his plane arrived an hour and a half late coming from Burma or some such place.

We had John F. Kennedy and Bobby, who had just graduated from law school, and one of their sisters. But the sister never showed up in Kuala Lumpur, I think she stayed in Singapore.

Q: *Why were they all coming to Kuala Lumpur?*

VAN OSS: Well, because this was an interesting place. It had the third hottest war as I told you and economically it was very important. Tin and rubber were both very important to us in those post-war periods.

Q: *Was John Kennedy in Congress at that time?*

VAN OSS: He was a Congressman at that time. I am ashamed to say that although John F. Kennedy entered Princeton the same time that I did, spent several months there and lived in the same dormitory that I lived in, I never knew him. I didn't know at the time he came to Malaya that he had ever gone to Princeton. He got some blood disease, perhaps hepatitis I believe, left Princeton after a few months and subsequently went to Harvard. I may say that if I had known he was a classmate, his visit would have been a far more pleasant experience than it turned out to be.

Adlai Stevenson visited Malaya after he had been defeated in the 1952 presidential election. I may interject that all the British wanted Adlai Stevenson to win, even Sir Gerald Templar. He

liked and was a great admirer of Ike, but as an intellectually superior person himself, he thought Stevenson's speeches were great stuff and that he would be a much better president than Eisenhower. Stevenson came with Barry Bingham, the head of the Louisville Courier Journal. Anne's parents were great friends of the Bingham's and I knew them reasonably well. He came with Bill Attwood, who was then one of the editors of Look magazine and later became Ambassador to Guinea and Kenya. There were several others whom I can't recall.

I might mention one little episode that gave me a gray hair or two. I had arranged to have Stevenson taken out by helicopter over the jungle so that he could get an idea of what the terrain was like. There were only two operating large helicopters at that time, which we had supplied the British. My boss from Singapore, Chuck Baldwin, was up for the occasion and there was no room for yours truly on either helicopter. So I stayed morosely at home while Adlai and all the others went off on these two helicopters.

I had been at my desk for a couple of hours when the phone rang. General Templar's aide was on the phone and he said, "Hank, there has been a slight to-do." I said, "What do you mean, a slight to-do?" "Well there has been a spot of trouble on one of the helicopters." I began to tense up a bit. I said, "There has been? Which helicopter?" "Oh, I'm not sure," he said, "Don't panic. I'm sure everything is all right. But as a matter of fact, one of them has gone down." And I said, "Which one?" I was getting highly excited at this point. He said, "As a matter of fact it is the one with Stevenson on it." I really began to sweat, wondering where I could find a flag to cover the casket, etc. A few minutes later the aide called again and said, "Nothing to worry about, the other helicopter has landed and taken Adlai Stevenson off. Nobody is hurt, everything is all right."

Well, what happened was that the main rotor stopped whirling on Stevenson's helicopter. Its descent was slowed by the tail rotor which was still turning. The pilot with great skill brought his machine down in a small clearing in the jungle and everybody was safe. But boy, I was trying to figure out how I could have explained why I had allowed the Democratic presidential candidate to risk his life in a helicopter in a zone of hostilities.

Q: Without going with him too.

VAN OSS: Without being there to help him. My boss (Chuck Baldwin) was there to hold his hand.

The point to all this is that Kuala Lumpur was on the milk run for many prominent people. We did have a number of visitors of one sort or another and that always made for tough work as any Foreign Service officer knows. When you have an important visitor, a Congressman or political figure, you have to do what you can to see that his visit is successful and that takes time. When your facilities and resources are limited that means that you have to do a lot of things yourself. The rest of the work goes on so you have to squeeze them in in some way. So we were very, very busy.

Another man I might mention was Donald MacGillivray, the Deputy High Commissioner under Templar. When I first saw him I thought, dear me, here is the epitome of the British public school, wimp-type Britisher. He was thin with a prominent Adam's apple and looked as though a

breath of air would blow him over. But I couldn't have been more wrong. He turned out to be a very fine person. He supplied the human touch that Sir Gerald Templar had but kept under wraps.

He was the one who did most of the traveling throughout the peninsula. He was kind enough to take me along with him on several occasions. Otherwise it would have been very difficult for me to get to some places. Everything was laid on for him, and I just piggy-backed along and saw a lot of things that I otherwise might have had great difficulty seeing. We visited a number of rubber plantations. We stayed in a Malaya Kampol. The Malays often lived in houses on stilts. They built their houses up off the ground so that air could circulate and domesticated animals were kept underneath. We spent a night or two in one of those. We visited the British advisers in the various Malay principalities.

I might point out now at this point that the Federation of Malaya consisted of nine Sultanic states and two settlements: Penang and Malacca. The nine Sultanic states were ruled by sultans. The British had a special arrangement with each sultan who had his own governmental structure, with his own administrators headed by what they called the *mentri bazar*, who was in effect the prime minister of that particular Sultanic state. The *mentri bazar* was the man who really ran the state, the sultan was the ceremonial head and ruler, but really didn't have many substantive functions. I would say that the sultan of Johore, if I remember correctly, was somewhat of an exception to that rule. He was a bit more independent and feisty than the others.

I wanted also to say that the Consulate in Kuala Lumpur was responsible for the southern part of the Malayan Peninsular. I had a Foreign Service colleague in Penang who covered the Sultanic states of Kedah, Perak and Kelantan. I had Selangor, Trengganu, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Johore. I don't know why the distribution was so uneven, but I had a much larger office than he. I think he was the only officer at his post. Larry Lutkins was consul at Penang at that time.

One thing I probably should start talking about now is the independence movement that was going on in Malaya, which was highly important and has gotten lost in the shuffle in this tape. The British were obviously at that point resigned to the fact that eventually Malaya would become independent. But they wanted to be sure that they would be independent in the image that they envisaged for it and not as a communist satellite. And don't forget that these were days just after China had been taken over by the Communists, North Korea had invaded South Korea, and Ho Chi-Minh and his Viet Minh were fighting the French. The common belief in those days was that the Soviet Comintern had orchestrated all these conflicts and that the Malayan conflict was part of the communist master plan to conquer the world.

Q: *Well, they said it was.*

VAN OSS: Yes. We all believed it.

In any event the British wanted to be sure that this guerrilla insurgency did not succeed. So they conceived this Briggs plan of creating new villages which were established not only for the protection of the squatters but also for their education. It would put them in contact for the first

time with schools. There would be medical facilities. It would create a medium for conducting elections and for teaching people the rudiments of democracy.

But, as always, there were people in Malaya who felt the British weren't moving fast enough. There were a number of Malays and Chinese who felt that Britain should move faster towards giving up its hold over Malaya. Malaya was not a colony, incidentally, the Sultanate states were all protectorates. The only colonies were Penang and Malacca, the two settlements I mentioned earlier.

One very interesting person who was being groomed to lead an independent movement and take over the country was a man named Dato Onn bin Jafaar. Dato Onn had been the head of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), which was a nationalist Malay movement. No Chinese members. While he was head of UMNO he was very popular. He was a good rabble rouser and potential leader. Also he was a favorite of Malcolm MacDonald who felt that he represented the voice of the future in Malaya.

The British made a great mistake. They felt they had to bolster Onn's status so they made him, as I recall, minister for home affairs in the government that existed at that time. In other words, they took him out of his role of nationalist leader and made him in effect a British bureaucrat and expected him to keep his leadership and following and remain the political force that he had been up to that time.

This was a naive thing that the British did constantly at that time. The minute they saw people who they thought were promising political figures whom they approved of, they tried to help them by giving them jobs as administrators, not realizing that although this might have improved their knowledge of how government works, the British were really giving them the "kiss of death." They were destroying their political base among the masses, who didn't like the British or persons who collaborated with them.

As a result Dato Onn, who had been moving along up to this point as the British had hoped he would, was compromised with his base of popular Malay support. Part of the British vision was a cooperative venture between Malays and Chinese, because the Malays couldn't run the country alone. They didn't have the drive, or knowledge. They needed the help and support of the Chinese who did have the drive and were the businessmen, the pragmatists.

At one point Dato Onn resigned or lost the leadership of UMNO. He formed his own party, the Independence of Malaya Party. This was going to be a party which would cooperate with the Chinese and other ethnic groups. The main Chinese honcho of the period was Tan Chen-lok, a wealthy person Malcolm MacDonald had cultivated. Tan did have a great deal of prestige among the Chinese community. But in forming this new party, Dato Onn, in trying to include all the factions in Malaya--the Chinese, Malays, Indians, etc--cut himself loose from the Malays and besides, did not win Tan Chen-lok over. In essence the only people who really supported him were the Indians, a very small minority.

Then the British gave him the final nudge to oblivion by appointing him minister for home affairs and giving him all these administrative duties. To cut a long story short, Dato Onn's

image plummeted. He realized this and got crankier and crankier. I saw him many times and he would get madder and madder at life in general. He found himself in a situation that he just couldn't handle, couldn't control.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, an hereditary Malay prince, took over and was elected head of the United Malay National Organization. The British at first made light of Tunku Abdul Rahman because although he had been well educated he never got very good marks. He managed to get a law degree, but they scoffed at that. Some people considered him rather a clown. I found him a very nice guy. I didn't consider him politically very charismatic at that point, but I am not a Malay and Malays apparently did find him appealing because he became the head of UMNO, eventually formed some affiliation with Tan Chen-lok and the Chinese, and eventually took over as prime minister of Malaya when it got its independence in 1957. He became a tremendous force.

But at the time I was there this was not at all apparent. One knew he was in charge of UMNO but apart from being an awfully nice person he had not shown all that much political skill.

The British, as I say, didn't like him, but he was the one who ended up on top and they had to work with him eventually. All the people who became ministers remained bureaucrats. Dato Nik Kamil, for example, was the Menteri Bazar of Kelantan. He was a fine, very intelligent fellow. The British appointed him minister for something or other and he eventually became ambassador to the United States. He had a fine career, but my point is that the British had probably envisaged him as an eventual prime minister and he never quite blossomed into that.

I want to say something about Norman Cleaveland, the head of Pacific Tin Company. He had been in Malaya for a long time. He had seen, long before the British, that whatever was going on in Malaya was something important and dangerous and something that had to be watched carefully. In the 1947-48 period a gentleman named Gent was the British High Commissioner. When the first evidence of terrorist activity took place, some tin miners, including Norman Cleaveland, and some rubber plantation owners came to Gent and said that something had to be done. He said, "Are you gentleman sure that you are treating your laborers properly?" He thought the guerrilla uprising was just a labor movement.

Well, Norman Cleaveland lost patience, chartered a large plane, bought weapons I think with his own money, flew them in and armed his miners. As a result they survived and were not taken over or run over by the guerrillas. Sir Gent was replaced by Sir Henry Gurney, who knew very well what was going on and who was responsible in the first instance for the policies that eventually Sir Gerald Templar carried through to a successful conclusion.

Norman Cleaveland was really a great fellow. He had been in the back field on Ernie Nevers' undefeated football team at Stanford, graduating in 1924. He had been a member of the first and only, up to that point, Olympic U.S. rugby team, going to the Olympics in France. The team eventually won the gold medal.

Norman's mother was one of the first women ever to go out to New Mexico. She settled in the Sante Fe area and wrote a book, which I think was called, "No Life For A Lady," which has been very popular, has run through several editions and is still in print. He, himself, was a bachelor

when we knew him in Malaya, in his late 40s. He had gained fame there by rescuing some young lady who got caught on a field by a Brahman bull. He rushed over to the bull, grabbed it by the horns and wrestled it to the ground in true cowboy style, a technique he had learned in Santa Fe, having grown up in the far West.

He was a great admirer of Herbert Hoover, which will give you some idea of his political inclinations. I used to consider myself somewhat of a liberal in those days. We used to have great arguments. He used to take me on pig hunts. We would go out early in the morning from Kuala Lumpur with a group of other men, dogs and beaters. It was dark. I never could fire a gun accurately and went out just to get the atmosphere, although he made me carry my police positive .38 caliber revolver, just in case.

We would go into a hiding place in the bush while the beaters were beating up the pigs. Then Norman would get arguing about economic matters and what was wrong with the United States. His pet hate was Democratic Senator Symington because Symington in his Senate Committee in Washington accused the Malayan tin miners of "gouging" the American taxpayer. Of course, the price of tin was indeed high, but these tin miners were mining tin under rather difficult conditions. Tin was in great demand at that point so the price rose. I don't think the tin miners themselves had very much to do with it. Then Senator Lyndon Johnson echoed Symington's sentiments, to Norman's disgust.

Norman would get riled up over whatever the subject might be and you couldn't get him off the subject of tin, once he got started. So there we would be out in the boondocks of the jungle listening to the beaters in the distance, Norman declaiming what should be done with people like Symington, and a pig would jump out of the bush and run across our path and he would say, "Uh oh, there's a pig. Just a moment." By the time he got his gun armed, the pig would be gone and he would resume his economic diatribe without a loss of breath.

He stayed in Malaya quite a long time after we left. How long exactly, I don't know. I think he was there when the country became independent in 1957. To our amazement he got married while there in the late fifties to a girl who was at least 25 years younger than he. I think she was the daughter of a British admiral. They had several daughters. He kept a home in Santa Fe and one in England. At the moment they are separated. He is living in Santa Fe and is a very senior citizen, being in his early nineties. He is still full of fun, as feisty as ever and as conservative as ever. In my opinion he was the best that American enterprise can produce--honest, intelligent and courageous.

Q: I would like to talk a little about the Department. How interested was the Department in what was going on and what was your relationship with them? What were their directions to you considering what the British were doing?

VAN OSS: It is a little difficult for me to reconstruct the instructions that I got from them. I think they were pleased with the reporting we were doing and I think I was carrying out my mission. We were there to support the British. There was no question about that. We were to encourage the British in their efforts to lead this country into independence and we were to aid the British tangibly in any way we could.

One of my bosses was Phil Bonsal, I think he was the director of the Office of South Asian Affairs...he might have been deputy Assistant Secretary also...he came out and we had very cordial relations. While he was there I was a little bit peeved because Sir Gerald Templar asked him for helicopters and Bonsal magnanimously agreed to see what he could do. Even though I was a mere "youngster" at the time I thought that if Sir Gerald really had confidence in me he would have raised the helicopter issue with me so that I could have had a chance to help out. But these are the things that happen.

As I told you before, we were a subsidiary post to Singapore. I got along very well with Bill Langdon, but he didn't stay long as Consul General. His place was taken by Jack Goodyear, in an acting capacity. Jack felt very strongly that Kuala Lumpur should fit into the Singapore command structure and that I should follow his lead in my political reporting. I had had considerable experience with political reporting in China and in the work I had done in the Department, with biographic intelligence and that sort of thing. Jack had never done political reporting and he was really listening to Malcolm MacDonald. Whenever what I said, reflecting my contacts, went against what he had heard from Malcolm MacDonald, he would pooh-pooh it. He would say, "Well, this isn't right."

So we thoroughly irritated each other, although I liked the man and still do, but we didn't work together very well. I had my instructions to report directly to the Department, which I insisted on doing. My reports didn't go through him but I sent him copies of everything I did.

Then Chuck Baldwin came out as the regular Consul General. He was a much more amenable person and much broader gauged, at least from my point of view. I got along extremely well with him.

The only bane to my existence was in the USIS activity. The USIS man in Kuala Lumpur had to work under and through the USIS chief in Singapore, even though I had the right to report directly to the Department, he didn't. The USIS head in Singapore was named Elmer Newton, a very nice man but also very feisty, and with his own ideas. He had the impression that USIS was really the organization that carried out U.S. policy. He considered that consuls and consuls general were there to take care of Americans, to give visas, to report on economic matters, maybe military matters, but when it came to carrying out policies it was up to USIS to do that.

Q: Where did he get that idea?

VAN OSS: Well, I suppose from the idea that USIS is a spokesman for American policy and was in charge of cultural exchanges. For example, he took it upon himself to advise the Chinese in my district to beef up their labor union activities. I knew, from my contacts, that this was just asking for trouble. The Chinese Communists were trying to get their foothold in the unions and by beefing them up you were fertilizing the field in which communism might grow. In any event, it was not up to him to make that decision. He could have a hand in it, yes, but this was a policy matter which should have been articulated in the Department and not by him blundering around in what I considered to be my area of responsibility.

This led to some unpleasant set-tos that he and I had. Nevertheless, I always respected the man. He was good, his heart was in the right place, but he just couldn't stand for what he considered interference by me in things he was doing, when he was really the one who was interfering in my work.

As far as the Desk people in the Department were concerned, Dick Poole, my predecessor was eventually on the Malaya Desk. We had very cordial relations and as far as I know he was satisfied with what I was producing. Ken Landon was another one back in Washington. Another person who eventually came out to Kuala Lumpur was Oscar Armstrong, a close friend of mine. He was a Chinese language officer who had been stationed in Singapore. The work load in Kuala Lumpur was really very heavy and we were far too small to handle it properly. Also I felt very strongly that...I was only a class 5 officer at the time when class 6 was the bottom rank...my job should have been held by an FSO-3, somebody who could pull rank a little more than I could as a young FSO-5. So I recommended that my successor be a more senior officer, especially if the place was going to become independent, so that he could operate a little more freely and without worrying too much about protocol and having to work with people who greatly outranked him.

This is not something that preoccupied me to any extent, it was just something that became obvious. The work load was extremely hard. I knew the office would have to grow and that unless the principal officer had a higher ranking it would be very difficult to assign experienced persons there. If my successor was not at least an FSO-3, he would be assigned relatively inexperienced officers under him, and thus wouldn't get the quality personnel I thought the place should have. Anyway, the Department assigned an FSO-2, Eric Kocher to replace me.

Q: Which would be a senior Foreign Service officer today.

VAN OSS: Yes, and it was in those days.

Q: You mentioned a number of famous American visitors, did any British royalty come?

VAN OSS: Not exactly royalty, but royal family yes. The Duchess of Kent, whose husband had died, came and brought the Duke of Kent, heir apparent, with her to attend some celebration. Their visit took a tremendous amount of time on everybody's part, the British especially. This was great stuff for them. They organized everything down to the last second. I can remember being with one of the organizers at some point along the parade route. He looked at his watch and said, "I reckon she will now be getting out of the gate at King's House." We looked up and indeed her car was just being driven out of the gate at King's House.

Anne and I were invited to the receptions, and other events. We were given instructions on how our wives should curtsy, but I didn't think it was appropriate for the wife of an American official to curtsy so I suggested to Anne, who didn't want to either, that she simply bow her head as she shook hands to show that she was respectful, without being obsequious. And, indeed, that is what she did. But the wife of one of the British rubber planters, Headly Facer's wife, didn't curtsy as a matter of principle. She, being a British subject, got into hot water. The King's House people noted her act, and she was boycotted. She never went to another reception in the King's House. That shows how the British work.

And this protocol business was so annoying because all these people, these young officers...I was on good terms with most of them...I used to play water polo with them for example...but at a reception when the Duchess of Kent would come into the room these men would come in and officiously push everyone out of the way and say, "Make way for her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Kent." They didn't see anything amusing about it at all.

Speaking of British protocol, this is one of the less pleasant aspects you run into when you are in a British preserve. For example, the British Advisers...each of the Sultanic states had a British Adviser, or Resident. When he would visit the Kampongs and villages carrying out his duties, he would always wear a hat or a necktie. Not because he wanted to, but because this marked him as being different from the "natives."

I remember very vividly one trip Anne and I took out to Trengganu, a Sultanic state on the east coast. I might say that Kuala Lumpur was essentially a modern city. It had Malay Muslim type architecture and things of that sort, but had all the conveniences...elevators, electricity, etc. Selangor was a fairly advanced Malay state, but when you went out to the east coast, Trengganu, you went out to Malaya as it always has been. There is where you see Malayan huts on poles to account for the high tide. The moon shines, the waters are sparkling, the women are in sarongs, the men wear their black Malay hats. Very colorful.

On this particular visit we stayed with the British Resident. I can't remember his name, but I do remember that his wife was a "Lady," one of noble birth. He was very hospitable. He laid on a venture in which we were to go out in his yacht and motor up the coast, where Malay villages were having some sort of harvest festival on the shore. We would be picked up by a Malay canoe and brought through the surf to the shore where we would join the festivities. We approached the shore. It was dark, the middle of the night. We could see the bonfire burning brightly and people dancing around it. The first canoe came up and the Resident told me and a few others to get on board. We were brought in through the surf which was quite a hair raising experience. Then apparently the surf picked up so it was decided that it was too rough to unload the other passengers from the yacht. They would have to wait until the surf subsided.

Then as I was standing on the beach, I heard somebody say, "Oh, one of the row boats has come in from the yacht and it has capsized." I didn't pay much attention to that and then someone said, "Oh, it is the Resident and he has some lady with him and they both capsized in the water." I got a little nervous at this because I had been a lifeguard in my past and I know how difficult it is to bring an ordinary rowboat or dinghy through high surf. So I rushed to where this happened and there appeared before me Anne, looking like a drowned rabbit, and the Resident, equally moist, and a couple of his crewmen. Apparently they had decided before the warning came in that they would come to the shore by dinghy. They got caught by the waves and were lucky they didn't get hurt. I was quite angry. But I noticed the Resident did not have his necktie on. I said, "Well, I see that you have finally relented, you don't have your necktie." He said, "Oh yes I do. Here it is," and he pulled it dripping out of his pocket and put it on.

Trengganu was a delightful spot. It really was the Malaya of Somerset Maugham and myth. It was always pleasant. And I might add in general that it was always pleasant to travel and see

other towns and villages. While I had little opportunity to do that in the early days because of the security situation, I had many opportunities our second year because security had become much, much better.

Q: So Templar was able to accomplish something with his safety villages?

VAN OSS: Yes. These villages were extremely successful. That is why, I'm sure, they were adopted years later for the Vietnam scene. The British became very much more efficient. Templar was a superb leader. In fact, he is one of the finest leaders I have been associated with. Head and shoulders above most of the people in similar positions that I have run into. He had a very good chief of police, Arthur Young, who had been the chief of police in the Borough of London, the original old city of London. He was a big 6'6" fellow. He taught the Malay policemen to help Chinese women across the street, go unarmed and treat people civilly. He tried to make London bobbies out of them, and succeeded to a certain extent. Their relations with the populace, which had been very dicey before that time, especially since the policemen were mainly Malays and the population was at least half Chinese, became extremely good. Also the British trained a lot of home guard people in the new villages to carry arms and build up their own little security forces. They eventually became quite successful. They weren't too successful in the beginning, of course, because the people were still scared of the guerrillas who would approach a settlement in force and terrorize people.

I haven't said much about the rubber plantations, but they were very interesting too. They were highly organized, very efficient.

Q: Who owned them?

VAN OSS: Mainly British, but there was one large Belgian plantation. I don't think we Americans had any rubber plantations out there.

Q: No Firestone?

VAN OSS: I don't remember any. I don't think so. Tin, yes, and iron. Well, the iron mountain near Kuantan was owned by an Australian, but had an American engineer who was chief of the operation.

Q: You mentioned that the Malays were Muslim.

VAN OSS: Yes, the Malays were all Muslim.

Q: And the Chinese?

VAN OSS: The Chinese were a mixture of Buddhists, Christians, and Taoists. They were not a particularly religious group. The Chinese had their own schools, their own communities. They were quite exclusive.

The Indians were a force to be contended with. There were a number of Indians and Ceylonese in the government.

But the Chinese were very exclusive and wanted to be taught in their own language. They felt their education was quite as good or even better than the British on the one hand and the Malay on the other.

Q: *The Malay language is related to Thai is it?*

VAN OSS: No, it is related to Indonesian. I was supposed to learn Malay and I tried, but all my contacts were with English-speaking people so I really had very little opportunity, except when I was traveling, to speak Malay. The traveling that I did was usually in the second half of my stay there and I just never did get any degree of fluency in or even working knowledge of Malay.

Q: *The Chinese probably spoke Chinese, Malay and English.*

VAN OSS: Yes.

Q: *How widely was English spoken by the Malay?*

VAN OSS: Oh, I would say in the country, not widely at all, but among the people that I met, the officials, all spoke fine English.

Q: *Was English taught in the schools?*

VAN OSS: Yes, in many of the schools.

Q: *Was it compulsory?*

VAN OSS: As far as I can remember, yes. A large percentage of Malays went to school. The new villages opened up all sorts of possibilities for education that hadn't existed before.

Q: *Before that they were scattered?*

VAN OSS: Yes, along the rivers and forests.

Q: *In those scattered areas was there any kind of farming or did they live on fish, etc.?*

VAN OSS: I would say there was a lot of fishing. I don't really recall much in the way of farming. They must have grown some crops.

Q: *They ate rice.*

VAN OSS: Yes, they ate rice. My orientation was almost 100 percent political and military. While I had to sign everything that Dick Peters and Bob Myers did, of course, I can't say that I

knew all that much about the economics of the country. They had poultry, fresh vegetables, coconuts, fruits, the usual tropical food products.

Q: Some place rice was probably grown or imported.

VAN OSS: Oh, I think it was imported largely. I don't think...well maybe they did produce rice. I am afraid my memory doesn't help much on that.

Just to conclude, my time in the Federation was thoroughly enjoyable. The people were extremely pleasant...Malays, Chinese, British, Indians. It was one of the nicer posts. The story has a happy ending because Malaya did reach its independence and did become a viable entity. It had its problems when it united with Singapore, but then it separated because Tunku Abdul Rahman did not want to have a majority of Chinese in the new Malaysia. Singapore with its overwhelming number of Chinese put the numbers of Chinese over the Malays and they didn't like each other. Lee Kuan Yew, a bright, aggressive, highly educated Chinese and easy going Tunku Abdul Rahman were not exactly soul mates and didn't get along. But they parted in a friendly way and the two countries still work closely together to this day.

But in contrast to some of the African countries where I have served since, which have gone through all sorts of troubled times since they have become independent, I think free Malaya has done relatively well.

Q: Certainly better than Burma for example.

VAN OSS: Yes. From what little I know about Burma, the psychological atmosphere in Malaya is much more benign. In Burma, from what little I could learn when I visited Rangoon in 1947, everybody was scared to death of the Burmese, of the security situation. I really can't say anything about it but I gathered that it was an entirely different atmosphere. Heavens, shortly before I arrived in Rangoon virtually the entire cabinet had been rubbed out, machine gunned to death. Malaya was much more benign, ...with the exception of the guerrilla insurgency which was tough and rough...but today I think it is one of the pearls of Southeast Asia.

Q: So you left in 1953 with some regret.

VAN OSS: Left with great regret, yes, but with happy memories. And I have never been back.

DAVID DEAN
Consular Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1951-1954)

David Dean was born in New York City in 1925 and graduated from Harvard. He entered the Foreign Service in 1951. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Rotterdam, Taichung, Hong Kong and Taipei. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: You were in Kuala Lumpur from what, about '52?

DEAN: Yes, at the turn of the year; it must have been from '52 until about the middle of '54. Just before I got there, the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, had been assassinated in an ambush on the way up to one of the hill stations, Fraziers Hill. He was a very courageous man. He was going up there with his wife and just a driver and a police constable in the car. They had no other type of protection. He saw the road blocked with a tree trunk, and he knew what it was because that is how the communist guerrillas would attack. They would block the road and then fire on the cars when they stopped. So, he got out of his car and let them fire away. They killed him, but his wife was not injured. The British sent Sir Gerald Templar to take his place. Templar, who was later chief of the Imperial general staff, was a livewire and he energized the campaign against the terrorists.

Q: He was a name to conjure with.

DEAN: That's right.

Q: Were you there at that time?

DEAN: Yes, I knew him and his family quite well and saw him frequently, not on official business, but socially. He was very active. His daughter invited a lot of younger people to various functions. She was about my age, so I would go there fairly frequently with a number of friends. He would join these parties and have a very good time. He was really quite a brilliant person too. It was he who organized the home guards around the Malay kampongs. He also instituted resettlement areas to bring the Chinese squatters off the land and guard them in a barbed wire village which would have schools, hospitals, and places for them to work. because the communist guerrillas were pressing the squatters for food and information. Templar was trying to isolate these people from the guerrillas and to deny the guerrillas both food and intelligence. I used to go around occasionally with the patrols into the jungle looking for communist camps. There were several different kinds of troops there besides the home guards which just supported the Malay villages mostly. The police and the army would guard the resettlement areas. Then there would be patrols into the jungle by whatever units of the British Army that happened to be stationed in Malaya, Australian units or Fiji units, and Gurkhas, too. One of my friends, John McKay had been a brigadier general in the Indian army. He had gone to Nepal and recruited three or four police jungle companies from the Gurkhas, most of whom had been retired from the Indian army. Some of them were quite young people; maybe they hadn't even joined the Indian army. He brought them to Malaya and established them around certain key areas in the mountain chain that runs up and down the Malayan highlands. They would try and interdict the movement of the communists going back and forth and sent out patrols to try and find out where they were bivouacked and to kill them. I went out with them a couple of times. One time, it was during the Dashira festival, the new year's festival, during which they stack all the arms of their company in a square, behead various animals and sprinkle them with blood, and then have three days of plays and drinking and everything else you can imagine. It is their major time to let off steam. I was present during one of these rituals and it was quite a sight to see. Anyway, travel through the jungle with these patrols was very difficult. The jungle was

so thick, you had to hack your way through if you didn't find any trail. Most people said the British soldiers could only get one or one and a half miles a day whereas the Gurkhas were able to go at least three, sometimes more. They were really good troops. The whole atmosphere of the time, of course, was one of tension because of the emergency situation. The communist guerrillas were trying to disrupt the economy of the country by slashing rubber trees and blowing up the tin mine dredges in an effort to cripple the country and eventually take it over. So, General Templar was really like a breath of fresh air coming in from the outside. The former Sir Henry Gurney and the Malayan civil service had never seen anything like him before. They had more of the old fashioned Somerset Maugham type of attitude.

Q: Sitting on the veranda at night waiting for the sun to go over the yardarm.

DEAN: Indeed there was a lot of that. It was a really fascinating time. A lot of the rubber planters existed in an almost besieged state. They lived on their rubber estates, their bungalows surrounded by barbed wire, with special troops hired to protect them. Inside their bedrooms, they would have sandbags stacked so that if someone fired or threw grenades from outside, they would be protected. They would drive around their plantations in old Fords that had an armored sheet underneath it. Even the windshield would come down; a piece of metal with just slits in it. The windows would be thick sheet metal. There were many instances when they were ambushed and killed, so if you got an invitation to a rubber plantation, you would usually go out in a convoy and spend the night and come back together the next day. The rubber planters had some fairly intense parties. They lived under siege, so it was a hard life for them. A lot of rubber tappers were killed or their trees were slashed. Depending on where the communists were, it was a dangerous life for them. When they got into town they lived it up a lot at the Dog, a popular sports club, or the Lake Club or the Selangor Golf Club or other places where they congregated late at night, such as Nanto's Milk Bar. I don't think Nanto ever saw a glass of milk in his life! I joined another group there, the Hash House Harriers. The Hash House Harriers in Kuala Lumpur was the original club. They organized a sort of paper chase. The hares would go out with small sacks of paper and would lay a trail, including false trails, and then come back in a gradual circle to where they had started; the hounds are then a half-hour head start and then tried to catch them by following the paper trails. At the end there would be a great big tub of beer and lemonade. One of our members, John Yates, who is still a close friend today, went out with a colleague as hares and at the edge of the jungle they came across a communist guerrilla camp in atap (palm leaf) huts. They saw them with their weapons but my friends were unobserved. The hares came back and warned the rest of us. The police and the army were told and they encircled the guerrillas and captured them. In those days there was a reward on the heads of the leadership of the communist guerrillas. Central committee members were worth so much and so on up the hierarchy. Two of the people captured had \$10,000 rewards on their heads. My friend and his colleague each got \$10,000 for finding them and they gave a succession of rather remarkable parties through every restaurant in Kuala Lumpur for the other members of the Hash House Harriers in 1951.

Q: Other than that, the U.S. presence was a Consul General at the time?

DEAN: No, it was still a Consulate from 1951-1954.

Q: A Consulate. Well, what were you doing?

DEAN: I was the administrative and consular officer. We had a very small staff, a political officer and an economic officer. Hank van Oss was the Consul. Then there was a small USIA group, too. The consulate consisted of seven or eight Americans and four Chinese staff and two Malays.

Q: What were our concerns at that time? What were we doing?

DEAN: We were concerned with the emergency and with the communists, whether or not they would succeed or whether the British would be able to cope and restore political stability and the economy. The U.S. had large commercial interests there. Some of the tin mines were owned by Americans. We bought a lot of Malaya's rubber. The U.S. had stockpiled lots of rubber and tin, and whenever we sold something from the stockpile, it would affect the prices in Malaysia to the nth degree. I think our unpopularity there grew with the manipulation of these stockpiles. I can't remember how many American citizens lived in Malaya then, but not many, and we didn't have much visa or consular work to tell the truth. Most of my work was on the administrative side, except the Consul asked me to write airgrams and telegrams about my contacts with the military and the jungle companies and others just as a commentary on how the war against the communists was going.

Q: Of course, to put it in perspective, at this time we were still at war in Korea most of that time, so this was not an esoteric exercise.

DEAN: No, no. It was quite important. There was no evidence that the communist Chinese had sent arms or other supplies to the guerrillas. They were using mostly arms that the British had given them during the war against the Japanese. The British had helped organize them and had used them in attacks on the Japanese. But the guerrillas were getting moral support you might say through communist Chinese radio broadcasts, and perhaps training too, although that wasn't too clear at the time. Of course, it was a serious time because of the Korean War, but everyone in Kuala Lumpur was focused inward on their own emergency rather than what was happening elsewhere in the world, so this occupied everyone's attention.

Q: Were you seeing at that time a pretty solid split between the Malays and the Chinese?

DEAN: Oh, yes. There was a big ethnic divide. The British were seen to be coddling the Malays and protecting them against the ravages, economic and otherwise, of the Chinese merchants. The Chinese were fending for themselves. I don't mean the guerrillas, but those Chinese in the business community. There was the Malay Chinese Association which was very powerful. In fact, there was a Chinese, Henry Lee, who was Minister of Finance. In everything economic and financial, including ownership of shops and businesses, just as the Chinese did and do in Indonesia, they controlled most of the commerce. There was a lot of jealousy against the Chinese on the part of the Malaysians. Occasionally a Malay would go amok and slice up a lot of the Chinese. There was a great deal of tension and hatred on the part of the Malays toward the Chinese.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Chinese? I'm not talking about the guerrillas.

DEAN: Oh, yes. I had a lot of contact with the Chinese because they were merchants, including as I said, the Minister of Finance. They were involved in all aspects of the rubber and tin industry.

Q: What about in the Malay group, I was wondering if you saw a political class begin to emerge?

DEAN: No, not then. The British were occupying all of the positions, not just of power but also administrative positions in the civil government, the police, almost every other aspect, including immigration control. Malays were not then a major power. That came later when the various Malay leaders were helped by the British to come to the fore. The British were running everything as far as government went at that time. It wasn't the Malaysians and it wasn't the Chinese.

Q: Were the British people you talked to sort of making noises about leaving at some point?

DEAN: No, I don't think they were thinking in those terms. This was early, you see, in 1951-'54. They were not really that much aware of the big forces going on around them in Southeast Asia and China, except by reading the newspapers, but they really weren't thinking in those terms. The Malay civil service was, as I said, a very old-fashioned civil service. The military were there for a very specific job. People weren't thinking of leaving and being replaced.

Q: What about Singapore? That was part of the whole.

DEAN: That was a separate crown colony at that time, also ruled by the British.

Q: Lee Kwan-Yu...

DEAN: No this was before Lee Kwan-Yu's rise to power.

Q: Is it possible that anything went on before Lee Kwan-Yu?

DEAN: I'm sure he was there, but he was a young man. He must be in his 80s now, so he certainly was there. I don't think there were too many people in evidence in the government structure except those nominated and put there by the British.

Q: Was there any effort made on our part to say these people are going to get free at some point and we want to make sure as we started to do later on.

DEAN: At that point, when I was in Kuala Lumpur, there weren't any discussions of that, at least among our staff.

Q: We weren't pushing de-colonization or anything like that?

DEAN: No. We may have been pushing it elsewhere, in London and in Washington, but not in Kuala Lumpur, and certainly there were not any instructions or messages that I saw to that effect.

Q: I was just wondering why you were allowed to go out on these patrols. Was there any thought that...

DEAN: Well, I just did, you see. I was a member of the Hash House Harriers and some of the military officers were members, so we just became very friendly and we'd just go. I was also on the Selangor rugby team then, and we would go off to different capitals in Perak or Penang or to Singapore, and play rugby with the various teams in these places. Some of the members there were also in the military and we'd go off with them, too. But, it was very informal. We didn't go through lots of bureaucratic red tape. In fact, even the books we had in the office to guide us on various consular issues and other guidance were so old that I once remember the widow of an American sea captain coming in. She was, I think, part Malay, and she had married a sea captain in 1905. Her sons wanted her to go to the States as one of them was thinking that would be a better place for his mother. So she applied, and I looked it up in these old books, and there was a provision that before a certain date in 1925, people who married sea captains would gain American citizenship. So, I sent a paper into the State Department, giving them all the citations from our meager supply of manuals. They sent me back an airgram stating that the law I cited had been repealed in 1935 and, "in the future, please send your messages in on the proper forms." I had to tell the lady that she couldn't become an American citizen. Eventually, she got an immigration visa.

OSCAR VANCE ARMSTRONG
Consul/Consular Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1952-1953)

Oscar Vance Armstrong was born in China to American Parents in 1918. He received his bachelor of science degree from Davidson College in 1939. Subsequently, he served in the U.S. Army during World War II. His Foreign Service posts included Canton, Peiping, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, London, and Taipei. He was interviewed by Willis Armstrong in March 1991.

Q: How long were you in Singapore?

ARMSTRONG: Two years, from 1950-52. Then went up to Kuala Lumpur. That, of course, was much more interesting because you were in the middle of a very interesting country and the insurgency was still going on. Not long before we got there the British High Commissioner had been ambushed on the road up to one of the hill stations and been killed. By the time we left, about two years later, they had declared the first "white area" which meant it was free of insurgency and life could return more to normal. As you know, this was one place where a communist insurgency was effectively quelled.

Q: I know. I visited KL in 1954 and again in 1956. In '54 I was put in touch with some of the British people who were handling the insurgency problem and went to a command post where I had an interview with General Templar who was a fascinating guy. I was taken around and shown their defenses, war maps, etc. by officers in the British establishment. It was very interesting. I also got out and looked at some small rubber plantations. But you were in KL until 1950....

ARMSTRONG: 1955.

Q: We were there at the same time but I didn't know you.

ARMSTRONG: No. I don't recall.

Q: I have forgotten who the consul general was.

ARMSTRONG: It might have been Eric Kocher.

Q: Yes, it was. I remember staying with him. He gave me a dinner party. He was very horrified that I was traveling around the tropics without a dinner jacket. All I had were my Washington cotton suits.

ARMSTRONG: I hope some of our military that were involved in Vietnam were briefed on the British experience in the Malaya. The situations, of course, were different.

Q: Totally different because the Chinese were the guerrillas in the woods. The Malayan population was on the side of the British.

ARMSTRONG: That's right. And there was no equivalent to North Vietnam.

Q: Right, they couldn't be infiltrated.

ARMSTRONG: Thailand was reasonably cooperative in helping the British control the border area there. So the situations were very different, though it took them many years.

Q: Did you think there was any significant connection between Peking and the insurgency in Malaya?

ARMSTRONG: There certainly was in terms of moral and propaganda support. In terms of physical assistance, money or arms, I think the evidence was that there was not very much of it.

Q: Well, it was hard to get at.

ARMSTRONG: That's right.

Q: And the British controlled the ports, railroads and roads pretty much.

ARMSTRONG: It would have been difficult for them and, of course, the communist insurgents were almost all the time in the jungle. They were not occupying any significant urban areas in Malaya. The jungle was sometimes very close. One of our younger officers in the consulate general joined some Britishers that called themselves the Hounds and Hares. They used to go out on these paper trails. One person goes out and leaves pieces of paper and the others try to catch up with him. This time they flushed out a small guerrilla group, dashed back in town, reported it, got a reward and had a huge, what the British call a "bash" to celebrate their exploits. They were fairly close at times, but they were not at any time threatening to take over.

Q: They didn't take the bus into town.

ARMSTRONG: No.

WALTER K. SCHWINN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Kuala Lumpur (1954-1957)

Walter K. Schwinn joined USIS after serving as a colonel in an economic intelligence unit in World War II. His career included assignments in Poland, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Schwinn was interviewed by David Cartwright on June 24, 1987.

Q: In Singapore did you do much the same thing as you had done in Warsaw?

SCHWINN: That's right, although the emphasis changed there. As a matter of fact, I was assigned to the Consulate-General in Singapore, the Consulate in Kuala Lumpur, and the Consulate in Pinang. So I lived in Kuala Lumpur, which was a charming little town at that time, tin mines, the rubber...just a few other diplomatists around-Australia, India, France-just a handful of us, and living was very good, very comfortable, and I knew nice people....

But the job there, again, changed, and one of the nice things about the way the information agencies run at that point, you weren't told from Washington what to do specifically. If you were a Public Affairs officer, you made a decision as to what was important to be done and spent your money that way.

Well, here it was in 1954, and the Korean War barely over, all the guns were silent, but Malaysia had a very large minority of Chinese. Particularly a large, young population, I mean 20 and under in school, and to them the pink-red dawn over to the east was very attractive. China was rising to its feet. It was no longer on its knees to every Britisher and American and Frenchman...it was standing up, standing tall. (Laughs) What do you do? It was kind of comical to think now we're in such close relations with Communist China, but then we regarded this as an enemy. On the same scale, I was now operating on the other side of the Communist world. So we put almost all our money and emphasis into dealing with the Chinese in the middle schools,

in the colleges-what to do to impress them. Do two things: impress them with the virtues of the United States, and also to draw them away from their fascination with Maoist China.

We had a nice little guy, Jimmy Anderson, who was down in Washington with his wife, who was the Information Officer and.... Well, we sought out these things, trucks which carried films, books, literature, all up and down the peninsula on a regular schedule, stopping at the high schools-middle schools, they're called-for a day and a day and a half, running films.... Then we had great good luck in discovering the enormous power of athletics on the young mind. And we had basketball coaches basketball was pretty high in Malaysia - come out and spend weeks at a school, teaching the kids basketball, American-style, swimming stars coming out and working in the pools.

Q: *Who sponsored these people?*

SCHWINN: USIA.

Q: *USIA. And the books and the movies and so forth that you circulated were all USIA?*

SCHWINN: All USIA, yes.

Q: *Did you have the opportunity to tailor anything to the local situation, or were you using more or less standard films and books that were simply translated? Or did you have a chance to do something creative?*

SCHWINN: Well, I don't think I had a film made specifically for Malaysia, but it came in Chinese, in Mandarin Chinese. It also came in Malay, but these were the films that were in general stock. But they were good films, I mean, they served the purpose. We discovered one thing-again, Jimmy Anderson was very smart about this-he said, "We must always have something going at four in the afternoon until six at these schools." I said, "Why?" "That's the time when these Commies try to set up their meetings with the kids. And if we can compete with the basketball coach at four o'clock, or a swimming coach, or a good film, they won't go to the meeting."

Q: *Were these separate Chinese schools or were these integrated schools?*

SCHWINN: These were separate.

Q: *Separate Chinese schools.*

SCHWINN: See, one of the shortcomings, shall we say, of the British rule in Malaysia was that they were so conscious of the need to stratify the Malay rulers and Malay people, that they brought out these Chinese laborers to do the tin mines and rubber things without wives for a long time. Then [came] wives, and of course then children, no money for the schools-the Chinese had to build the damn schools and run them.

Well, we were so concerned about the Chinese, that it took me a while to realize that we had to do something about the Malay population, too. Then we hired a couple of Malay boys, very bright kids, to do a newspaper for the Malay population, and particularly for the east coast. You see, the Chinese were all along the west coast of Malaysia, where the tin mines and rubber plantations are...and, of course, the Chinese, they were just so damned energetic and enterprising.

This did not affect my work, but it was interesting to me: most of the crime was Chinese crime. So, the decision was made to get more Chinese in the police force because they had the same problem we have here. The Malays arresting Chinese. Get more Chinese in the police force. God, they just had a hell of a time getting the Chinese to join because young Chinese men would say, "Why should I join the police force? I could make more money selling cigarettes in the street." So, all this kind of difficulty presented itself, and, of course, I keep wondering now what is happening in Malaysia because I have sensed that the Malays have really taken over more and more, and they're more fundamentalist. And this means the fundamentalists on the east coast are calling the tune. This is going to be hard for the Chinese to accept, and hard for the economy to accept because it's the Chinese that run the entertainment industries, run the bus system, run the transportation industry...it's all Chinese.

Q: Now, the newspaper that you mentioned was aimed at a Malay audience.

SCHWINN: That's right.

Q: Did you edit that paper yourself?

SCHWINN: No, I left it to the Malay boys.

Q: What I was driving at was whether or not you were drawing on your previous experience as a journalist in this.

SCHWINN: No. No, all I did was to...once the decision was made, that we had to do something about the Malays and this would be a good thing to do, I sought out advice among governmental people whom I knew as to who would be a good person to do this, and got these two names. They were bright kids. Indeed, one of them has since become a minister (laughs) in the Malay government.

Q: Who was that?

SCHWINN: I forget his name now, it was several years ago. But, he....

Q: He was upwardly mobile.

SCHWINN: He was upwardly mobile. But he knew what to do, and so I said, "You have so much money, you have so much staff, get it done."

Q: Now, for most of your professional life, out of government or in government, you have been involved in the shaping of public opinion in one way or another. How do you determine to what

extent you had succeeded? Let's take the example of the Chinese, which I find very interesting. How did you measure, or did you attempt to measure, the impact of your activities on the Chinese students?

SCHWINN: We had no funds for surveys, and so it just was what we felt.

Q: Did you ever worry that your attempts might backfire and be perceived as simply propagandistic or meddling?

SCHWINN: No, no. Now mind you, the British Raj was still there, so you didn't have an indigenous government to worry about. You had sympathy and support from the British. But the example of what Jimmy Anderson told me about interfering with the Commie meetings was as good evidence as I can now think of that we were succeeding in diminishing the attendance, of causing the kids to have-you know, "What shall I do?"

Q: You could count the number of students shooting baskets as opposed to the number of students reading the Red Book.

SCHWINN: Well, I don't think we ever saw the Red Book. Again, the British were not encouraging this. Any guy that would carry the Red Book around would have trouble. But we knew that a large number of the kids were shooting baskets and assumed if they weren't, they were at least open to go to the meeting.

CHARLES T. CROSS
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1955-1957)

Ambassador Charles T. Cross was born in China in 1922. He attended Carleton College and Yale University, and served as a lieutenant overseas in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1942-1946. His assignments abroad included Taipei, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Alexandria, Nicosia, London and Danang, with an ambassadorship to Singapore. Ambassador Cross was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Then you went to Kuala Lumpur. Was it then Malaya or Malaysia?

CROSS: It was the Federation of Malaya. I was there for a little more than two years - winter of 1955 to the summer of 1957. As I said, I was the political officer - the only one at that post. I covered the first elections, the "Emergency" - i.e. counterinsurgency which I really learned on the ground - and the negotiations for a new constitution. None of these were bilateral issues; all were internal which left me with the major burden of reporting. We supported the British as they were leaving the country. They left the country in good order, quite stable after the "Emergency," in the hands of a popularly elected prime minister elected by the Malays and the eligible "Overseas" Chinese. That person was Abdul Rahman who was the right person for the

times - a very unusual circumstance.

Q: What was the situation when you went to KL [Kuala Lumpur] in 1955?

CROSS: The communists began their full scale insurgency in 1948. They started these activities at about the same time in India, Burma, Indonesia and Malaya. The latter was the strongest movement because there it involved ethnic Chinese. The peak of the insurgency was reached approximately in the 1950-51 period. Then it began to de-escalate. So by the time we reached KL, there were already areas designated as "White Areas," mostly along the coast in such towns as Penang and Malacca. Nevertheless, travel around the rest of the country required a convoy. We had to have a convoy escort if we wanted to go from KL to the Cameron Highlands. During our first few months, we needed a convoy to go from KL to Malacca. But slowly, the government forces began to whittle away at the insurgents.

The government, as part of its counter-insurgency program, established what were called "New Villages." This was an idea of Sir Robert Thompson, who not only established them in Malaya, but later was also instrumental in establishing the same kinds of villages in Vietnam during our experiences there. There they were called "Strategic Hamlets." They were not that in Malaya because there the government took the Chinese who were targets of the insurgents and moved them away from the areas bordering the jungles which is where the insurgents operated. The removal of these Chinese not only protected them, but also denied the guerrillas easy access to food, medical supplies, and intelligence.

So by the time we arrived in KL, the insurgents were in bad shape. The government used a lot of tricks to defeat the insurgents. They infiltrated them with government agents who then assisted the government forces in wiping out some guerrilla units. In addition to these tricks, the government was offering independence to the Malays and economic opportunities for young Chinese. While the British were still in Malaya, they fought the insurgents. When they left, the government used enticements as well as power to finish the insurgency. They promised protection to the Chinese and pretty soon, the insurgency was no more. Since my time in KL, there have been tensions between the Malays and the Chinese from time to time, but they were managed without major recourse to violence. I think the British did a great job; they kept the Malays united behind the idea of cooperating with the Chinese while at the same time keeping the Chinese united behind the idea that co-existence could take place if the Chinese who made up the Malayan Communist Party ceased their insurgency.

Q: I assume that our representation in KL was a consul general. Did you have many dealings with the British.

CROSS: I did work in a consulate general. We dealt only with the British - or Malay officials who were part of the British colonial government - there primarily to train so that the new Malay government could function once the British had withdrawn.

Q: What about the election and the new constitution?

CROSS: First, there was an election for parliament. This legislature was not totally in charge, but

it established a party structure for Malaysia. One party was Negara, which was a Malay nationalist party. It lost the election to the Alliance Party - a consortium of the united Malay National Organization, the Malayan Chinese Association, and the Malayan Indian Association. The Alliance was led by Abdul Rahman, whom I mentioned earlier. The Malays governed in those areas that were primarily populated by Malays: the Chinese of the Malayan Chinese Association did run in areas where the Malay might have been a small majority and yet many of them won. So the Alliance swept this first election for the new legislature.

Q: What was the consulate general's impression of Rahman at that time?

CROSS: I think we were great supporters. He was very personable. In some ways he was like Reagan. He would say something, and it would be misinterpreted by some people. He would never bat an eye and deny that he had said whatever he said. The whole country knew his style; it never questioned his statements, but rather praised him for sticking to his guns - whatever he really meant.

Q: Did you ever have any contacts with the communist insurgents?

CROSS: Almost never. Every once in a while, the special branch would ask me to interview a former member of the insurgent groups. These were not people who had been imprisoned but rather had changed sides. Howie Schaffer and I watched one of these operations once. We were on our way to call on the Sultan of Johore. We were riding in the consul general's Chevy. On the way, we stopped for a night and stayed with the chief of the Special Branch in a town which was still surrounded by communist terrorists. We had a briefing about the local situation; then the chief, who was a flamboyant Welshman, asked whether he could take our car to carry some supplies to one of his patrols. Both Howie and I knew that our bosses as well as the Special Branch higher ups would disapprove of any such use of a CG vehicle. But we went happily anyway. We drove down narrow little roads - lanes really - between rubber plantations and finally came to a rubber estate. The high jungle really shades an area; it is practically dark if you are in it. Nothing grows in it, but on the edge of such a jungle, there is some heavy growth because the sunlight is able to shine there. That is called blukar.

So we were driving along this lane and the Special Branch chief asked us to stop somewhere along the road. He asked us to get out and lift up the hood of the car to pretend we had car trouble. It was very quiet and all of the sudden there was a whistle and a group of insurgents came out of the jungle. They had little red stars on their caps. I was somewhat concerned because I didn't know what would happen next. It turned out that this group was composed of former terrorists who had been captured and had changed sides. They had to stay in the jungle for a while - I guess to prove their *bone fides* - and then they were permitted to re-enter society. While in the jungle, they were led by a British army non-commissioned officer. The group was also accompanied by two Chinese Special Branch members, all in their jungle get-ups. These groups would live in the jungle for months on end, although the British leaders would change because they could not remain in the jungle as long as the natives.

Q: So you spent a lot of time just observing what was going on in the country?

CROSS: Yes. We had no political differences with either the British government or the Federation of Malaya. There may have been some discussions about the size of our representation; it may have been larger than one might expect from a consulate general, but that was because it soon would become an embassy.

Q: Who was the consul general?

CROSS: At the beginning it was Eric Kocher. He had been the labor attache in Belgium and perhaps at another post before being assigned to Kuala Lumpur. He was a very good political reporting officer. His wife, Peggy, was related to Lillian Hellman - the playwright. Eric was very good with the staff; he introduced me to Rahman the first week I was there. I was also helped greatly by Oscar Armstrong, whom I replaced. He was also a son of China missionaries. Oscar gave me a very good list of people whom I should contact, along with his own ratings of these individuals. I also got a lot of help from Lucian Pye of MIT, who had studied the communist movement and was an expert on its motivations.

After Kocher came Ken Wright. He had been in the Navy prior to joining the Service. He was very military minded; he liked everything to be neat and tidy, as if we were going to be visited by a VIP. He used a lot of nautical expressions. One that I found quite descriptive and useful was his characterization of a bureaucratic impossibility: "You can't piss up a rope." He didn't like political reporting; he didn't like to write. So I became the political reporting officer of the consulate general. If he had talked to someone who might have had some interesting things to say, he would ask me to go see the person and write something to send to the Department.

Q: Did you get to Singapore at all?

CROSS: Yes, although we didn't do anything in Singapore. Elbridge Durbrow was the consul general there. Technically, he was responsible for our operations in KL. He would visit us periodically. He was always very friendly and helpful to me. I think that the Singapore staff was more worried about Rahman than they were about Lee Kuan Yew, even though the British saw the latter as potentially quite dangerous. Lee played the game as it had to be played. Early on, he played "footsie" with the Communists briefly in order to get control of the Overseas Chinese on Singapore; when that was accomplished and the British left, he was ruthless in eradicating the Communists.

Q: You left Malaysia in 1957. Did the Vietnam Geneva Conference of 1954 have any impact in Malaysia?

CROSS: None whatsoever. I think the British felt that they had done extremely well in Malaya, particularly with respect to the spread of communism to South Asia. I think they in fact had done well. I should mention that I was asked to stay in KL for another year, but I really didn't want to stay on in an embassy. All of the Malay leadership were personal contacts; once the U.S. had an ambassador, how could I as a lowly FSO-5 officer maintain those contacts?

HOWARD B. SCHAFFER
Vice Consul/Economic Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1956-1958)

Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer was born in New York in 1929. He graduated from Harvard University and then served overseas in the US Army before joining the Foreign Service in 1955. Overseas, Schaffer served in Malaysia, India, Korea, Pakistan, Cyprus, and as Ambassador to Bangladesh. In Washington DC, he served in the Office of Personnel, as the Country Director for Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka, and as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1997.

Q: So in early 1956, you were assigned to Kuala Lumpur? How did that come about?

SCHAFFER: I had decided, probably based on my Japanese experience, that the Southeast Asia area seemed interesting, although I had never been there. I wasn't that interested in returning to Japan; China was closed; Korea had not shown up on my screen. I wanted to do something different and therefore Europe was not a great attraction--I had traveled there during my senior year in college. I was looking for different cultures and sights. Southeast Asia seemed to fit my requirements. So I asked for Indonesia or Thailand. In those days officers did not get a list of upcoming vacancies; you were just asked to indicate country or regional preferences. As it turned out, there just happened to be a vacancy in Kuala Lumpur, which was halfway between Indonesia and Thailand. So I was assigned there.

I knew where Kuala Lumpur was because I had followed the military moves of the Second World War closely as a high school student. I remembered plotting on maps the advance of the Japanese forces down the Malay peninsula in late 1941/early 1942 as they headed towards Singapore. So I knew exactly where KL was. Many of my classmates, not to speak of people outside the Foreign Service, did not have the vaguest notion where Malaya was. I soon decided that if anyone asked me where I was going, I would explain that KL was near Singapore. Of course I didn't know what KL was like in the mid-fifties. So I was amazed and delighted when I read the post report and other material and found that of all the cities in South East Asia in those days, KL was the most comfortable and most livable. For example, the city had a 36-hole golf course and water that was safe to drink out of the tap. I told my friends that all of this was the result of the Imperial Amenities Act of 1876" which established the basic living requirements in colonial headquarters towns. Some of them believed that foolishness.

At the time, the U.S. establishment in Kuala Lumpur was a consulate general. I got there in a most interesting way. My uncle - Dr. Bruner, the one I mentioned earlier - happened to be teaching in Cambridge, England, in the 1955-56 academic year. He suggested that I route myself through the UK on my way to Malaya. In fact, the Department encouraged me to stop in London to talk to the embassy people since Malaya was then still a British protectorate. So I did that; I flew first class--as was the practice in those days--to London. We were unable to land there because of the customary January fog and were diverted to a small airport in the west of England. Then I boarded a train to London--Waterloo Station.

I made my way to the embassy where I was told to talk to someone in the political section who dealt with Asia. That was a strange conversation; it was an eye-opener then--I don't think I would find it strange today. The officer knew I was coming, but I found that he was not particularly interested in talking to me about policy. He wanted to know the latest gossip about personnel that was making the rounds in Washington! That struck me as very strange indeed, particularly since I was junior officer--hardly a good source for that kind of information. But he was looking for any scrap, even though my larder was pretty bare. His interest just surprised me; only later did I learn that such gossip in the mother's milk of the Foreign Service.

I stayed in London and then went to Cambridge to see my relatives. Then I returned to London and flew on to Bangkok on a PAA [Pan American Airways] flight 1 - that well-known globe-circling flight. I changed planes in Beirut, where I got to see something of the city by night because of the delayed arrival of a connecting flight. Then I flew on to Bangkok, with stops in Karachi and Rangoon, my first brief exposure to the subcontinent where I would spend so much of my career. After a night's rest, I went on to Singapore, where I changed for another plane that would take me to Kuala Lumpur-- a DC-3 of the Malayan Airways. All of this was a new experience; I was very proud of my brand new diplomatic passport and my new role as a diplomatic representative of my government--at the age of 26. I was met at the airport by one of my new colleagues from the consulate general.

I was told before leaving Washington that I would be the fifth officer in the consulate general, which until my arrival had consisted of four experienced officers under the leadership of Consul General Thomas K. ("Ken") Wright. They dealt with all of the functions of a standard diplomatic establishment--political, economic, consular and administrative. I was to be rotated from one section to another, starting with consular affairs, while also helping John ("Jack") Knowles, the administrative officer. I was the first rotation officer to come to the post. I think at first there may have been some question how best to use me, but eventually all concerned in the Department and at post agreed to the rotational program. As far as I know, this program was the post's idea and not Washington's.

Being the first rotational officer, I received a lot of attention. Furthermore, KL was a small post and all the staff were very friendly. Indeed, until I found an apartment of my own, I lived with three of the officers at one time or other. They showed great interest in my education as a Foreign Service officer. It was a warm, rewarding assignment. I got a chance to use my Malay and enjoyed that very much.

I found both consular and administrative work somewhat routine and not particularly challenging. Then I worked in the economic section with William J. Ford, a knowledgeable and conscientious officer indeed. Following a few months there, I was shifted to the political section, working first with Charles T. ("Chuck") Cross and later with John Farrow. Consul General Wright took a great interest in me and met with me periodically. As I said, KL was a small post; the atmosphere was one of considerable informality. We would inevitably meet when off-duty; we belonged to the same clubs, went to the same movies, ate at the same restaurants. KL had all of the attributes of a small town. Since we all got along quite well, we would see each other both in the office and outside. My exchanges with Wright were both very pleasant and professionally rewarding.

My contacts went beyond the British and American communities. My knowledge of Malay helped me to become particularly well acquainted with the Malay community. Of course, the better educated segment of Malayan society knew English quite well, but I found Malay useful. After having reached a certain level of proficiency, I was able to carry out some of my political reporting responsibilities in the language. I was never tested, but I would guess that I reached a 3 or 3+ level in speaking.

I think the whole staff tried to pass on to me some of the flavor of the Foreign Service--its do's and don'ts. I learned many of the established diplomatic practices when I was named protocol officer in connection with Malayan Independence ceremonies that took place in August, 1957. I would become more proficient in these matters later in my career. Consul General Wright was probably not the best officer to initiate me into the rites of the Service. He was a "Wristonized" officer--a term that I quickly learned meant that he had been brought into the Foreign Service from the Civil Service without having to go through the three-and-a-half day entrance examination. So he did not fully share the punctilio of people who had come in at the bottom and had risen in the old Foreign Service in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, I was still very much unmarried at the time and I think a good deal of the protocol folkloric atmosphere of the Foreign Service was maintained by officers' wives -- there were no officers' husbands in those days. Junior wives had been taught the rites by "dragon ladies"--the wives of ambassadors or DCMs [deputy chiefs of mission]. Mrs. Wright, like her husband a wonderfully outgoing if somewhat naive person, had not had that learning experience. She was as much a newcomer to the Service as I was. So the protocol dictates in Kuala Lumpur were considerably less stringent than they might have been at another post.

My colleagues were quite knowledgeable about Malaya, particularly Chuck Cross, who later rose to become ambassador to Singapore, consul general in Hong Kong and our principal representative in Taiwan. He had made himself familiar with all aspects of Malayan political and social life. As the son of an American missionary, he had grown up in prewar China and spoke Mandarin well. So his connections with the Chinese community were particularly strong. But he had also made many contacts among the British authorities--the Army, the police, the civil government--and the Malay officials and politicians I came to have the greatest admiration for him professionally and personally; I still do.

Living in KL was very pleasant, particularly for someone who had been living first with his family in New York and was then cooped up in a small room in McLean Gardens in Northwest Washington. As I said, it took me a while to find permanent quarters. There was still a very large British element in KL. In fact the "good" clubs had very, very limited Asian membership. So during my first half year at post, I lived in a succession of temporary arrangements. In July, 1956, I managed to rent a lovely bungalow right next to a golf course together with a couple of Americans in their twenties--a businessman and a U.S. Army doctor who had been assigned to Kuala Lumpur to conduct research in tropical medicine. We had a couple of servants and lived very well. I had no complaints.

Just as I was arriving in January, 1956, the British and the Federation of Malaya government headed by Tunku Abdul Rahman, had come to an agreement on the future of the country. Malaya

was then wracked by disturbances (“The Emergency”) sparked by communists--all of Chinese background. Nevertheless, the British and the Malayans were able to reach agreement to grant Malaya independence on August 31, 1957. So during my first eighteen months, I was able to observe a process leading to independence --called “Merdeka” in Malay. The original time-table was adhered to.

The consulate general kept very close touch with political developments on the road to independence. We had to be very careful-- and I think we were-- because there was wide- spread suspicion in the British community and elsewhere that the United States was seeking to supplant the British as the dominant power in Malaya and the region. I don't really know how deep this British concern was, but we heard it enough so that we were quite careful in our comments and actions not to give this prejudice any basis. Ken Wright made it his business to keep in close touch with all major elements in the political community. As I recall, he would have a formal dinner monthly with the British including whenever possible the high commissioner, who played the role of governor. He would also meet monthly with the predominantly Malay leaders of the government. Cross would keep in touch with the Chinese community, as well as the Malays and the Indians.

As I have indicated, there were three principal communities in Malaya--Malay (the largest or about 50% of total), Chinese (38%), and the Indians. The Chinese were divided into several major group--one called itself the “Queen's Chinese.” They traced their presence on the peninsula to the 17th or 18th centuries. They were quite proud of their past and spoke of it in the same terms as would New Englanders in the United States who could trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower. They were particularly prominent in Penang and Malacca as well as Singapore, which then and now is separate from the Federation. They drew a distinction between themselves and the Chinese who had immigrated more recently. These included large groups in the countryside who were being resettled as part of the British anti-communist terrorist campaign--a pattern of anti-terrorist strategy which we later copied in Vietnam.

Most Chinese had no right of citizenship in Malaya. Politically they were left out in the cold. They were also for the most part very poor. They suffered discrimination in government employment. In other words, they were ripe for the kind of political activism that the mainland government was involved in at that time. So many Chinese became terrorists. They had support--weapons and money--from mainland China. The leadership was home-grown.

All of us, even in the cities, had to be aware of this security threat. Europeans, a term that included Americans, were certainly targeted, but the activities of the communists were not a daily concern as I went about my job. Nonetheless, we were all mindful of instances when CTs (communist terrorists) would infiltrate the cities. For example, there was a shooting on a golf course not far from my house. The year before I arrived, the British high commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, had been assassinated by a CT. There was a state of emergency in effect, which limited travel for example. When a traveler left KL, there were a series of check points; the military checked vehicles for such things as food which you were not allowed to carry--as a means to quarantine the terrorists. However, in actual practice, a white person had a much easier time passing these road-blocks than did Asians.

The Indian community was interesting because it comprised two very distinctive groups. The larger group were descendants of people who had been brought from India to work on the rubber plantations. Rubber plantations were described in the 1950s as "Little Indias." If you visited a plantation you would meet the manager who was British and spoke to his workers in a demotic Tamil. The others on the estate were Indians from Tamil Nadu, Madras as it was then called, plus some Malayalam-speaking Indians from the state of Kerala who occupied many of the administrative and clerical positions. They had lived their whole lives on the estates and had been educated in schools there. They had very little to do with the indigenous population, who were not at all attracted by the work on the plantations--routine, demanding labor. The Indians worked hard. They would go out every morning and tap the rubber trees, drawing off the latex. They also worked in the processing plants, preparing the sheet rubber which was exported to be used in manufacturing.

I visited a number of the plantations which I always found fun. But that life was separate from that lived in the rest of the country. As I said, the government had had to import labor from India because the life on an estate was too different from that to which a Malay was accustomed. That is not a unique situation; we find the same thing elsewhere in parts of Indonesia, in South Africa, and in Sri Lanka for example. There the "coolies" as they were called, were brought in because the indigenous population just wouldn't put up with the working conditions. They won't get up at the crack of dawn day after day to tap rubber trees in a prescribed, routinized way.

There were other Indians who were professionals and well educated -- teachers, lawyers, doctors. They lived in towns. They played a political role, particularly as labor leaders. They had to be reckoned with. They were organized in a political party called the Malayan Indian Congress. It was allied with Chinese and Malay parties that held similar, moderate views. All three belonged to an Alliance led by a dominant Malay political group, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). These Indians were among the most recent immigrants, as were some Ceylonese (now known as Sri Lankans). Most came from South India.

This was my first close experience with a multi-cultural society. I thought it was a very fascinating situation because you basically had four groups of people, with each having sub-groups--some of which I have already described. The fourth group, which I have not mentioned, was, of course, the whites. They were still an important element and remained so even after independence, particularly in commerce. Much later, this group sold its interests to members of the other groups.

We were quite concerned about the four ethnic groups being able to work together after independence. We were particularly concerned about the relationship between the politically dominant Malays and the Chinese, who were the economic powerhouse. The memories of the South Asian "Holocaust" following the separation of Pakistan from India were still fresh--even after ten years and even though few if any inhabitants of Malaya had witnessed the 1947 events in India. But there was such a calamitous loss of life and property then that it could not soon be forgotten and there was no assurance that it would not be repeated in Malaya. I remember vividly one of the persons who came to cover the transfer of power in August 1957, Keyes Beech of the Chicago Sun Times. He had been in India in 1947 and recounted in great detail the events of that time. He also expressed great fear about a repetition of the slaughter in Malaya. Fortunately, it

did not happen, even though there was a serious confrontation between the two communities in the late 1960s. With that exception, Malaysia (as it came to be called) has had remarkable communal harmony--certainly far exceeding our anticipations.

Much of this cooperative atmosphere has been due to the skillful political management exhibited by Tunku Abdul Rahman and his government. They developed an alliance in which the Malays had (and still have) a predominant role but the Chinese have a sufficient voice to give them some sense of participation. The Chinese on the other hand have shown a willingness to share their wealth. This has led to comparative communal harmony and today's prosperous Malaysia.

The arrival of independence in 1957 did not bring any major revision of the government that ran the country in the preceding period. The composition of the government did not basically change after August 1957. In the previous period that government had gradually been given more and more responsibility as British authority was withdrawn. For example, the Malay states had been ruled by local sultans with the assistance of British advisors. Those advisors were withdrawn in the period leading up to independence. The British did retain control of the military and the police until August 1957. Indeed, even after that time, they maintained an active involvement in those functions. This arrangement was essential to the successful fight against the CTs. The British and Australians also maintained an airbase near Penang.

The Malays developed a fascinating arrangement for the selection of their titular ruler. It was a rotating system in which every five years the sultan of a different Malay state becomes the paramount ruler--by election of his fellow rulers. After five years, the incumbent steps down and another paramount ruler is elected head of state. It is a thoroughly unique form of government. There is also a deputy paramount ruler. But the rulers were essentially symbolic and ceremonial; the work of government was carried on in a parliamentary system borrowed from the English model, which was familiar to the Malay, Chinese, and Indian leaders. Many of them had studied in England and had observed that system in action. The real power rested in a prime minister elected by his fellow parliamentarians.

During my tour, the government was a conservative one--in the best sense. It was not a fundamentalist Islamic government. It believed in all of the things we liked including a foreign policy oriented towards the West, a conservative economic policy, more rights for the Chinese minority, communal harmony, and political democracy.

As an economic officer, I covered a lot of subjects. In the 1950s, economic sections were beleaguered by mandatory reports on all sorts of commodities and activities. In the political section, I was assigned to follow the minor parties. That put me in touch with Malay leaders. Cross and Farrow were principally interested in the Chinese, whom they knew well and with whom they could communicate in Chinese since both came from missionary families. I did a lot of traveling, doing such things as observing by-elections.

It was a busy and rewarding two years. I look back on KL with great fondness; I have always been happy to return there for visits. It was an excellent experience, even with the difficult time I had at the end. That experience was an instructive one. I have already mentioned what a pleasant working environment Thomas K. Wright had built as CG and then, after the consulate general

had been elevated to embassy status following the independence of Malaya, as chargé. We had a great staff including the USIS people who shared the rather rundown office building we used in downtown KL. We were all up on the third floor. To get there, we had to pass a Chinese betting parlor. The corridors were often crowded with scruffy types waiting to place their wagers. Our offices were very inadequate--although the full flavor of this slum really didn't hit me until I had seen some of the better establishments that we had elsewhere. But the post was very congenial despite our inadequate working quarters.

With the coming of independence, when the consulate general became an embassy, we moved to larger and more handsome quarters. These were also rented, but there was no Chinese gambling parlor downstairs at that place. Wright's tour ended soon after independence. He was followed by Homer M. Byington, Jr. on his first ambassadorial assignment. He was the typical old line Foreign Service officer and the son of an old line Foreign Service officer who for years had been the head of the Office of Personnel. He had never been east of Suez. He didn't like the informality that governed the relationship among the staff and the relationship it had with outsiders. I found Ambassador and Mrs. Byington very difficult to deal with. I should note that by the time they arrived I was the last of the officers who had served for any length of time under Wright when he was the CG. I guess I didn't know how to deal with Byington. I was used to the Wright informality which obviously was not the Foreign Service that Byington was accustomed to. I think the ambassador did not feel that I had treated him with proper respect. He objected to the way I dressed--he had insisted that all officers wear coat and tie; that was absurd in that climate.

When I was leaving, Byington let me know that he had been very close to requesting my reassignment several months earlier. He did vent his unhappiness in my efficiency report, which made me quite concerned about my future. My situation was illustrative of what happens when a stuffy EUR type is plunked down in newly independent nation in a non-European region. The fact that he had arrived having hurt himself on ship board, requiring that he present his credentials while on crutches, made him even more sensitive to real or imagined slights. Byington's standing, with me at least, was not helped by his being married to a dreadful woman--a "dragon lady" of the old school. Fortunately, I only served in KL for a couple of months after their arrival. I have been told when the Byingtons left in 1961, the whole post went on a 48-hour drinking binge. They went off to Naples, where Homer became the CG; I am sure that he was much more at home there and probably did a much better job than he could have in a non-European post. I am sorry that I was a witness to this misassignment, but it was good lesson for me in personnel management. I learned what a great difference there was between an old line Foreign Service officer like Byington and a Wristonee like Wright, as well as the difference between Europeanists and specialists in the developing world.

Fortunately, I think the efficiency report had little effect on my career. When a new Foreign Service salary schedule was instituted in 1956, I had been downgraded, but not as far as I might have been. I went from FSO-6 to FSO-7--although it could have been FSO-8, the lowest grade in the revised system. Some of my colleagues found themselves in a similar situation and we had a glorious "demotion" party in which we toasted one another with the worst liquor we could find in our storerooms.

Finally, I should say that my KL tour gave me an opportunity to witness the transfer of power from a European colonial power to a local authority. It was exciting to watch the Union Jack come down at midnight on August 31, 1957; to watch the Duke of Gloucester come from London to turn over the reins of power to the Malaysians. That was a rewarding experience because for me it symbolized the tide of history taking place--the retreat of a European power from its Asian colonial possessions. The turn-over was celebrated by major festivity. As I suggested, there was some apprehension that trouble might break out with the departure of the British. None did. So it was indeed a touching ceremony, both at midnight and early the next morning. The ceremony had to take place before the heat really took hold. I remember going out to the Selangor Golf Club (now the Royal Selangor Golf Club) that afternoon. It was a holiday of course, but things seemed to be carrying on much as always with the usual dearth of non-European members. I had to go to the manager's office to pay my bill. I happen to look in the corner of the office and noticed a small bundle lying there. It dawned on me as I stared at it that the bundle was the Union Jack which had been hauled down from its pole for the last time and now had been wrapped up and quite unceremoniously placed on the floor in the corner of the office.

I should make a point about the club. It had had a few Asian members for some time. There was, it seemed, a tacit understanding that these handful of members could play golf or tennis, but that they would be expected to avoid swimming in the club pool, which implicitly remained for whites only. But at some time during 1957, a young officer by the name of Ted Liu was assigned to USIS. He, like just about all members of the diplomatic community, could afford to join the club and he did. One day, while we were sitting around the pool, Ted Liu jumped into the water. That act integrated the pool at the club. After that, the pool was available to all members and had swimmers regardless of race. I don't think that Ted understood what he had done--he had just arrived and it was hot-- but no one objected and the wall of segregation fell in one instant.

There was another club in KL which was much more renowned. That was the Selangor Club--known as the site of some of Somerset Maugham's more interesting short stories. That club always had a number of Asian members, probably dating back to the twenties or even earlier. It was for that reason--so the story went--that it was known as "the Dog" since "even a spotted dog could be admitted." We are talking about a time when race was very important in social life in Malaya. Because of its more liberal admission policy, I used that club on occasion for meetings with my contacts. However, as a rule I used restaurants or my own home for such sessions.

MICHAEL E. C. ELY
Political/Consular officer
Kuala Lumpur (1957-1959)

Michael E.C. Ely was born into a military family. After receiving a degree in international affairs from Princeton University, Mr. Ely entered the military as a second lieutenant of artillery during the Korean War. In addition to service in Algeria, his career in the Foreign Service took him to China, France, Somalia, Italy, Belgium, and Japan. Mr. Ely was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 9, 1992.

Q: You were in Kuala Lumpur from '57 to '59. What was the political situation at that time?

ELY: I got there one month before independence and at the very end of what they called the Emergency, which was a Chinese insurgency against the British and the colonial system, and against the world. Lucien Pye and a number of people have done a good deal of research on the real root of this Chinese Communist rebellion in the jungle, which had actually broken out in the late '40s, developed into a major Vietnam-like civil war in the early '50s, was eventually suppressed but not eliminated in the mid-'50s, and lasted until the '70s, in a flickering, reduced way. It was, to make a long and complicated story short, a drama of alienation in the Chinese community, of son from father, brought on by the rapid and intense social change that movement from mainland China to Malaya had brought about. It was a revolt against Confucianism.

The Emergency was technically still in effect when I got to Kuala Lumpur, so it was a hardship post. But there was very little hardship, believe me. It was still British and colonial, and had clubs and restaurants and golf courses. A hierarchical society. I was amazed by it; I didn't think that such things still existed. But they certainly did. But at the same time, it was a well-run country, no corruption, relatively prosperous. Kuala Lumpur was and is a Chinese city. I was amazed at the racial content of life there; everything depended on ethnic grouping.

I was back four years ago, found everything had changed and nothing had changed. The city was built up, beautiful and modern, with skyscrapers and heavy traffic and all that, but the same racial tensions still prevailed: the Malays fear the Chinese; the Chinese hold the Malays in contempt for their passiveness and laziness; and both sides look down on the Indians, who...

Q: This was in the '50s, before we had what we probably today would call sensitivity training. How did the embassy deal with the--by the time you were there--mostly ex-colonialist British, the Malays, the Chinese, and all?

ELY: Well, we had an ambassador who had come from being deputy chief of mission in Rome, and he was an old-timer, very formal.

Q: Who was this?

ELY: Homer Byington, Jr.

Q: Oh, God.

ELY: You know him?

Q: Well, yes, his ghost lingers on in Naples. He was born there and served there for eons.

ELY: Well, he was an enthusiastic golfer. Actually, he was a likeable man, but really stuck in the past. His wife was a grande dame; she insisted that all the ladies wear gloves and stockings and hats, and pay calls. There was much printing of formal calling cards. Sort of a European invasion of the post. It was probably the most European post I've ever served at, in some respects.

The British were phasing out. The Malay politicians who were running the country were unsure of themselves. The Chinese were desperately worried about political repression. And the country was very uneasy. The planters at the Selangor Club on Saturday night, when they'd all go and drink a lot, were saying, when independence comes, there would be fighting from Johor Baharu, which is down on the tip of the peninsula, clear up to Alor Star. As it turned out, there was no such conflict. It took place 15 years later.

I rotated, did a little consular work, a little political work, and then ended up doing rubber and tin, which was the main substantive economic activity there, and rather enjoyed it.

My wife had a baby, the first American born in independent Malaya. And we were transferred from there to Paris. In Kuala Lumpur, I had virtually no culture shock at all--everybody spoke English, you were immediately inserted into the clubs, you had a charge account at the department store, and the amah (the maid) came along with the apartment.

ROBERT W. DREXLER
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur(1960-1963)

Robert Drexler was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He received his Bachelor's degree from Harvard University before entering the Foreign Service in 1957. In 1975 he served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bogota, Colombia. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Geneva. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

DREXLER: That's right. We all aspired to Hong Kong as an assignment, but there were only so many places at the time when we graduated, so we were instead sent to what were called peripheral posts, around China, where there were overseas Chinese communities, and once you got such an assignment, you were able to study at FSI the dialect spoken there, and I was assigned to Singapore, so I had three or four months learning the Hokkien dialect, which was terribly difficult, but then at the last minute, the assignment was changed to Kuala Lumpur, where they speak Cantonese mostly, and I didn't have time to learn that. I became the first Chinese Affairs officer at the embassy there. And I was very frostily received, because Kuala Lumpur in those days was the Indonesian language officers' bailiwick. They had a tough language to learn, and few places to speak it. There was Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and then there was Kuala Lumpur. I was received at the airport by an Indonesian language political officer with whom I had to work. He said, "Welcome Bob, but frankly, we don't know why they sent you here." But actually Kuala Lumpur is mostly a Chinese city, and I developed contacts in the Chinese community to such an extent that the Police Special Branch complained to the Ambassador about it because they didn't want the US to start sympathizing with the Malaysian Chinese.

Q: *You were there from when to when?*

DREXLER: I got there in 1960 and left at the end of 1963.

Q: *That was the Emergency?*

DREXLER: The Emergency was officially over. The guerrillas, largely Chinese, were still up in the northern jungles. They were no longer killing people in the city, but you were not allowed to go up into the northern territories adjoining Thailand. This Communist insurgency had been mostly put down, and that was a remarkable success in those days. You know, when Americans were still trying to fathom how to deal with such guerrillas, the British showed how it could be done. They were successful. But there were circumstances in Malaysia that couldn't quite be duplicated elsewhere. At first I found myself at loose ends in our Embassy there, because as I said, people didn't welcome me, and they put me to work as visa officer again, which I objected to, because I hadn't learned Chinese to give visas there, and I asked to be reassigned to another post. And then they gave in, and made me the junior political officer in the Political Section, and that's when I began to work with the Chinese community.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador?*

DREXLER: When I first arrived, it was Homer Byington, who had largely a European professional background.

Q: *An Italian hand.*

DREXLER: Yes, of the old school. He later retired there in Naples. And he ran the embassy in a colonial style. We men were all required to wear white cotton or linen suits. The Post Report said that full dress was required of officers, that is, silk hat, white tie, tails, as well as morning coat, white and black dinner jackets, and white suits. This was before the era of polyester, and that sort of thing. And Byington changed suits twice a day at the Embassy. He would come in looking starched in the morning, go home for lunch, dump his suit, put on a fresh one, and looked fairly well starched throughout the day. The rest of us wilted. I fell afoul of him very early when I was observed going to the men's room without my jacket, and my supervisor called me in and said the Ambassador took a very dim view of this. It was a small post, but run in a very stiff way. His wife, known as "Lady Jane," made frequent shopping trips to Singapore, and all the other wives were required to turn out at the airport or the rail station to see her off, wearing hats and gloves, in a tropical climate. This was also of course, the style of the British who were still there in important numbers, and whose style the Byingtons found attractive.

The Peace Corps arrived when I was there, it was one of their pilot projects. Just before they arrived, and after I'd been there perhaps six or seven months, we held a weekly staff meeting about the Corps' plans. We were sitting around the Ambassador's office, about eight or nine of us in all, and the DCM said they had to designate an officer for liaison with the Peace Corps. The Ambassador looked around, and pointed to me, but he didn't recall my name. And this is after I was there for six months as part of just a nine or ten officer staff. Anyway, I was put in charge of the Peace Corps. The Corps did not really want such a person, but that's another story.

The Ambassador's residence was located alongside the golf course. And Byington made himself notorious for not allowing people to come in off the course to retrieve stray golf balls, which were numerous, as you would expect, if you had a lawn near the 17th or 18th hole.

Finally he left to retire, and then Charles Baldwin came in as the new Ambassador. He had retired from the service a few years earlier as a career officer, but then he was recalled. He was a fine gentleman. A very distinguished diplomat. He didn't know much about Southeast Asia, but he made a great hit with his staff, and with the local people. He was a wonderful antidote to Homer Byington. He brought in a secretary, Olga Hladio, who had served previously in Vienna and Tehran, and was going to go to Moscow, but at the last minute her assignment had been canceled. Baldwin interviewed her and selected her as his secretary. And I married her. So that's why Kuala Lumpur will always be an especially important post to me. It was Ambassador Baldwin who gave my wife in marriage, and walked with her down the almost endless aisle of the great cathedral there, and who gave us a wedding reception.

Q: He learned your name.

DREXLER: Yes, he learned my name. I have the warmest feelings toward him. He was there when Malaysia was formed, that is to say, when the federation of Malaya joined with Singapore, and what was then Sarawak and North Borneo. And he was very close to the father of that country, Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Malay prince, and it was very good to have Baldwin there, because the transition was difficult. It finally led to Singapore's breaking off, under Lee Kuan Yew. We didn't have a major role to play, but such a role as we did play was discharged very capably by Mr. Baldwin.

Q: Let's talk a bit about what you did. You had to sort of make a place for yourself as the Chinese language officer. How did you do that?

DREXLER: First of all, I established contacts with the local Chinese, which hadn't been done before. The country was governed by a coalition party, which was responsible for its independence, and still is in charge up to today, called the United Malay's National Organization. And it formed an alliance with parties representing the other two major communal groups, the Chinese and the Tamil Indians. The Tamil Indians were a small community descended from persons brought in to work in the tin mines, as were some of the Chinese. There was a Malayan Chinese association and a Malayan Indian association, part of the alliance. No one much bothered with the Indian association, which was a tiny party, but no one in the embassy had established a relationship either with the more important Malayan Chinese Association. So I did that for the first time. Actually, I called on the Indians too, but mainly got to know the Chinese leaders of that political party, which was part of the government coalition. There were also Chinese who were in opposition to the alliance. And particularly in the city of Penang, a coastal city on the Straits of Malacca, which is largely Chinese, an island. One of the local Chinese politicians there, Lin Chong Eu, had formed an opposition party, and I was the first embassy person to go up and talk to him. The government frowned on this sort of thing, but both of the Ambassadors encouraged me to do it, and they never tried to curb my activities. Of course, we just had chats with these people. It was the sort of contacts that are normal in posts around the world.

There were one or two occasions when I was asked to help the Central Intelligence Agency in Kuala Lumpur, because they didn't have any Chinese language officers either. They occasionally ran operations which required some knowledge of Chinese, and asked me to work with them on this, pledging not to tell my State Department superiors about it. So I did this, and helped them with a couple of operations, which they found useful. And I also had a Chinese lady as my assistant, who formerly worked with the Special Branch during the Emergency, doing press translations. There was a very large number of Chinese newspapers, locally as well as in Kuala Lumpur. And she had been working for some time before I got there, but nobody was paying attention to what she did, and her work production fell off, and she nearly left as well. My arrival, of course, delighted her, because she had at least one more reader, but also someone who was willing to work with her and see that her work focused on things of interest. So we revved up what I think was a very good Chinese press translation service, of documents that we circulated to the other political officers, and to the Ambassador, who were not getting it from anybody else. So this was important. I became pretty well established in the embassy, when they could see I could be of use to the CIA and to the other political officers. I could help out in the Consulate. USIA would sometimes ask for my help too; I would occasionally serve as an interpreter for the PAO. And of course friends always wanted you to take them to local Chinese restaurants and order the meal in Chinese, which was something I never learned to do, but tried to finesse. So I came to enjoy the post quite a lot.

Q: I assume you were looking for influence from Mainland China at that time. Did you find any?

DREXLER: No, not really. I found Nationalist influence. The government, of course, was very anticommunist, just having put down a communist rebellion. And the penalty for being found with a weapon was hanging. The Emergency was a terribly bloody affair, and the Communist Party was banned, and so on. There were no relations with Peking, of course, and there must have been a Nationalist Chinese Embassy, but I don't really remember it, or I certainly didn't have anything to do with it. My interest in the Chinese was as Malaysian Chinese, and how they were faring in their own country. The big question was Chinese education, the future of the language, the Malay's national language policy, these were the hot political issues; that the Malays were imposing their own language officially on the Chinese, forcing them to learn, Malay, English, which they did, and their own Chinese dialects at home, and sometimes Mandarin at school. Many of these young people were learning four languages. And the future of their schools, which were largely privately funded by the local communities, was jeopardized. And I was in touch with the Chinese School Teachers Federation, and I was following that. What we wanted to know was, was the country going to blow up. There have been cases where there were severe racial riots.

Q: One thinks of Indonesia. Amok is a Malay term.

DREXLER: In fact, it did not happen while I was there. Shortly thereafter, they had a terrible riot, with great loss of life. So my job was to keep my finger on that pulse. The Mainland - Nationalist thing did really not figure.

Q: How about the counter thing that was happening in Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew. Here was a real Chinese city and leader, who is around today?

DREXLER: He was regarded as a dangerous leftist, and 110% Chinese. Not in a Communist or Nationalist sense, but just too Chinese. He represented a great threat to the Malays in Kuala Lumpur. They had great qualms about bringing Singapore into the Federation, and they did so only in connection with North Borneo and Sarawak, which had a non-Chinese indigenous population, which they thought would help balance the Chinese. When they saw these Dayaks and former headhunters come into the Parliament for the first time on the day I was there, the Malays, I think, had their doubts whether this was really going to be the counterbalance that they had anticipated. But it didn't work with Singapore and Lee wanted it to. He was in tears when they broke up. But Singapore and Lee were just too Chinese, and at that time, Lee was regarded as a leftist. And of course some even thought he was a Communist. The DCM in Kuala Lumpur at that time thought that he was almost in the pay of the Chinese Communists. This was James O'Sullivan. But it was very easy to tar Chinese who resisted Malay dominance, to tar them with a Communist brush. I thought that was unfounded, that the connections did not exist.

Q: You were there when Kennedy, particularly Robert Kennedy came. And this tremendous emphasis on youth, a real arrogance. Can you talk about Robert Kennedy coming there?

DREXLER: He made a bad impression on me personally, though we awaited his arrival with a great deal of enthusiasm. I was there when his brother was assassinated, and scurrying around to find a condolence book and hanging the black streamer on our flag, and having our stationery edged in black, and attending an unforgettable requiem mass in the cathedral. We were all devastated. So Robert still had heroic proportions to us. But when he got there, his behavior -- well, you used a word I would find very apt -- his arrogance and his self absorption were so strong, that as he waltzed through the office and greeted us, not perfunctorily but, well, arrogantly, I can't improve on that -- the charm wore off very soon. He also was involved in mediating a quarrel between Indonesia and Malaysia, the "Confrontasi," the confrontation by Sukarno of the federation. Robert Kennedy thought that he could bring this mediation off quickly and prove his skills, his diplomatic abilities. And he made, I remember, demands on the communication system which we simply were not up to, and he was totally unrealistic and short tempered, and unforgiving when neither our embassy, nor Jakarta, nor Manila, where he went off to, was able to provide him with the backup which he felt he needed, and which I suppose he got in Washington with his entourage. So I think he left thinking badly of us, as we did of him. The one virtue of that experience was that shortly after his trip, a much more modern, sophisticated communications system was installed, which we all benefitted from, and which was probably overdue. He, of course, did not succeed in mediating this dispute, but made a lot of waves.

Q: Just to sort of wrap this up, as this Confrontasi was going on with Indonesia, were people in the embassy taking sides on this?

DREXLER: We were hostile to the Indonesians. We didn't like Sukarno at that time, and we, among the younger officers there was dislike of the American Ambassador in Jakarta, Howard Jones, who was sometimes called Sukarno's court jester; that's how we viewed him. And of course it was Jones and his country against Baldwin and our country. And in true foreign service

fashion, we identified with our host country on this. And of course Sukarno and the Indonesians were easy to identify against. There was poor little Malaysia, a democratic country. And we admired the Tunku, the leader, the prime minister, very much. So we were all for them. I remember when the crowds charged right past my apartment to go to burn the Indonesian embassy, which was just three blocks away, I didn't mind at all. No one was hurt, but we thought they were getting what they deserved. The Indonesian Ambassador and his entourage were all military men and made it clear that they looked down on the Malays. They also felt that the Malays were handed their independence by the British, unlike the Indonesians, who had to fight a bloody war against the Dutch.

Q: What was your impression of Tunku Abdul Rahman?

DREXLER: He was a prince, literally, and also in character. He played an indispensable role at that time. He was the royal line of the House of Kedah. At that time, as now, the Federation of Malay States, which had been formed by the British, of course, had I think nine, or at least seven sultanates. The Sultan of Johore, for example, was well known and even had his own army. These were people who had the almost slavish allegiance of their Malay citizens, who were loyal to their Sultans before anything else. And Malaya, when it became independent, had a king, who served for four years, who was elected by these Sultans, and the role of king passed from one to the other. So the Sultans were very important. They were the cultural, and religious leaders of their sultanates, their states, as we called them then. Kedah was one of these. So the Tunku came from an aristocracy that played an important role. He was English educated, he was trained as a lawyer, he spoke English fluently. And he was a democrat, basically, despite his aristocratic background. By the time I got there he was already on top of the political situation, so I can't really account for his rise. But I certainly witnessed the hold he had. And most important, the Chinese trusted him, and that was vital. They did not trust his deputy, Razak, who succeeded him, who was regarded like most Malays, as basically anti-Chinese. But the Tunku, by his previous political career, by his friendships and his demeanor and conduct, won the confidence of the Chinese, and of course the Indians too. So this was vital. There was no one else like him, no one else near him. So the great fear was that he might die, he might have a heart attack or something, and then what would happen? Of course, he was lucky that he was working with a very enlightened colonial government, the British, at a time when they realized they had to let go. So the transition and the relationship during the transition with the former colonial masters was ideal, very smooth, to the extent that many Brits were kept on after Independence -- the Chief of the Supreme Court, the top military commander -- to ease the transition until the Malays could work their way up. That showed how relaxed both sides were. It's impossible to think of the Dutch staying on as head of the Indonesian Supreme Court under Sukarno. But this is what happened in Malaysia. And then of course they both had put down the Communist insurgents during the Emergency. This of course was a terrible experience for the Chinese community. But by the time of independence, it had been put down. The Chinese Communist guerrillas had clearly lost, order had been restored, and the Chinese community in the cities wanted to get on with their lives, educate their children, make money, be secure, and so on. They realized that the pro-Peking communists had no future. They were beaten and they didn't really have to worry about them. So they got over the Emergency experience fairly quickly. I think the one mistake, perhaps, and Ambassador Baldwin cautioned the Tunku against this, was adopting Malay as the national language, rather than English. We said, why not English? After all, it's not the language

of either of the three major communities, yet the leaders of all three know it. It's an international language, and so on. But the Malays couldn't have it.

RONALD D. PALMER
Economic Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1962-1963)

Ambassador Ronald D. Palmer was born in Pennsylvania in 1932. He received a bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1955 and a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1957. Ambassador Palmer joined the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Denmark, the Philippines, Togo, and an ambassadorship to Mauritius. Ambassador Palmer was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 15, 1992.

Q: *Then you went directly to Kuala Lumpur?*

PALMER: No, I came back to Washington and spent some months here. In fact I had home leave and was almost pulled back from home leave to work during the Cuba crisis of 1962.

Q: *This was the missile crisis.*

PALMER: Yes. But, fortunately, that passed quickly. Then we went out to Malaysia. I replaced a man by the name of Paul Miller in the economic section working for Kent Goodspeed. At that time Charles Baldwin was the Ambassador, Donald McGhee was the DCM, and Frank Underhill was the chief of the political section.

My work at the time was essentially on commodities, etc. The interesting thing for me was that there was such a contrast between Malaysia and Indonesia. Frank Underhill, as you know, was a marvelous drafter. He had written a series of very beautiful despatches, as they were called in those days, contrasting Indonesia and Malaysia as Indonesia being Huck Finn and Malaysia being Tom Sawyer and UK being Aunt Polly. It was very strange. In Malaysia you could drink the water, there was security everywhere, the food was excellent, etc. And frankly I enjoyed it. My wife found it very difficult.

Q: *What was the problem?*

PALMER: Well, you know sometimes when you are living in a stressful situation you are all set for dealing with stress.

Q: *You are speaking about Indonesia.*

PALMER: Yes, that is right. And then when that stress is removed, sometimes you don't function as well. This was my first wife. She had a nervous breakdown there and we then came back to the US in about June, 1963.

We passed through the Philippines at this point, she was at Clark Hospital. Clark at that time was a sea of army tents because of the casualties coming out of Vietnam. I had no idea of what was going on in Vietnam. This was June, 1963.

Q: This was before our major troop commitment.

PALMER: That's right. But there were by 1963, I suppose, something on the order of several thousand Americans in Vietnam. We certainly were suffering significant casualties.

Q: I wonder if we could return for a little glimpse of Malaysia at the time. Having studied the language, did you use it or was English the language you used?

PALMER: Malaysia was a very English pukka society at that point. One saw a good number of whites, Europeans, primarily British. It was still in the days of the British planters when planters would be in their rubber estates during the week and come into town, Kuala Lumpur, on the weekend and proceed to try to drink up all the beer in the country and do various other types of school boy things. There was lots of playing of rugby, etc. These were the days when the Selangor Club, the so-called Spotted Dog, was the center of the expatriate life. Those were the days when Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak were leading the country. It was 1963. It was six years away from the riots of 1969 when about 600 people were killed and when Tunku was forced to resign.

With regard to the language, in those days there were very few Malays who spoke English. So if you were going to speak to a Malay you almost had to speak Malay. The Malays that were in Kuala Lumpur tended to be in a very isolated area. Most of the people that one saw tended to be expatriates and, as mentioned, primarily British.

My most realistic experience in using the language was when I was sent in May, 1963 with Bob Blackburn, who has since left the Service, to make a tour up the east coast of Malaysia, across the peninsula and then down the west coast to sample opinion about the Confrontation that was going on with Indonesia at that time. So I had a chance in the days when travel on the east coast of Malaysia was very difficult and when one had to cross about four or five fords by small boats, to see the country before it really changed.

It had already begun an evolution from the end of the British time, 1957, but Malaysian culture had not really taken hold so there was a kind of kaleidoscope. You could go from one rest house in one state to another and go from a place that still very much had a British character to a place where it was very quickly becoming Malaysian, including the food. One place would have wholly Malaysian foods, curry, etc. and another place would be strictly steak and potatoes in the British style.

All in all Malaysia was a delightful place in 1962-63. Kuala Lumpur deserved the name of Garden City as it was then called because it was very green. The British had gone to great pains to make Malaysia into a monument to their colonialism. But there was something antiseptic about Kuala Lumpur in those days. Rather like Singapore these days. It was just too clean and

too good to be true, as it were. However, there was at that time a very lively night life that in its quiet way was probably akin to night life that was going on in other places in southeast Asia.

Q: How did we feel at the Embassy there about the confrontation that was going on with Indonesia?

PALMER: That period in time was an extremely interesting one. We felt that Indonesia was very much a bully and interloper. We felt the Malaysians were trying to do good things. They were trying to do everything right. They were going to school, they were trying to regularize and make life orderly in the post independence period. Indeed, the Malaysians faced some extremely difficult problems with regard to the integration of Singapore into the framework of what came to be known as Malaysia [I have been using the word Malaysia previously but it was not formed until the fall of 1963, I should have used Malaya]. We thought in the Embassy that the United States sided too much on the side of Indonesia.

Q: You had come from working under Howard Jones. Did he have horns in the eyes of the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur?

PALMER: Well, looking at it from the perspective of Kuala Lumpur, I found myself more frequently than not toward Indonesia, trying to defend American policy, indeed trying to defend the well known slant of the Embassy in Jakarta towards Sukarno. Often people would not give me very much of a hearing. Rather patronizing, then thought it was nice that I would seem to defend Embassy Jakarta.

You asked about Ambassador Jones. There was a certain amount of coolness one would feel in Malaya towards Ambassador Jones. He was known as Howard Merdeka Jones, as you probably have heard.

Q: No.

PALMER: Merdeka is the Indonesian word for independence and it was alleged at one point that Sukarno was asking ambassadors and others in his entourage to entertain. Ambassador Jones is alleged to have stood up and urged the crowd towards merdeka, the Indonesian goal.

Q: Now merdeka in the Indonesian terms not only meant independence but also meant taking part of Borneo. Is that right?

PALMER: It wasn't just Borneo. It was the whole area from the tip of Sumatra over to New Guinea. Yes, it did include the idea that the Malaysian or former British portion of Borneo might be freed, as it were, to have Indonesian sovereignty asserted over them. It is useful to remember that the area that is now called Sabah in Malaysia was the British North Borneo Company. The area called Sarawak had been, of course, the area ruled by Rajah James Brook, the white Rajah of Borneo. Brunei was ruled by the Sultan of Brunei who chose eventually not to go into Malaysia.

So these were, so to say, colonial leftovers in Borneo. In the final analysis, however, Tunku Abdul Rahman and the leadership of Malaysia were very successful in encouraging the people in Borneo to join the Malaysian Federation. There were those who thought this was a British confection and perhaps it was in the beginning. But as Tunku became Prime Minister and got further and further into the statecraft that was necessary to bring Malaysia into existence, one thing became very basic. The Malay population of Malaya, if one is to have only Malaya and Singapore, would be approximately equal to the Chinese population of the two territories together. To actually get a Malay preponderance, it would be necessary to include Sabah and Sarawak as well. That was the premise that I think the British had suggested the idea to Tunku.

But it became a self-fulfilling prophecy because the issue of maintaining Malay political control was something very, very much on the minds of the Malay leadership in the early sixties. You may recall that this was a time of great emphasis on the question of Malay becoming the national language and various other manifestations of nationalism and emphasis on the Malay question.

I said earlier that there were riots in 1969. They were ultimately about the issue of political control. The formula had been that the Malays had political control and the Chinese had economic control. In the elections of 1969, what happened was that the Chinese almost won control of the state of Selangor which at that time include Kuala Lumpur. Political leaders on the Malay side appeared to encourage or at least egged on Malay radicals who attacked Chinese and this led to the May 13 riots at that time.

The critical thing and we can come back to this later on in these conversations, is that the Malays were then and remain quite sensitive to the issue of political balance between them and the Chinese.

Q: Looking at it at that time, how did we feel at the Embassy concerning the "communist menace"?

PALMER: Communism in Malaya was a very real thing. Communism, of course, in Indonesia was real as well. This was after the emergency which ended in 1960, but the Communist Terrorists, as they were called, were still operating in remoter areas of the country. It was known that they would come across the mountainous spine of the country down from Thailand, where they had a sort of safe haven, and would infiltrate into various areas of the country.

The issue of communist menace looked at from the perspective of 1990 does not have quite the dramatic coloration that it had in the early sixties. In the early 1960s communism and the issue of Asian communism and the possibility that communism as an organized force could extend from China down to Thailand, down to Malaya and across the Straits of Malacca to Indonesia, was a very real...I shouldn't say fear, but was regarded as something that could happen. It is easy to forget that through most of the fifties and certainly well into the sixties, the issue of whether communism or anti-communism was going to prevail in most of the third world was a very open question.

I don't want to get too far ahead of my story at this point, but I will tell you right now that if you speak in man-to-man terms to leaders of Singapore or Malaysia they will tell you that the US

intervention in Vietnam gave them time to organize their societies and to protect them from becoming communist.

Q: This is a contention which I have to admit my prejudice. I think there is validity in this idea that maybe it didn't work completely in Vietnam, but certainly it allowed the whole area to solidify.

PALMER: Again, I don't wish to sharpen any historical, rhetorical swords. But I believe that if things had come out differently in Indonesia in 1965...that is to say if the pro-Communist coup of September 30, 1965 had turned out so that the left had won instead of being defeated, as it were, and the PKI and all the forces it represented had gotten control of the country, I just don't know what the impact of that would have been. It would have been a very considerable political impact in the region.

ROBERT W. DUEMLING
Consular/Economic Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1963-1965)

Ambassador Robert W. Duemling was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1929. He received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Yale University. Prior to becoming a Foreign Service officer, Ambassador Duemling served in U.S. Navy intelligence and was stationed in Japan. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Rome, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Ottawa, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Suriname. Ambassador Duemling was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: In 1963, you were assigned to Kuala Lumpur. How did that come about?

DUEMLING: I had been in the Navy in Japan and became tremendously interested in Japan and particularly in Japanese culture and society. So much so that when I left Japan at the end of my navy assignment, I said to myself that I had to leave Japan right away because if I didn't I would become a Japanophile who would settle down and just get deeper and deeper into the society. I did get out of it, but when I came into the Foreign Service and was given an opportunity to study a "hard language", I decided to shy away from it and not study Japanese because it was too soon after my entrance into the Foreign Service. I wanted to get a broader view of the Foreign Service before plunging back into Japanese affairs. But I was very interested in the Far East as a result of my naval experience and my visits to a number of countries out there aboard the aircraft carrier. So I told a friend in the Personnel Office--Christian Chapman-- that I would love to go back to the Far East after my Rome tour. He agreed and since he was in charge of assignments into the Far East, he found me an assignment in Kuala Lumpur which was not a language-requirement country, having been a former British colony. Knowing Malay was therefore not essential. So I was assigned to KL to be a one-man Consular Section.

At that time, before the "track" system, it was felt that a junior officer should obtain experience in different functions. Having served as a political officer in Rome and knowing that I would prefer to remain in the political area for the rest of my career, it was important that I become acquainted with the other Foreign Service facets and aspects. I was therefore very pleased to get this assignment as a one-man Consular Section. That was much better than having to go to a huge Embassy in a visa mill where you would get a much more limited experience. This way I would be performing all the functions of a Consular Section--protection and welfare, immigrant and visitors visas, passports, citizenship. So for one year, that was my job and I learned a lot, getting the consular functions "under my belt".

There was very good rotational program at our Embassy in K.L. and the DCM there, Don McCue, was very good about trying to give a variety of experience to the junior officers in the Embassy. He rotated people throughout. So after I had been there in the Consular Section for one year, he assigned me to the Economic Section and I spent about eight months there, responsible for all the basic reporting on the natural rubber industry and the tin industry which were the Malaysian principal export commodities at that time. That was very good economic experience. It got me involved with US exports and imports into Malaysia. I learned a little bit about the American business community in Malaysia.

Then our Ambassador, Jim Bell, decided that I would be the right guy to become the Consul in charge of the small Consulate we had in East Malaysia, in Kuching, Sarawak. Therefore, I went to Borneo, which is divided one-third --the old British Part--consisting of Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah (Sarawak and Sabah joined Malaysia) and the other two thirds consisting of Kalimantan which is part of Indonesia. I went to run the Kuching consulate, which no longer exists. I was responsible for three areas--Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah-- reporting across the board on political and economic issues. That was very interesting. This was at the time of so-called "confrontation" between Malaysia and Indonesia. The only place where the two countries abutted was in Borneo, so that when I was there, there were Indonesian raids across the border into Sarawak. That was never much of a war. It was a low-level guerrilla activity.

Q: Was there a feeling that the incursions were not serious or could be contained?

DUEMPLING: The thought was that it could be contained without too much trouble. Most people felt that it was primarily posturing on the part of the Indonesians. No one thought that they would do much. In the meanwhile, there were these guerrilla activities. There was an attack, for example, on a police station seven miles outside of Kuching during which several people were killed. There was always the concern about infiltrators. No one thought it would lead to full scale war, but at the same time it was not anything that you could just ignore.

My territory also included Brunei. In those days it was a British protectorate. It is now independent and we have an Embassy there. I did have the fun, while Consul in Kuching, of representing the US President at the wedding of the current Sultan of Brunei, who was then about 21 years old, marrying a young lady of about 18. I doubt very much that the President knew that he was being represented at the marriage of the Sultan and in fact I don't remember any particular directions from Washington or the Embassy on what to do. I just figured that we ought to have be there. I had to give some gift; I went to Singapore and bought an American

made silver cream and sugar set. That was given on behalf of the President of the United States. This was all on my own initiative. This is the sort of stuff that when you are in the Foreign Service, way out in the boondocks somewhere, you take the initiative.

Q: Did we show much concern with the fighting? Did we try to bolster the Malaysian side?

DUEMLING: Yes, we were. We didn't want to be drawn into the dispute publicly, but essentially we supported the independence of the Malaysian states against any potential Indonesian aspirations to take over Malaysia. We were supportive of the Malaysian cause. One tends to forget the facts and the mood of the situation at the time. We forget the Communist international of 1948 and their plans to foment political unrest and disorder in various places. One of those places was Malaysia. There had been the so called "emergency" which was a serious insurrection which took place in Malaysia throughout the early 1950's. It was not until it was effectively brought under control that the British granted independence to Malaya in 1957. There was still concern when I was serving in Malaysia and Borneo for the vestigial Communist party movement working out in the jungles. There was a certain amount of political agitation going on. So there was some interest and concern for what could happen.

Q: Do you have any reflections about our Embassy in Indonesia, which was then under Ambassador Howard Jones, who was viewed as being too pro-Sukarno?

DUEMLING: There was a famous episode when Jones sat on the platform at a big political rally with Sukarno. When introduced to the crowd by Sukarno, Jones raised his fist and shouted "Defeat Malaysia" in Indonesian. This was totally unauthorized and we thought that Jones had been carried away. It was totally ill-advised. We laughed about it because we thought it was slightly loony. There was a certain tension between our Embassies in Malaysia and in Indonesia and our Consul General in Singapore as well. There were three different posts involved in the Malaysia-Indonesia dispute: one was the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, one was the Consulate General in Singapore and one was the Embassy in Jakarta. It was interesting to watch the telegraphic traffic emanating from these three posts because they were each reporting on the viewpoints of the states to which they were accredited. There was undoubtedly a certain amount of "clientitis" creeping into the reporting. There were some small, subtle digs from each post about the others. Singapore joined Malaya in 1963 to form Malaysia. I arrived in Kuala Lumpur just after that event had taken place. Therefore, one of the factors on the American side, was the Consul General in Singapore which had been an independent post, but after the formation of Malaysia, had become a subordinate post to the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. That was a hard pill to swallow for the Consul General in Singapore. That post had been independent for a long time.

That situation did not last very long because within a couple of years Singapore left Malaysia. That was a fascinating evolution. I was in a position to see that situation in considerable detail because shortly after I arrived in K.L., I met the British Ambassador--High Commissioner-- and his wife. We became life time friends. We remained very friendly after all of us had left K.L. They invited me to their daughter's wedding at Eton College some years later. I remained in close touch with them until they died. In any case, I became good friends with Lord and Lady Head. He had a very distinguished career--he had been one of the youngest Brigadiers in the British Army. He left the British Army at the end of World War II in order to go into politics. He

was the Minister of Defense in the Eden Cabinet at the time of the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. When Harold MacMillan shuffled the Cabinet, Lord Head declined to stay at Defense because the Prime Minister was planning to reduce the size of the British Army and, somewhat like Winston Churchill, Head didn't want to preside over that. He then began a diplomatic career--he was High Commissioner in Nigeria and then Malaysia. He was a breath of fresh air in Malaysia because despite the fact that he was a Viscount, he had started as a commoner. His wife was born into nobility, being the daughter of the Earl of Shaftesbury. Both were vigorous types. Lady Head was very liberal and despite her ancestry, in manner, speech and dress was a very plain woman. She wore plain dresses; she wore flat shoes, she wore a kerchief around her head. She thought that Malaysia was an extremely interesting place. She got involved in many activities--she went to political meetings. While her husband was dealing with the Prime Minister and other high level officials, she was out in the boondocks. They were quite a political couple. We played a lot of tennis together on their court.

During this very turbulent political period, one of the Heads' frequently unannounced visitors was Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore who made Singapore independent again in 1965. I was at the British residence on the day that in effect the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, threw Singapore out of Malaysia. I'll never forget Lee Kuan Yew rushing to the British residence unannounced because he was in such close touch with the British government about these problems. He was in tears. He consulted with the High Commissioner and then left. I asked Lord Head what was going on and he told me confidentially that Lee just had a session with the Malaysian Prime Minister who told Lee that he thought that he (Lee) had violated a gentlemen's agreement regarding the forthcoming elections. The Prime Minister thought that Lee's party, which was based in Singapore, would not contest any elections on the mainland. But apparently Lee, after having made that agreement, went back to his own Cabinet which over-ruled him. It decided that their party would contest in two or three constituencies on the mainland. That was obviously contrary to the agreement originally reached and the Tunku threw Singapore out of Malaysia. This anecdote is interesting in part because there are many versions of how the rupture between Malaysia and Singapore took place. One version had it that Singapore and Lee took the initiative to opt out of Malaysia. That was not the case. My sense was that Lee would have preferred to stay in Malaysia because at the time there was considerable question about the economic viability of a little city-state like Singapore. Singapore then, as contrasted to now, was not the economic major player. It was a busy little place with a certain amount of commerce and some manufacturing, but it was nothing like Hong Kong. What has of course happened is that Singapore has become the "other Hong Kong". With the political changes that will take place before the end of the century in H.K., Singapore may become the pre-eminent financial center of East Asia. None of that of course was the case back then.

Q: You went back to Washington in 1966 at the height of the Vietnam War, to become Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for East Asia. What were your responsibilities?

DUEMLING: I was asked to return after one year in Borneo to become the economic officer for the Malaysia-Singapore desk. There wasn't too much to do in that job. I was underemployed. I worked closely with Bob Barnett, who was the Bureau's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. Barnett was intellectually very stimulating and therefore I enjoyed that aspect of my job. The rest was pretty boring. Fortunately, Bill Bundy, the Assistant Secretary, needed a

new special assistant to run his office. He had spied me and knew that I was underemployed. He therefore asked if I would be willing to fill the job and I readily agreed.

ROBERT WILLIAM FARRAND
Junior Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1964-1966)

Mr. Farrand was born in Watertown, New York in 1934 and graduated from Mount Saint Mary's College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Moscow and Prague and was named ambassador to Papua, New Guinea in 1990. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You were there in Kuala Lumpur from when to when? How many years?

FARRAND: I was there from 1965 to 1967, no, '64 to '66.

Q: What was Malaysia at that time, was it an independent state and what did it consist of?

FARRAND: It had just received its independence from the United Kingdom in the late 1950s. Following Malaysia's independence, however, the British Army had to stay in order to help put down and insurgency of so-called communist terrorists in the jungle areas bordering on Thailand. Malaysia at independence consisted of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and two provinces in northern Borneo: Sabah and Sarawak. I can't remember exactly how many provinces there are in total, but I think there are ten or eleven on the Malay Peninsula – the locus of what used to be British Malaya. Singapore was located at the tip of the peninsula, across the causeway. While I was there, a young Chinese politician was part of the Singapore delegation in the Malaysian parliament controlled at that time by the Malay party of UMNO (United Malay National Organization). The young politician was Lee Kuan Yu. He was a firebrand, bright and irascible; and he was driving the Malays nuts. So, about 1965, while I was there, UMNO engineered Singapore's ejection from Malaysia. As I recall, the break had to do in some part with Lee Kuan Yu's strong personality. Surely UMNO's reasons for taking such a drastic measure were more complicated, but as a junior officer working in the consular section, not the political section, it stuck in my mind that way. They just voted to chop Singapore off and that was supposed to go a long way toward solving a major part of their problem with the Chinese minority.

Q: The territories in Borneo did that play much of a role while you were there? Was that considered very important?

FARRAND: Well, not really, no. Only insofar as the Borneo provinces could serve as listening posts for what was happening in Indonesia. At that time Indonesia's president Sukarno had declared a state of hostility - or "Konfrontasi" in the Malay/Indonesian language - with Malaysia. Thus, all direct travel between Malaysia and Indonesia was prohibited. I mean you couldn't travel directly between the capitals of Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta or between any other cities in

the two countries. To go to Jakarta from KL you had to go first to Thailand (Bangkok), change planes and then fly down. Of course, as a junior officer I'd never have an opportunity to do that. Such travel was rare and only undertaken by more senior officers as circumstances dictated.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

FARRAND: A marvelous career Foreign Service Officer by the name of James Dunbar Bell. He was a man of maturity, toughness, taciturnity - physically lean, white-maned, and large in stature. He played a good game of golf, which was the thing to do in Malaysia. Business was done on the beautiful course at the Royal Selangor Golf Club right in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. The RSGC has to rank I'm sure with one of the world's more beautiful golf courses. Expensive to join, the Royal Selangor was outside the budget of a junior officer. But, Ambassador Bell was a very good person to work under and to learn from at my first posting. For me, he set the standard for how an ambassador should carry out his mission. An excellent role model for me, just entering the Service.

Q: Let's start with your posting. What were you doing?

FARRAND: Are you ready for this?

Q: Yes.

FARRAND: Well, here is a division officer who had served aboard a naval vessel with sixty or seventy men under him responsible for radar communications, electronic navigation, and weather aerography; followed by some years as an instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy going around in this spit-and-polish kind of place at the heart of the naval establishment. Now, as a junior FSO in Kuala Lumpur, I am assigned for six months as assistant – get that? - assistant General Services Officer. Assistant General Services Officer!

Q: One usually thinks of this as making sure the plumbing works and stuff like that.

FARRAND: I did all that and I actually liked it. I tried to do it well, even though the content of my work was rather unlike anything I'd done before. Some of the junior officers upstairs were scratching their heads, "What the hell is he doing down in GSO?" (*Stopped editing here on January 30, 2005.*) But it helped that I was working for a very fine guy, Art Goodwin, and he was an excellent GSO, he really was a person who devoted himself to cutting costs, figuring out how to get things done. He was not a person that was, he was an administrative officer that saw the mission needed to be supported and he imbued me with that. It wasn't hard. It was for six months. I worked hard at it. The one thing I did that probably stood me in good stead. The ambassador's wife had been an administrative officer in the Foreign Service. They had a large residence and the kitchen was peopled with Malay and Chinese, not so many Indians, but Malay and Chinese cooks and bottle washers and people that deliver and all of this business. Well, she asked me at one point if I would come and take a look at the inventory of her house and I did. I went into the kitchen with my little clipboard and I looked around and I know that the country was loaded with cockroaches and I thought to myself that this kitchen has to be no different. So, I opened up all the cabinets underneath, there were many. Opened them up and I looked back in

and I didn't see cockroaches, but what I did see was lots of cooking ware that had been sitting back there collecting dust and there were droppings and this and that and I said to the head of them. I said, "Mr. Cole or Mr. Kim I want all of this cleaned up. I want all of it, all, everything, pulled out, every piece of crockery, I want it washed before it is put back in. I want all of that way back in there to be all washed out, I want this cleaned." That was my naval training because we would have never have permitted the galley to look like that. That established me with Mrs. Bell, that established me with the ambassador. I could do no wrong from then on because, of course, she knew some of this. She was a flunks at hard to deal with. The games that are played.

Q: How did you find working with, you say the trainees in Malay and Indians. The Indonesians are a different tribe when you're the GSO you're really need the tribal politics.

FARRAND: It was constant. (Bell goes off.)

Q: We were talking about GSO dealing with the different nationalities there.

FARRAND: In answering the question you just unlocked a little cabinet. I don't want to blow on it. I just came from working for three months in Bosnia with the Croat Serbs and Muslims and I just wonder whether my ability to interact successfully with Malays, Chinese and Indians over the years had any official effect.

Q: There's a spillover.

FARRAND: Well, but it's not necessarily a clear-cut spillover. It just kind of builds into what you understand that they, you can't take sides.

Q: No.

FARRAND: Well, you can't take sides and as came clear later, in 1969 I left, I was in Kuala Lumpur. Actually, Kuala Lumpur was '65 to '67. In 1969, just two years later there was an awful blood bath right in the city when the Malays took out after the Chinese down in their unclaimed downtown part and it was just terrible. It probably wasn't as bad as what happened in Indonesia in 1965 when the Malays went after the Chinese, I'm sorry the Indonesians, which are the same stock. It was horrific.

Q: Did you find that having some of these three groups, the Indians, the Malays and the Chinese, did this make it hard to work in this for an American in this area?

FARRAND: No. Not an American who was naive. An American who had no predispositions who came on the whole thing fresh, no. I just went about my kind of, as I say, my open faced way working with them all. I recognized the people on my staff where all three and I had to be a little bit sensitive to that, but I let them know not by saying it, but you know we're all working together here and I'll need to support. I treated them all as well as I could.

Q: Well, then after six months doing this, what did you do?

FARRAND: There was a consular officer by the name of Samuel Hart who is in retirement now from, he went to Old Miss. He was running the consular office. It was a single consular officer. He took his wife, a lovely young woman and two Indian ladies in the backseat of his Mercedes and drove on the road from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. He came around the bend and met a logging truck head on, driven into the rice paddy, lay there bleeding, his wife lay there dying, the Indian ladies were in terrible pain and no one, they would gather around and look at him, but they wouldn't do anything because in the I don't know what particular religious strain holds this view or whether it's just an animus strain from the villages. If you help someone and save that person's life, then you are responsible for that person for the rest of his life or her life. So, they wouldn't do anything. He hollered out.

Finally, along came a policeman and they got them all to a hospital. Mrs. Hart died on the way and Sam was left with two children and a broken leg and a broken pelvis, all kinds of other things and the ambassador said to the General Services Officer, "I'm going to have to take your assistant." I had already taken the consular course, so they put me directly in. So, for nine months I had to pick up a moving operation and I had to go into it just willy nilly and it wasn't just dealing, as you can imagine, it wasn't just dealing on a visa line with non-immigrant visas. It wasn't just dealing on the immigrant visa line. It wasn't just dealing with citizenship and welfare, nor was it dealing with only passports, nor tourist problems. It was everything in a city, a country of about ten million people that wasn't yet on the tourists maps like it is today or was, but it, there were plenty of people passing through with all kinds of problems and I, I mean you want to talk challenging. For nine or ten months I ran that and I would actually go back after dinner and sit in my office from oh, 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening until 2:00 in the morning. The air conditioning was off. The building didn't have the air conditioning on after a certain time so I would sit there, stripped, sweating and just trying to keep up with, trying to keep up with the massive amounts of, and reading the regulations and try to be sure I was doing everything right. It drove me crazy.

Q: What were they, were there many immigrants to the United States or tourists to the United States:

FARRAND: The quick answer is no. There were enough. The Vietnam War was just beginning to start across the South China Sea and that meant that U.S. immigration policy was tighter I suppose from that part of the world than it might otherwise have been. Also, what was happening, there would be a bleed off in consul work. You well know that if one post is tough people will shop for another post, which isn't so tough. It worked out that there was a lady consular officer in Singapore. Her name escapes me, but not her approach to consular work. She was swamped with Nonyung Chinese, South Seas Chinese, Nonyung. She was swamped with them and she was hell on wheels when it came to ferreting out fraud to the point that she would have at her desk a large magnifying glass that she would take every photograph and bring it under close observation to see if it hadn't been cropped or added to. Her toughness led to an up flux of Chinese to Kuala Lumpur and then I had to be tough, but of course, I was naive. I mean I was not naive, I was new.

Q: Well, you didn't know the territory.

FARRAND: As an ex-naval officer I mean I don't want you to get the feeling that I was a child, I wasn't, but I did want to do it according to the book. I did want to do it according to the law and it took a lot out of me.

Q: What type of fraud were you running into?

FARRAND: Oh, God. People would say they were family members when they weren't. You got, you know someone what is it under the NIB that could prove that you have a residence abroad and had intention of abandoning. Well, I mean I had young women of mixed background, in other words, their father might have been Chinese and their mother might have been Malay. That didn't happen very often, but when it happened. So, they are Eurasian, Portuguese and they would do anything to get out and get to the States and that was it.

Q: Well, what about what sort of consular problems, did you have people getting arrested and things of that nature there, drugs?

FARRAND: Yes. Drugs were just beginning, but I would have people getting arrested. I would have people getting across the law. There was a large Peace Corps contingent in Malaysia and that Peace Corps contingent was in the segment of Malaysia that you were talking about. It was in Borneo, north Borneo in Sabah and Sarawak and that Peace Corps contingent was as I've said already, large. We had them on the mainland, too, the main peninsula of Malaysia, but they were over there and they had a tendency to get romantically involved. I remember one fellow wanted to marry a Diack woman. Now this fellow had gone to a good university in the United States. A tall, lanky guy, nice appearing fellow who was going to get married to this Diack woman and I will admit that she was an attractive woman, but she probably had two years of education or three. I could not imagine in any way how he would bring her back to the United States and how she would ever fit in. I suspect they didn't. That sort of thing. If you ask for one specific thing, I'm not going to be able to come up with it because there was such a broad range of things and remember Malaysia had a university and did Singapore. Missionaries had been there and the local school system itself wasn't bad. We're not talking about a nation of primitives here, although that may have occurred in certain pockets, but no, no, you're talking about kind of the reasonably well-advanced country even then. Now, of course, it's percolating along with the highest buildings in the world.

Q: What about, were you getting R&R people from Vietnam? That must have caused problems?

FARRAND: Yes, yes. That was the first, we were the first, that program began in Malaysia and Singapore. I don't know if it went to Thailand as much, but young troops would be brought in by air, let's say on a Friday and the following Friday they would be picked up and taken back to the war zone. Marines, army, navy, this was one of our obligations and so we, I had something to because I was a consular officer, was trying to mobilize the embassy itself to be open to these young men. It was young men, all young men to come in and to invite them, get them, show them a good time. But that was, I remember one marine got off and we had him over for drinks and he was a husky guy, but he looked at me and he said, "I saw my best friend last week cut in half by machine gun bullets." It was surreal living in Malaysia going in the diplomatic circuit, having young men come in and say this is what happened. It happened many times.

Q: Did you have much contact with people in the political section and all, it was probably a small embassy, wasn't it, or not? Maybe it wasn't? I was wondering.

FARRAND: Yes, yes, no the embassy was probably the perfect size for a junior officer. It was not a large embassy and it was not a small embassy. I would estimate the size at something in the order of it, being in general services, I probably had thirty to forty houses I had to look after. There was a large station there. I can say that? There was a large station there. The station was a quarter of the size of the embassy itself and because it was a watching place for Vietnam. A watching place for the Chinese, a watching place for all kinds of area activity because we're just across. No, I had plenty of interaction and a very fine political consular would invite me over, a very fine political officers I became friends of them and still am, yes.

Q: What was sort of the embassy reaction when Malaysia split with Singapore? It happened on your watch there.

FARRAND: I'm going to say that James Dunbar Bell was. This was the first occasion I had to see the interaction between the CIA and the Department of State abroad and a particular thing happened before Singapore split or was cut adrift by Malaysia. A couple of, there was going to be a meeting, I think it's the Rapus Hotel, you remember that famous old hotel. It was still old now it has been upgraded, but it is still there. There was going to be a meeting between as I recall it, some Chinese politicians possibly local, possibly involving others to the north and the CIA wanted to listen in. So, they were tampering to put their bug in with some wires probably I have it in my mind in one of those fans that goes around. Well, the whole thing they shorted something or something, the lights went out, this and that and the other and looking into it. Here is this bug found and it was a major embarrassment, major embarrassment and who had to pick up the pieces was James Dunbar Bell who had to fly to Singapore because he was ambassador of that area and I remember him on in the newspapers and on the radio explaining away this incident doing what he could. He had never been brought in on it and I knew that, too. So, it was the agency doing their cowboy thing and then it was the middle standard, oh I don't mean standard, it was your exposed diplomat who had to sweep up the glass and take care of it. I never forgot that and it informed a lot of my interaction with the agency later. Although I have a great deal of respect, enormous respect, but I am not sure that I always have great respect for operations. I think they can always stand a little outside with you. Now, put that aside.

That probably the embassy and the ambassador, they probably were officially unhappy that Malaysia and Singapore had split because we don't go around wanting everybody to split up, tighter and tighter. On the other hand, I think that the difference between the cultures of the Malaysia mainland and Singapore were such that unless you were there physically and Singapore, even though there was only two million people there, these are two million energetic, moving all the time people whereas in the compounds in the outside of the cities of Malaysia proper, life was at a far, far, far slower pace. So, that when it came to political tempo, Singapore probably had it. If you were in Singapore, you were in Kuala Lumpur and you couldn't be down there all the time and there wasn't the natural, easy going back and forth. So, from many angles, probably from many angles, it is better to have two embassies to deal with those two areas. Probably, I think so.

Q: Well, after you got up to '67 and you sort of face your...

FARRAND: I must say to you that the most meaningful experience of that time came when after nine months in consular work I was tapped to go into the economic section for ten months. In that economic section I became deeply engrossed in Malaysia's two top industries in those days. One, natural rubber from rubber trees; two, tin from the great tin deposits around there. In those days Lyndon Johnson was trying to fight the war in Vietnam and have his great society as well. To get money for the Vietnam War, he began to look very carefully he and his administration at selling off the national stock pile of strategic materials which had been built up since the second world war because we were caught flat footed in 1939, '40 and '41. So, we built up all kinds of supplies of things including massive warehouses full of natural rubber in bales and warehouses full of tins for and many other things. Any of the rare metals, any of the things which you cannot get in the United States, they were stored in Maryland, they were stored in lots of places around the country. The sensitivity of general services administration ran all of this and they were under pressure from the White House to sell, but of course, given the amounts they had, when they sold it, it would depress world prices and I was in the middle of that. That was a marvelous learning experience.

Q: Obviously the Malaysians on rubber and tin were screaming bloody murder, weren't they? How did we deal with it?

FARRAND: Yes. Very delicately. The standard line over here in Washington was that we are conducting these sales from the national stockpiles. By the way, these weren't the only two commodities; there were probably another hundred commodities. But, a lot of money from that could come to the White House or to the Congress and then it could be dispensed. (Bell rings.) I just wanted to say that it was just an enormous experience and here is a situation where and it taught me a great lesson that I may or may not have benefited from and one is that you don't, you should take jobs that you are interested in because those jobs may become because of events they may rise in importance and it happened in Kuala Lumpur at the American Embassy that the economic section of the embassy was easily equal to in its work to what the political section was doing. Easily because we were focusing on the sensitive issues that were far more upsetting to the government. The sale of 1,000 tons of natural rubber back here in Washington was far more critical to our bilateral relations out there than was the visit of Senator Foghorn.

Q: But, what could we do about it outside of just tell them, "Here it comes boys, we're doing it"?

FARRAND: There was an ambassador in Bolivia, he was of Italian American background, Ernest Syracuse. At the very same time, what when I came back from Malaysia they brought me into the economic bureau and they had me work on tin and rubber and then later iron and steel. Syracuse was down there in Bolivia and what he did was, he told Washington at one point. Our ambassador didn't do this. "If there is one more ton, metric ton of tin sold from the national stockpile," said Syracuse, "I can no longer vouch for the safety of the members of my staff or of any American in Bolivia," and that stopped the sales of tin. Now it didn't happen while I was out there, but I can well remember putting together seriously long one or two seriously long telegrams for me. I'm not a great, I don't enjoy it that much, but I like it when I'm in it, but I

don't like to contemplate it. But, I made this long argument which the ambassador had asked me to do and I cleared it with political and I cleared it with the DCM and everything and the ambassador and he looked and he made a few changes, but it was a agreed more or less telling Washington this is what you're doing to your relations with Malaysia if Malaysia matters. You see in situations like that, Malaysia may just be put aside.

Q: Pushed to one side, but

FARRAND: Yes, there were American interests there. Colgate Palmolive was there, there were other, you know.

Q: Also, too, at the time Johnson was looking for support for the war there and this must have played a, you know, I mean, you can't dump almost literally on a friendly nation and then expect them to come around and give you support on your war in their area?

FARRAND: Johnson, perhaps speaking to this, came himself to Malaysia. He spent thirty-six hours there.

Q: How did the visit go, I mean a presidential visit is usually equivalent to a major earthquake for an embassy.

FARRAND: Bob Bliss, Robert Bliss, was the admin officer and a good fellow and he told me that he was given, he gave me a number. He said they came in and they gave me a checkbook and here was the number in it, they just gave me a checkbook, the White House, State Department. That's it, just get it done. Every limousine in town, every driver, every. Bundy was there and yes, I think through that there was a lot of being careful because sales of rubber and tin were at the top of the agenda when he spoke to the Tucu Abdul Rafman. That's how, that was it was done. It was done with smoke and mirrors and trying to say to that and oh by the way, oh by the way, the Malays' particular UMNO were scared silly about the prospects of this looming monster to the north, China coming down. So, they were not unhappy to have the United States there doing its business in Vietnam. So, they could put up with it. Who was getting hurt? On the rubber and the tin? Malay Chinese. See what I mean?

Q: What was the impression you were getting from your own experience being around there and from your fellow officers about Abdul Rafman, the prime minister?

FARRAND: Tengku?

Q: Yes.

FARRAND: I think well, like in lots of places, since he was on top sure there was criticism, but in time I'm not going to say then because I didn't focus on the Tengku all the time, but I will say this, that in time I think that Tengku Abdul Rafman who passed away here about twelve years ago. I think in time he came to be seen as as far as Malay politicians are concerned as a statesman and good, good for the country and good for the region. You see what's happened to the Mahateer now. I mean this guy is everything in many ways. Tengku would never have

permitted this to happen. I don't want to lionize it because he was Malay after all.

Q: What about while you were there with your wife and all, what about social occasions? Was it easy to get to know the Malays or the Chinese or the others or not?

FARRAND: Reasonably, yes it was, it was. The only thing that would interfere with that would be their traditional approach to their own private time, their traditional approach. I don't think that there was any effort to freeze out the Americans even young or old. The embassy, as all embassies, had so much money to go for representation. My areas of expertise and responsibility. There was a board and a panel, a DCM, I don't know, our section as consular officer, when I was assistant GSO forget it, but when I was a consular officer I was the only consul so I got to know all the consuls in town. I got to know the consular division at the ministry of foreign affairs. That was my bag. I had enough. I wasn't still in the mode of you know high entertaining because you know I was a brand new junior officer, but I had enough. I could go to lunches at least and take people. When I was in the economic unit it became a little wider, a little more expansive and I participated there, but I had no trouble in getting the key people when I wanted them to come around, but remember as a third secretary who the hell's going to come to your house?

Q: Yes. How was the Vietnam War playing from your contacts who were seen in Malaysia? At that time, '65 to '67?

FARRAND: I'll divide this into two parts. There was a massive ignoring of the Vietnam War on the part of the people mostly. The local newspapers did not carry extensive accounts of it except by AP or UPI, lawyers, stuff like that, but there wasn't any original reporting in the local newspapers. It didn't appear I'm not even sure in those days if we had television. I'm trying to think if we had television. We must have but it was thirty-five years ago. So, you went about your business as though the Vietnam War wasn't going on. That was kind of the official approach to it. Way up high there was this I've already alluded to it, nervousness about the fallout of what might happen if the allies, the United States, Australia, whomever else was fighting with us, South Korea, were to fail in checking the Viet Cong and in checking Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. So that was up there at a higher level. That's what I think. Now on the more gut level as consular officer I got to see the riff raff that floated throughout Southeast Asia. I got to see those who were cast off from the war, those were trying to get in the war, trying to work for Brown and Root, not Brown and Root, there was another big one. Morris and Knuts.

Q: Knutson, Pacific Architects and Engineers.

FARRAND: But mostly Morris Knutson. Morris Knutson, I've never heard of them again. I don't know if they're in business anymore. But, anyway, Morris Knutson, you'd see these drifters, fellows that would be between thirty-five and fifty. You know, you didn't know how old they were, all you knew was they looked kind of tough and down at the edges. They would be coming in for all kinds of different consular services, but the one service they never wanted to hear about was the possibility of going back because for many of them if they landed in the United States there would be a warrant for their arrest or for back child payments, child support or something of this nature. Somebody was after them. They often would hook up with local women and then they would find their way back to Vietnam to work for any of these contractors

who were having obscene amounts of money shoveled at them to keep the bases up or to do whatever. It was the very, I mean, it was the underside of the war. It made the war look like a tawdry, tawdry dog's breakfast from where I sat.

Q: But, the Malays, I mean, this just sort of, that's your thing and not our thing, sort of?

FARRAND: Yes, at the level at which, that's right, yes, yes. I come back to this. My suspicion is that when the ambassador would have conversations with the prime minister and the foreign minister, etc., then a greater grand strategic view would emerge, but it certainly didn't on a daily basis where I was.

Q: Well, during the time you were there, the Chinese guerrilla movement was completely dead, I mean, was it over there?

FARRAND: No, it was dead for all intents and purposes, but there was still a small cadre that lived on the Thai/Malaysia border way up into the heart of the jungle and they hung on, they hung on, they had a particular leader and his name was known. They hung on.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the Malays and the Thais got along or didn't get along on both the unofficial and official levels?

FARRAND: No, I don't have a feeling for that. Remember Malaysia is Islam and Thailand is what is Thailand?

Q: I thought it was more of a Buddhist type of thing.

FARRAND: Yes. That made for serious cognitive dissidence on lots of things. If you look at the Malay Peninsula it connects Malaysia with Thailand and then Burma comes down, too. It connects Thailand not for a very large part. Not. So, I, no, I did not have a strong sense of Malay Thai relations.

SAMUEL F. HART
Consular/Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1964-1966)

Ambassador Samuel F. Hart was born in Canton, Mississippi in 1933. He joined the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included posts in Uruguay, Indonesia, Malaysia, Costa Rica, Chile, Israel, and an ambassadorship to Ecuador. Ambassador Hart was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Well, I take it this was not a happy ship.

HART: It was a terrible ship, and I couldn't wait to get out of there. God, I was going crazy. And when my transfer came through to Malaysia, my boss, who was an elderly gentleman I think on

his last tour in the Foreign Service, head of the Economic Section, in my last efficiency report, which was a favorable report, said: "I think that Hart's assignment to Kuala Lumpur is a good one because his body will now be where his sympathies have been for two years."

Q: Today is February 1, 1993, and this is a continuing interview with Ambassador Samuel Hart. Sam, we got you out of Djakarta in 1964.

HART: In the nick of time.

Q: Then you didn't go very far; you went to Kuala Lumpur.

HART: As my boss said, my body moved to where my heart had been all along.

Q: You were there for two years, '64 to '66.

HART: A little less than two years, that's right.

Q: What were you doing there?

HART: Well, I was supposed to go there as a member of the Political Section. But there was a quick shuffle by some people who were already there, so when I arrived, the Political Section job had been filled by somebody who was already present at the post. And I was given the choice of being the American consul in Kuala Lumpur or going to the Economic Section. And since I had figured I'd just as soon get my consulate tour out of the way, and because the Economic Section was not a very attractive place to work at that time, I did a year of consular work. And after that, I shifted over to the Political Section, where the Political Section chief was Bob Moore. I don't know whether you know Bob Moore or not.

Q: Yes.

HART: A very, very fine officer.

Q: What was the sort of political/economic/social situation in Malaysia at that time? Or was it Malaysia at that time?

HART: It was Malaysia. It had become Malaysia, of course, about a year before I got there, in '63. And that was the signal for Sukarno to declare a confrontation against Malaysia (which he considered a British colonialist plot against him and Indonesia), which of course ended up in a war between the British Commonwealth forces and Indonesia, fought mainly in Borneo, but not entirely, because you did, during the period '63-'64, have two or three Indonesian landings on the peninsula, platoon-size landings that didn't get anywhere; they were wiped out. The main battle lines were in godforsaken jungle over in Sabah and Sarawak. You know, that is the end of the world. But there were a couple of landings by Indonesian troops on the peninsula, which were picked up and snuffed out.

Notwithstanding that external tiff, Malaysia was off to a good start, having been, I would say, the crown jewel, in terms of colonial experiences, for the British. I think they had learned enough by their mistakes elsewhere that by the time they came, very late to the game, to colonial status in Malaya-Singapore, they realized that one day independence was going to come and it paid to get the people who were going to be the leaders of the new country educated enough in all forms of activities--whether it be medical or administrative or legal or whatever--so that they could be reasonably self-sufficient in governing themselves when they became independent. And they invested a lot in the infrastructure--both human and physical infrastructure--of Malaya prior to independence. So when independence came, it was not as rough a road as in most places. You didn't have a dearth of educated people, for example.

But you did have something there that was troublesome then and is still troublesome now, which is, of course, a multiracial society. With the population approximately 50 percent Malay, 30 percent Chinese, and 20 percent Indian, Eurasian, European, and what have you, a lot of Tamils, then you get all kinds of racial conflicts and strife, because the Malays, under the constitution of Malaysia, were given the political power, and everybody knew that the Chinese had the economic power. So you have a built-in tension, which occasionally erupts in racial violence.

But Malaysia is a lovely little country, and it was a pleasure to live in Kuala Lumpur, although for me personally it was one of the most difficult moments of my life. Because not long after I arrived there, my wife and I were going down to Singapore, and we had an automobile accident and she was killed. I never held that against Malaysia, but still, my time there is one that always will be looked at through that personal experience.

While I was in Malaysia, Indonesian confrontation was ended, in part because of the overthrow of Sukarno. I left Indonesia in, I think, July, went on home leave, got to Malaysia in October, and Sukarno was overthrown, I think, around November or something like that. I can't remember exactly, but it was shortly after I arrived in Malaysia that Sukarno was overthrown.

Q: I think it straddled a month. I think it was September, October. [EB says the coup was September 30, 1965, but Suharto did not become president until March 1968.]

HART: There was one big political event while I was there, Stu, although it ended up not being as big a deal as everybody feared it would be. Lee Kuan Yew, "the George Washington of Singapore," had brought Singapore into the federation on September 16, 1963. But on the morning of August 9, 1965, we woke up and Singapore was no longer in the federation. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister of Malaysia, had decided he'd had enough of Lee Kuan Yew's Chinese lip, and one night he said, "That's it, baby, you're out of here," and Singapore was out of the federation--a unilateral act on the part of the prime minister, who had a solid majority in the parliament and he didn't have to worry about where the votes were coming from. And that was it.

Q: What was the embassy reaction to this? I'm sure everything at that point was predicated on what we considered the fragility of Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War was going and we were just getting cranked-up into it. I'm sure we saw everything in terms of what does this mean to the Communists and all that, so how did that hit us?

HART: Well, I'm not sure that it was looked at quite this way. Kuan Yew was a known quantity to us.

You may recall that Kuan Yew, in '65, I guess it was, caused the United States a great amount of discomfort. He was staunchly anti-Communist. The intelligence function in Malaysia and Singapore was a British MI-5 function. There were some limits on what we were supposed to get into there. Supposedly MI-5 took the lead, and the CIA was just more or less a bit player in the whole thing.

Well, of course, as it happens in most intelligence things, we were cheating. And in other instances, they were cheating. And we had a bandit down in Singapore, a cabinet minister who was on the CIA payroll. One night they had him wired to a polygraph in a safe house in Singapore. This happened in the early Sixties. The Singapore MI-5 burst in on the safe house and there's this cabinet minister wired to the polygraph. Kuan Yew was really pissed off, but he didn't go public on us.

But after Singapore became independent and Kuan Yew got to a point where he was asking the United States for aid, he wasn't getting the answers from Secretary of State Dean Rusk that he wanted to get. And his response was, "If you keep saying things like you're saying right now about me, I'm going to go public about this thing." He didn't get the money, and he did go public.

And the immediate response of the ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, as well as Dean Rusk in Washington, was: "This is all a lie. CIA didn't have one of his cabinet members wired." Everybody in the embassy knew that they did. And in the end, he proved that they did. And it made a big fool out of the American ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, and out of Dean Rusk.

But we weren't big players. And I don't think there was a general feeling that the breakup of Malaysia was a big setback in the anti-Communist movement, in part because it was just about that time that the end to the emergency in Malaysia took place, which had been going on for about 15 years. The Malaysian Communist rebellion along the Thailand-Malaysia border had been reduced to nothing more than a little irritant, a couple of hundred people, something like that. Of course, it never amounted to more than about 5,000, and it tied down 100,000 troops. But it was gone. So we didn't look at it as a big geopolitical crisis, I don't think. And even to the extent that it was a crisis, it wasn't ours. It was British.

Q: What was the feeling that you were picking up, although it had ended about the time you got there, about this confrontation with Indonesia? The Malays, I mean, this was in Borneo, did they feel anything akin to their... or was this just...

HART: No, no, they didn't. There really was not. I think the Indonesians counted on that. When they landed these forces by rubber boat, or something like that, on the shores of southern Malaya, down around Johore and that area, I think what the Indonesians counted on was that there would be Malay villagers who would flock out and welcome the Indonesians with open arms as liberators from the oppression of the British and the Chinese. Well, the first thing the Malays did was run to the head man and report it to the district officer. And the Indonesians were in custody in 48 hours. There wasn't that feeling at all, no.

Q: Back to your work as consul. Was there much work? This was the beginning of sort of the drug culture, young American kids going abroad and all that. Did you get involved in that at all?

HART: Well, it was a big time of the Peace Corps. We had a very large Peace Corps contingent in Malaysia, and that was the biggest number of American young people that we had around. I think we had, at that time, two or three hundred, which was a pretty good-sized Peace Corps effort.

I did consular work under the ideal circumstances. If you ever wanted to do consular work and avoid the usual downside of it, Kuala Lumpur was the place. It was a one-man consular office, with a very good local employee, an under subscribed quota...

Q: This was a visa quota, which means you didn't have much demand for immigrant visas.

HART: An under subscribed immigrant visa quota. And you weren't on the tourist track, so you weren't going down and getting people out of jail. Occasionally a drunk sailor would miss ship in Port Swettenham, or something like that. Singapore had much more of the hassle of consular work. But I had a very pleasant time. I was just in there for a year. I got a lot of satisfaction from the job, because, unlike political work or economic work, you could go home at the end of the day and you could say, "I did something today which either reduced somebody's suffering or made them happy." There was a beginning, a middle, and an end on most of these things, and you could see how your handiwork had affected things, unlike reporting. So, although I didn't want to stay beyond the year that I had on the job, I came away from that with kind of a rosy glow. It was just a nice little mix of welfare and protection work. Occasionally a Peace Corps volunteer would come in and say, "Gee, I've met this super guy up in this village. I'm teaching English up in this little Malay village, and I've got this boyfriend who's the greatest thing ever, and we're going to get married. What do you think about it? Somebody told me I ought to come talk to you." And I would sit there and I'd tell her about all the dangers of intercultural marriages, particularly if she was marrying into a Muslim Malay family, and what the role of the woman was, and this, that, and the other thing. But in the end, they always did it.

Q: Yes, I did the same in Saudi Arabia. It really doesn't work very well, because it sounds like we're being race conscious. It wasn't that, it's just that the...

HART: It's a cultural problem.

Q: It's a cultural problem, because at a certain point, particularly American women can't take it any more and want to go home, and they can't get their babies out. And then, from our point of view, it becomes a consular problem, because we have to say, "We can't sneak your babies out, lady."

HART: Well, I probably was not the run-of-the-mill consular officer. I arrogated to myself certain judgments which were not provided for in the manual. Since we had an under subscribed quota, I looked at each non-immigrant-visa applicant as if he or she were an immigrant-visa applicant, because we did have a fair number of change-of-status cases. When somebody would

come in and say, "I've got this reason to go to the States for a visit for business or pleasure," I didn't look at them as NIVs, I looked at them as immigrant-visa cases. And if I thought they'd make good American citizens, I gave them a visa. And if I didn't think they'd make good American citizens, I didn't give them a visa. I just didn't do it.

I'll tell you a story. I was out of the Consular Section. We had a junior officer in there, who's still at the State Department. His name is Bill Farrand. Do you know Bill Farrand?

Q: No, I don't, no.

HART: Well Bill was a first-tour FSO-8. He had gone in to be the vice consul when I had moved to the Political Section, but I still kind of went down there two or three times a day to see if anything was going on that I needed to advise Bill on. One day, as I was going down to the office, the off-duty Marines were all standing there, the elevators doors opened and out walks this real babe. I mean, this is a Chinese babe what was. And she's headed into the consular office. I went in there, and Bill was in the office, and I said, "Man, you've got a live one outside."

He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Well, see this babe outside. She's something. I don't know what she is, but she's something."

Her name was like Lily Chong, and she was a big strip artist in one of the nightclubs down in the Chinese section of town. And she wanted to come to the States on a visitor's visa. I said to Bill, "You better bring her in here and interview her." And so he did. I stood over to the side while he interviewed her. And the story was that she was going to make an around-the-world tour in the company of an Australian veterinarian who worked for the race tracks. He was one of the primary veterinarians for race horses. He was a gentleman of about our years, and she was a hot young ticket.

"Well, what funds do you have?"

"Why, I don't have any funds, but here's my ticket, and he's guaranteed me all my expenses."

So she left, and Bill said, "Well, I don't see any reason why we can't give her a visa."

I said, "You give her a visa, and your efficiency report just went through the bottom. You've got no future in the Foreign Service."

And he said, "Why?"

And I said, "Because she and Charlie whoever his name is, the Australian, get over to the States and have a fight, and he'll drop her, take the tickets and everything else and leave her after that. She'll be there without a job, without money, or anything. But she won't be unemployed for long. And technically speaking, by the regulations, they're going to the States for immoral purposes. They're going there to fornicate in as many places as they can find. But I'm not worried about

that; I'm worried about her becoming a public charge if he ditches her. So you can't give her a visa."

"What grounds am I going to give for not giving her a visa?"

She's outside. I said, "Tell her to bring the guy in."

So an appointment was set up, and in due course she came in with the guy. And I was there. Bill was really feeling very uncomfortable about this. The guy and I, according to him, had met at some party up in one of the other towns in Malaysia when I was up there playing in a golf tournament. I didn't remember it, but anyway...

When it came down to brass tacks, I said to him, "Look, you're a big boy and I'm a big boy. Now we can sit here and we can be cute with each other, and if you really try to pin me down, I'm going to say some things you don't want to hear. But my suggestion to you is as follows: Have your around-the-world trip, but don't go through the States. Go through Mexico. It's nice in Mexico, you'll enjoy it. If you push me on this, I'm going to deny a visa, so don't do it."

And he said, "Okay." And that was the end of the case, I thought.

But then the ambassador started getting phone calls from all the high-ranking Malaysian ministers in the government, who had been sleeping with this babe. To the credit of the ambassador and DCM, they never put the screws to me, and those people never got visas. It was that kind of thing. It was a lighthearted thing.

Q: The ambassador during your time was James D. Bell.

HART: You just know everything, don't you.

Q: Well, I have a book; I look it up.

HART: That's right, Jim Bell.

Q: What was he like? How did he operate his embassy?

HART: Oh, I liked Jim Bell. He delegated a lot of the donkey work to his DCM, a guy named Don McHugh, who was DCM during most of my time there. Later on, Bob Moore, who was Political Section chief, moved up to be DCM. But that was mainly after I left. That's an unusual thing when it happens, too, to move somebody up from section chief to DCM.

But Jim Bell was a big, bluff, hearty, red-faced, hard-drinking Irishman (I don't think he had an alcohol problem, but he liked to drink), who was a smart guy, political type (not a political appointee, but a political officer), who loved to play golf. I was an FSO-5, I guess, at the time, and shortly after I got there, since I was the low handicap in the embassy, Jim Bell asked me if I wanted to go out and play golf with him on Wednesday afternoon at the Royal Selangor Golf Course. And of course, I was always ready to do that. He would have a few dollars bet, and he

and I would play partners. The first time or two we won. And then the third time, I had about a five-foot putt on the last hole that if I made it, we won, and if I didn't, we lost. I missed it, and I don't think I ever got asked back again. Jim didn't like to lose.

In Kuala Lumpur, as part of the British tradition, probably *the* "in" activity for males was golf. The king played golf; he had his own little separate dressing room out at the Royal Selangor Golf Club. The prime minister was an avid golfer; the deputy prime minister was an avid golfer. There were very few golfers in the embassy. Over my lifetime in the Foreign Service, there always were very few golfers in the embassy, and in some cases I was the only one. But it opened up enormous possibilities sometimes. I mean, if Tun Abdul Razak, who was the deputy prime minister and became prime minister of Malaysia for so many years, was standing in the shower stall with you, naked, after a golf game, that put you on a different basis with him than if you met him at a cocktail party. And that's the way it was; everybody who was anybody in the political and economic hierarchy in Malaysia played golf. But Foreign Service people missed it, because they didn't.

Q: Well, I know golf was extremely important in Korea when I was there, and had been. In Asia, golf is an important thing. Certainly it was the only contact I think we ever had during most of the time, from the Sixties and Seventies and into the Eighties, in Burma.

HART: Well, over the years, I've found that the people with whom I had the lasting personal relationships were not the business contacts. They were the golfing contacts. Now sometimes they overlapped, a business contact was a golfing contact. I always tried to tell junior officers and what have you: "have an interest and participate actively in it when you're overseas, because it gets you into the culture in a way that you need to be if you're going to understand what's going on." It gives you sources of information who will talk to you in a way, because they don't feel like it's a business deal, that you can't get simply by normal cocktail-circuit-type stuff. You can make real friends. After all, we are intelligence officers. And when people talk to a political officer, or whoever, from the American Embassy, I think the fact that you are a political officer and an intelligence officer shapes to some degree what they say to you.

Q: Well, it should.

HART: It should. It should. When you're no longer that, when you are a fellow birdwatcher, you get different kinds of information and different answers to the same questions. And I think that Foreign Service people, particularly in the modern time, miss a lot of that.

Q: Let's talk a bit, sort of for the uninitiated, about what you did as a political officer at this post. How does one write reports?

HART: Well, I had been a political officer in my first post, in Montevideo, then I switched to economic officer, then I went to Djakarta and I was an economic officer there. And at that time, there was a lot more cachet to being a political officer than to being anything else, although I chose not to be a political officer. Consciously I decided that I wanted to be essentially an economic officer. But I didn't want to serve in the Economic Section in Kuala Lumpur, and I did

this other political thing. I did not come to that, saying what does a political officer do, since I'd already done it and I'd been in the Foreign Service long enough to know.

You have certain areas of responsibility. One area of responsibility (as I'm trying to remember) involved covering the parliament, so I would go up lots of mornings to the Malaysian parliament and listen to the debates if something was scheduled that I thought we had an interest in. Let's see what else I had on my plate. I think I was covering relationships between Kuala Lumpur and Sabah and Sarawak, as I recall, so I tried to get to know at least the parliamentary representatives from those areas. You could tell *them* because they were the ones who had exotic feathers coming out of their headdresses--birds of something.

There were parliamentary elections coming up during this not-quite-year that I was in the Political Section there, and I did a fair amount of traveling around. I would go to some town, Alor Star (isn't that a wonderful name?) or someplace like that, and would go call on the district officer and various political people around and discuss politics with them.

I was the protocol officer, so I got to accompany the ambassador on some of his trips around the country, which were kind of fun.

How you write the reports...I think most political officers start the day off doing the same thing, and that is, they read the newspaper, and the newspaper tells you what's going on and gives you the clues about where to start asking questions. I had some Foreign Ministry contacts, if it was a foreign-affairs thing; I had some parliamentary contacts, if it was an internal matter. Go ask the questions and come back and write the report. I'm not sure what else there was to it.

Q: Was our feeling at that time that for really main influence and all, we left things more to the British?

HART: Right.

Q: So we worked at being secondary players?

HART: Right. When the Tunku threw Kuan Yew out of the federation, he called the British high commissioner first. He called the British high commissioner about ten minutes to midnight, and he threw Kuan Yew out at midnight. That's how much notice he had. The American ambassador, I think, got a call from the British high commissioner sometime after that, saying this is coming down. Those were the lines, as they should be.

Q: Yes, yes.

HART: The only person who didn't like it was the CIA station chief, a guy named Art Jacobs. Art Jacobs was barely over five feet, a little bitty guy. They used to say, "There's MI-5, and Art Jacobs is MI-4½."

Q: Did you have a feeling the CIA was any more knowledgeable than anyone else?

HART: No, no, not at all. It wasn't a bad bunch of people, but I didn't feel they were doing anything to advance the national interests of the United States, if you really want to know the truth. I must say, if you really want a gratuitous comment, in my 27 years in the Foreign Service I can't ever say that anything I saw the CIA do ever seriously advanced the foreign policy interests of the United States. Now that's a really sweeping statement, isn't it?

Q: I would probably go along. In fact, I would say maybe even a little more. I can think of cases where the CIA...

HART: It was a net minus.

Q: It was a net minus.

HART: Well, I would say that, too, but I was being generous. A net minus. And they caused a lot of mischief, a lot of mischief.

Q: Well, this was the problem. I think so much of it was a carry-over from the spirit of World War II, when everything was to do something right away and be mischievous. And in the long run, it didn't have real...

HART: Well, in the end, the CIA only looked at the world through anti-Communist lenses. And it happened that, in the places where I served, the Communist versus non-Communist Cold War battles were not that important. Now you could say, "How can that be? You were in Indonesia." Yeah, but ideology was never the thing in Indonesia; nor was it, in Malaysia; nor was it, even in Uruguay. Sure, Castro was active and what have you, but in the end, there was never any real danger that the Uruguayans were going to embrace the Soviet Union as their savior. It wasn't going to happen.

So you're screwing around the edges of the thing, but in the process of doing that and throwing so many resources and so many people into it, you miss the really important things that are going on.

In our entire post-war period, up until practically the collapse of the Soviet Union, the right wing in this country was saying, "The other guys are winning. The other guys are winning." My feeling always was, "We're winning. And without the military might of the Soviet Union, they don't have a very saleable product."

Now you can find special cases where somehow or other the economic and political and historical forces came together, such as in Cuba and Nicaragua, so that countries not contiguous to the Soviet Union or another Communist country embraced the Marxist ideology and became Communist themselves. But Cuba and Nicaragua are the only cases of which I'm aware that the Communists were able to take power where it was not essentially out of the barrel of a gun, by being contiguous to a Communist state where military pressure was used, either through support for an internal rebellion or simply by putting the muscle across the border.

Q: You were mentioning about how the political right wing in the United States was saying the Communists are winning, but they were also saying that time was on the side of the Communists.

HART: That's right.

Q: I think, to many of us looking at this thing...not that we saw the collapse that was going to come as it came...

HART: Nobody saw that, left or right.

Q: But the point being that, gee, the system really doesn't work very well, and who the hell's going to buy that?

HART: Well, you know, the reason I came to this conclusion, that we weren't losing the Cold War and that we weren't going to lose the Cold War, was because everywhere that I served where there was any kind of debate going on about the relative merits of a democratic system versus the centrally guided, totalitarian, authoritarian regimes of the Communist world, overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly everybody came out in favor of personal freedom. And I just got the impression that there may be something more or less in the spirit of man that, if you have a choice toward one political system or another, tends to lead them to choose one more like ours than like the Soviets'.

Now that's not to say that in special cases, if you don't have a choice, say, in Nicaragua, which spun out as a part of a long, long historical tragedy, if you want to call it that, you can't get a Communist regime in an unusual place. You can.

But I don't believe this is the kind of choice that free people make consciously. And I never thought that the Soviets were popular enough or smart enough or powerful enough or rich enough to beat us in place after place around the world in terms of what the model for the world's future was going to look like. I guess I had more faith in human nature than some of our brethren in the Agency did. And not just the brethren; after all, most American political leaders, and particularly those in the White House, bought this view of the world.

PARKER W. BORG
Rotation Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1965-1967)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy

in 2002.

Q: When did you get to Malaysia?

BORG: Summer of '65, August or September. My course began at FSI on June 30th. It would have been six weeks, and then there was the consular course for two weeks, and then I went right out. I was on the first plane out of here, because I already had language.

Q: Were you there in Malaysia when the Night of Long Knives happened in Indonesia?

BORG: No.

Q: That had already happened?

BORG: That had already happened.

Q: Did that seem to be making the change?

BORG: In Indonesia?

Q: In Malaysia.

BORG: Malaysia is sufficiently insular. Malaysia is an extremely interesting country in a Southeast Asian context because it is more like the United States in its relationship to Europe than it is like the other Southeast Asian countries. Other Southeast Asian places all have long histories and culture. In 1857 the first Chinese moved their tin-smelting boats up the Salanga River and found these mud flats where they couldn't go any further in their search for tin, so they put a little trading center there. This trading center became known as Kuala Lumpur, place of muddy estuary, and so they had gone further upriver then overland from there to make their tin mines and so forth. The British had their series of relationships with various sultans who lived along the coast. It wasn't until some years later that this central location between the northern sultans and the southern sultan would be the capital, that this was a neutral city. But Kuala Lumpur is a newer city than Minneapolis, where I grew up, and Malaysia was settled in the 1800's when people came across from Java, from Sumatra, came down from China, came across from India. It was all jungle that the British were opening up for rubber plantations and tin mines. So it was this magnet for workers from around the region, and so Malaysia is very much a new society, unlike the neighboring countries, and it has always been very much focused on itself and its own racial problems. What was happening in Indonesia, when it affected Malaysia, when they were attacking Malaysia, it was something that people were concerned about, but otherwise Indonesia might as well be Brazil.

Q: What were you doing when you were there?

BORG: I was a rotational officer, as many people were, but the consular work was considered too important to give to first-tour officers, because there was only one consular officer, and so I was assigned first to general services. Since I had a degree in public administration, I was put in

the admin cone and told that in the admin cone I'd be managing our foreign policy. So I was in the general services section with an absolutely awful general services officer who delighted in berating the locals for no reason at all because he felt that was the only way to keep them in line. I remember he called me into the office one day, and said, "I'm going to bring Yusof in today and read him the riot act." I said, "What did Yusof do?" He said, "Nothing, but this will prevent him from doing bad things in the future." I sat there sort of overwhelmed by this experience, this little Malay guy sitting there cowering in the corner, and the GSO (General Services Officer) shouted at him and screamed at him and told him what an awful person he was. He did this regularly to other people. I sent a letter back to my personnel counselor and I said, "I don't think I'm long for this world. If I'm going to be an admin officer, I don't think I'm going to take another tour with the State Department. This is pretty awful." Anyway, I lasted there through the rotation, which was nine months or something like that, and then they sent me to USIA (United States Information Agency). USIA had an incredibly weak cultural affairs program and they had two officers who for two years hadn't done any exchange programs, and so the head of USIA said, "We'd like you to go down and figure out who we can send to the United States. We've got all this money from the last fiscal year and we've got all this money from the next fiscal year, and we need to have a program. Our people are too busy with other things to do cultural exchanges. Figure it out. We should be sending some young people." So I decided that would be fun. I went out to the university and I started hanging around at the university and hanging around at the various bars where journalists met and tried to get a handle on what was happening in the country so I could figure out who would be good people to send to the United States on these exchange programs. While there was a committee, it was essentially whoever I chose that were going to be the ones that went for the different programs. I had all these categories and put somebody in this category and somebody in that category. That was great fun for, you know, somebody who thought they knew something about the country but really didn't. But through that I met the student leader community out at the university, and when the protests began about Vietnam, as they did eventually, I already knew all of the student protesters. When they came down to storm the embassy, I looked out and I saw my friends in the forefront. Everybody in the embassy was sort of behind a glass door, and I went out and talked with them all because I knew them all by first name and they knew that I worked at the embassy. They were convinced I worked for the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), because why would anybody else come out and talk to students at the university. I sent a number of them to the United States on exchange programs and then was able to write some reports. My first political reporting was about what these people are protesting about and why are they angry with the United States.

Q: Why were they?

BORG: The war in Vietnam.

Q: But...

BORG: Vietnam didn't affect them at all.

Q: Why...?

BORG: In 1968 what happened around the world almost everywhere - no, this was 1967 -

whenever there was an incident in Vietnam, there was a reaction in Malaysia as there was in a number of other countries in the region. Periodically the windows at USIS would be broken and there would be a group protesting something or other. I forget the details of what the different incidents were, but there was always something that had happened in Vietnam that triggered a reaction in many third world countries and countries in Europe too.

Q: Was the war in Vietnam protest against us sort of youth protesting against their own government and all that?

BORG: Maybe in some places, but the student community in Malaysia had it pretty soft back then. There was only one university in this entire country, and if you got into the university, you had it made. They didn't have the same racial quotas that they developed in subsequent years, so it was very much on merit and something like 60 percent of the students then were Chinese and another 20 percent were Indian and another 20 percent were Malays. So the idea that these groups that would likely go into business were going to be protesting political issues or showing frustration over the local political scene was marginal at that point.

Q: These were basically the already anointed leadership anyway.

BORG: That's right. I never had the sense that they were angry at their own country. If there was anger, they were starting some technical schools for some of the Malays who were less advantaged, and this would break out in riots in 1969, but in '67 it was all quiet.

Q: Were we looking at the Chinese-Malay-Indian relationship?

BORG: This has underscored the way everybody looks at Malaysia, just exactly who is doing what and how is the relationship working. At that time, I think, most Americans would say that the Malaysians seem to have found a solution for a multiracial society, a more successful solution than we seem to be finding in the United States. This is not the case any longer.

Q: We were going through our civil rights period.

BORG: We were going through the civil rights period. For the Malaysians this was not an issue, because each racial group had its place in the society, and as long as the society prospered, they all prospered. Malays ran the government; the Chinese ran the economy; the Indians were, on the one hand, the laborers and, at the other hand, they were the intellectuals, the newspaper writers, the doctors, the professional class.

Q: Was it Abdul Rahman?

BORG: The prime minister at the time was Tunku Abdul Rahman. Tunku was a prince and he was of the royal family, I think, of Kedah, but he was not the king; he was a politician. He had been a playboy in London for 10 years or something like that while he tried to get through school. He came back and was anointed the leader and was a very accommodating leader who got along with people of all races.

Q: Was he sort of seen as a positive...?

BORG: Very positive.

Q: After the USIA thing...?

BORG: Then I switched into the economic section, so I spent the last nine months or so working on economic affairs. There were three of us in the economic section and I was the junior-most person, so I got all of the other things. Let's see. I looked at hydroelectric power, I looked at the fishing industry, I looked at agricultural production. Anything in which there was an airgram due that nobody wanted to do was what I was assigned to. We set up a regional Southeast Asia development program in about 1967, and there were aspects of the project in each one of the countries, so I was the AID liaison officer. We had no AID mission, so I did sort of what economic assistance there was.

The Malaysians had had a successful experience against communists, so we had many military missions that would come down and meet with the Malaysian leaders. I always got involved in hosting them. I'm not sure why it was that I was designated to go around with these various military groups when they met with the Malaysians.

President Johnson came out for a visit and was there. I was a control officer at one particular site. I remember that I was overwhelmed by this proximity with the power of the White House and the stories about the preparations that had taken place for this visit. We had an advance officer from the State Department who came out three months beforehand to help orchestrate this 24-hour visit. I remember we were told that ships were lined up. The Pacific Fleet had strategically located itself at intervals across the Pacific on the route that the President would be following. We had to have three alternatives for each activity that the President was going to participate in so that, if there was a change in plans, we could shift from one site to the other site, and there had to be a case of Jim Beam at each one of these sites in case...

Q: Whiskey.

BORG: ...the President wanted to stop and have a little party with whoever wanted to drink the Jim Beam or Jack Daniels or whatever it was. Did you see any Johnson visits?

Q: No, I never did.

BORG: But we were also overwhelmed by Johnson's size. He was a big person, tall. I remember they were going to give him a ceremonial shirt, and they wanted to know his waist size and he had 53-inch waist. When we told the Malaysians this, they said we must be mistaken, nobody has a 53-inch waist. He did have a 53-inch waist, I understand, but he did not look fat because he was just a very big person.

Q: At that time one of the things that was being put out was the domino theory - if Vietnam fell, so would other countries - and Malaysia, of course, is in the line. It sounds like this didn't seem like much of a probability over there.

BORG: It did not seem like a real issue there, and I had never thought that it was a real issue. I think it was much more the sort of issue that people who don't know anything about a region decide, the politicians back sitting on the National Security Council would decide, is a possibility, none of whom have any direct experience with that part of the world.

Q: Was there any concern about the Vietnam trouble spilling over?

BORG: I think there was concern in Thailand that the Vietnam problem was going to spill over, and there was concern in Laos and Cambodia, but we were pretty far away.

Q: Did Thailand play any role? Although it has a border, it's really not exactly a main...

BORG: I think the domino theory was based, first and foremost, on Thailand, which during the Second World War had switched sides in terms of Japanese as soon as the Japanese declared war, and the sense was that, if it appeared that the Communists were taking over in Vietnam, the Thais would be very tempted to declare themselves Communist - this was the government - because the Thais were so accommodating in this sense. I don't think anybody thought about the domino theory much beyond Thailand, but I think there was great concern, and possibly the general concern - I don't know Thai issues that well - that Thailand might be next. I remember the USIA people in Thailand had a very big program at this point in which they would go around the countryside in the north showing movies and trying to do nation building and make Thais sensitive to a king and less sensitive to the Communist propaganda threat. The people who ran this program came down to Malaysia and they tried to recruit me to take a tour with USIA for my next tour and go up to Thailand to be a rural public affairs office. I thought that sounded like great fun, and I signed up and I told them I'd like to do that. People in the embassy thought I was crazy, but I essentially told these people that, sure, I'd like to do that, and I think I told the Personnel people that I would be very interested in a tour with USIA as my next assignment.

Q: While you were in Malaysia, what was your view of Singapore? It had recently become independent. Was this considered a real problem or not?

BORG: Singapore had become part of Malaysia as a way for the British to terminate their colonial empire in that part of the world. The Malaysians were induced to include Singapore, which was still a crown colony at the time, within Malaysia, and to sweeten the pot, the Malaysians were told, "We're going to throw in Sabah and Sarawak." This would have been 1961 and '62, and so the Malaysians had gone along with this with the idea that Singapore, with its large Chinese population, would not tilt the balance excessively toward the Chinese. Because of the "Malay" population in North Borneo, the Malays would still be the dominant number. Lee Kuan Yew and his People's Action Party was very aggressive in making Chinese in Malaysia think about their political rights; making Chinese aware of what their political possibilities might be. So once Malaysia was formed, the Malays on the mainland recognized that this minority population in Borneo was largely Christian and, while they might have had brown skin, they were not Muslims and had no interest in really siding automatically with the Malays on any issue. They were much more concerned with their local issues. There was a very heavy Chinese presence, and the Chinese seemed to be in a position that they were going to expand their

political action onto the mainland of Malaya. One of the understandings at the beginning was that People's Action Party stays south, but there were sympathizers in the north and so it became apparent that this was a threat to Malaysia. Singapore was ousted a couple of months, I think, before I got there, so this was already history and we didn't think too much about it. Singapore at the same time had a very serious question and that was how to develop a Chinese city-state in the middle of the Malay world, and that was Lee's genius, to figure this out and implement it.

EARL WILSON
Public Affairs Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1967-1970)

Earl Wilson was born in 1917 and raised in Washington, DC. He attended the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and George Washington University. Mr. Wilson joined the IICA (USIS) in 1947 and spent his career in China, the Philippines, France, Thailand, Mexico, Hong Kong, Spain, Malaysia, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1988.

WILSON: We were transferred to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, next. There was a very nice big colonial house there for the PAO. The ambassador, Jim Bell, was an old friend of ours. The house had terraces going down from a veranda in front of the place. Someone had built kind a wooden deck to watch tennis players. The ambassador told me, as soon as we got there, a jazz group was coming. He wanted us to give them a reception. It would be a means of meeting a lot of local people. I suggested we turn that platform deck into a stage, which we did. Behind it we had big palm trees, rain trees, and shrubs. We got lighting, loudspeakers, and it really worked very well. We could seat people in folding chairs along the terraces, and we could have it dark so we could see the stars, and then the lights would come up. Really a nice outdoor theater. We had lots of plays and poetry readings there, one thing and the other.

Q: You may not remember, but Peg and I were in that house of yours because at New Year's time, 1967-68, we drove from Bangkok to Singapore, and had Julie Abrams, the wife of General Abrams, with us, and we stopped over with you for a couple of days.

WILSON: My wife and I do a weekly cooking column for the Potomac Gazette here. I write for her these Foreign Service anecdotes. I just so happen to have an anecdote about that very thing you were just mentioning, but I don't use your name or their name.

Very soon after I arrived in Kuala Lumpur, the Agency asked me to go represent the Far East with an orientation group to Vietnam. They had just started this program for PAO's to spend a couple of weeks in Vietnam, getting indoctrinations, briefings, and traveling around the country in order to help explain the situation back in their country. Also, maybe help our program in Saigon do a better job with material they were sending out. They had a PAO from Germany, Italy, one from Latin America. Also, Sig Larmon, of the USIS Advisory Board. He was a big shot advertising man in New York. And myself. We got a briefing from Ambassador Bunker, the

Commanding General Westmoreland and various other ranking people. Then we split up and went individually to different parts of the country.

One of the conclusions I had at the end was that it's easy to be critical in such a turmoil, but you could certainly say that impatience with the Vietnamese and with little understanding of their language or culture, the American military basically, it seemed to me, to be saying, more or less, "Stand aside. We'll do the job." Also, that too much reliance was being put on muscle and hardware.

But be that as it may, I came away proud of the job the United States was doing and trying to do in that war-torn country. From my days in China, I had seen the spread of Communism, the strategy and tactics, and what happened when they won. I also saw that the foreign correspondents, for the most part, seemed to be turning up the rugs to look for dirt, adding fuel to the fire of those against our involvement at home and abroad. Traveling about the country for two weeks, I could honestly say I found morale high among American military and the Vietnamese. The same seemed to be true with the civilian officials of both sides.

There were plenty of problems, of course. The Vietnamese people, if they had their way, would like nothing more than to be left alone by both sides. I couldn't then, nor can I now understand the Jane Fonda crowd, strangely quiet when the Communists later killed and imprisoned millions of innocent people and drove others into the sea, and quiet about the degrading treatment and torture given the American prisoners of war.

So I came back to Kuala Lumpur. The main thing in Kuala Lumpur, I guess, one of the things that intrigued me over the years was distribution of our materials, our products. I noticed in post after post that a lot of attention was paid to producing something, but then when the distribution came about, you'd find some back-room, low-level local, as a rule, who was worrying about the mechanics of it back there. I called it the last ten feet. I had been needling Washington for years to give more attention to this.

Aside from that, I also had the feeling we didn't know enough about our target audiences. We talked about mutual interests. What exactly were their interests? Of course, American studies had become something the Agency was very much interested in. So I was trying to look at this. The Agency had three broad objectives for the less developed countries: one was understanding the U.S.; two, U.S. foreign policy; three, what they called modernization. I thought the Agency had little trouble with the reporting of our foreign policy. But when it came to understanding the U.S. or modernization, just what part of our vast and complex society was of interest and relevancy to various members of our target audience?

Of course, the main concern in these so-called Third World countries was national development. They needed technical information. But here the Agency had said AID had that responsibility, but it seemed to me we were going to inevitably get into that field one way or the other.

Then the Agency had come up with this thing called PPBS, planning, programming, and budgeting system, which was demanding a basic worldwide list of target groups, and each country was to use this list, adding their special local categories. So in Malaysia--this might be of

interest--our target groups were political and government leaders, academic community, communications, media leaders, labor, military and paramilitary, professionals, creative intellectuals, entrepreneurs, businessmen, managers, rural development leaders, and traditional leaders. Then we had more detailed breakdowns under that.

Then another thing began to bother me. When I looked into it, every section of the embassy had its own list of names and contacts, all more or less unrelated to one another. The political section had a responsibility for the biographic list, but those lists broke down often for the simple lack of a typist to keep some of this data. The other lists, outside of USIS, most of them were kept in a shoe box in some office, the military had theirs, the labor attaché, agricultural attaché, social secretary, economic section, etc. It didn't make sense to me to not have some kind of coordination. Then how to motivate the various sections to cooperate in this central effort?

One thing that had a relation to this, during the 12-year emergency in Malaya, when the British, who were fighting the Communist insurgents there, came increasingly to rely on what they called local military operations rooms. These were set up around the country, organized in a certain way, and they fed their data up to a central countrywide ops room. They kept detailed information, including the progress towards goals, and identifying local problems and what was causing the hangups and so on.

When they gained their independence and Malaysia was founded, these operations rooms were turned toward following the same idea in implementing plans for national development. I went to the central one for a briefing. So I decided that what we needed at USIS was our own operations room next to my office, where I could keep an eye on it. It fitted in with the Malaysia ambiance.

I got Harry Britton, an energetic Chinese-speaking information officer, to be responsible for what I called our TAU, target analysis unit. To the mystification, I think, of some, I assigned our senior Malay local, and under him, our senior Chinese local and a local typist, with another typist on contract, to be responsible for this thing. We equipped the place with bookshelves and static displays, all the paraphernalia, typewriters and chairs and all, and we had our small staff meetings there. I called it the "poor man's computer." This was before the computers were much in use.

You are probably familiar with the Royal McBee key sort cards. It's a very old information retrieval system, five-by-eight cards with 131 numbers around the edges, when coded, could be retrieved with a needle-like spindle that would go through these holes. So in setting up that part of it, it cost me \$150 out of my budget. We coded the numbers of the holes around the cards for target groups, geographic areas, languages, fields of interest. I won't go into it either, but we set up, with a good deal of study, and it went back to the Library of Congress listings and so on, fields of interest from A (administration) to Z (zoology).

Our first job, we transferred USIS mailing lists and personal contact cards and all the rest to these cards. As we progressed, I found that my American officer, my Malay and Chinese became increasingly enthusiastic, and they went to the different embassy offices, taking what they had and encouraging input. So out of the Malay population of 10 million, we had 3,000 on our target audience list. That began to make an impact as we incorporated this into our planning.

One of the things, the Agency had, was a donated book program. We were receiving books by the thousands. Through this little unit, among other things, we could rapidly identify the book, its subject matter, and people that were interested, because we sent out letters and asked people to check off what they were interested in. We got about a 90% response. It was amazing. We worked more efficiently with the libraries around the country. The air attaché loaned us his plane from time to time. Esso tank ships helped take our books to East Malaysia. The Minister of Education began to provide storage space at no cost. Soon we were dealing in the hundreds of thousands. The Agency called our book operation the most outstanding in the Far East or in the world.

Ben Posner--you know him, Lew--was the USIA Assistant Director for Administration, he visited us and later said that, "This system should be definitive in its field, it's impressive, logical, tightly organized, comprehensive." He said he was going to have his officer in charge of distribution explain it to posts in his visits around the world.

Then the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific came through. He told our ambassador our ops room was the most efficient thing of this sort he'd ever seen in USIS work. So he wrote this praise to Fitzhugh Green, who was USIA Deputy Director for East Asia. Fitz wrote back to him, sending me a copy. I'll read his reply: He said, "The man in charge of our operation in K.L. is Earl Wilson. I'm not surprised. He's probably the greatest idea man that ever headed any organization, plus being a talented and successful painter. So it's not surprising that you saw some fancy operating methods at his post."

I did later prepare film strips and other materials for Ben Posner at the Agency, which were incorporated for a while into the training program. I do know that here and there young JOTs became interested. This was sort of at the leading edge as computers were beginning to come in. But the interesting thing is that Joann Lewinsohn, who was assigned to take over from me as PAO, the only woman PAO in East Asia, very rapidly dismantled the whole goddamn thing when she came in. So that's life.

One other thing out there, on the family side. An Indian doctor, Dharmalingen, had the best cancer hospital, the most modern in Southeast Asia. He was a golf partner, companion, and physician for the prime minister. He was a good friend of our ambassador, Jim Bell. The ambassador liked my paintings. He told Dharma. Dharma, as soon as I met him, said, "I want you to paint a mural in my hospital out-patient room."

I said, "Man, I haven't got time to do that. Besides, you should have one of your fine Malaysian artists." Well, he kept after me, and finally Lorane and I, we went over there. This was a beautiful hospital. It was new. These big waiting rooms for out-patients had plain cement walls, very depressing. So I drew life-size animals. The first was an elephant drinking from the water fountain. Lorane would help paint them in. Finally, I even got the ambassador, his wife, Dharma and his wife, who was a doctor, to help paint them in. Dharma was here recently and stayed with us a few days. He told me the mural still exists.

One other thing about our ops room. I found out many people would say the most important thing we did was our exchange of persons program, but when you really looked into this, it was amazing to me how many of these people, once they came back home and resumed their life, were forgotten by us. No contact. So I found that by using our ops room system, if someone were going on a trip, for example, we could furnish them with a little list of the people in that area and make it his business to contact them. In this way we recovered contact with lots of people.

Another thing in Malaysia. The drug scene was developing in the U.S. and, as I learned later, in Laos and Bangkok. American kids were getting involved, also in Malaysia. The Agency was not doing anything about this. I found one of my own kids with marijuana, and like the average American, I was shocked. I looked into it. So I wrote to another friend at home and got a whole stack of materials on what was happening in the U.S. I wrote a special report on that which we sent out. I wanted to have it sent out to all the target lists on the health, police, education, etc. My young press officer came over and said, "You can't put this out."

I said, "Like hell I can't. You put it out, and I'm responsible." Well, very soon thereafter, the PAO in Manila and the one in Bangkok somehow heard about it on the grapevine, and they wanted my materials. They put it out. Of course, today in the Agency, that's one of its big, big activities, doing the drug thing.

The moon flight. We had an exhibit in the K.L. museum and it was the best exhibit they'd ever had in that museum. People came from all over the place.

That does remind me of one thing, Lew. Quickly, I'll go back to it. In Spain there were space stations, one outside of Madrid. When they said, in the Orbiter program, that they were going to get the first photograph of the moon to come into the station out there--it shows you how little we knew about these things--the ambassador and I jumped in a car and ran out there. But all they were getting were dots and dashes that were being sent to the Jet Propulsion Lab in California to be put together. So a bit later, we went out there this time for a briefing in advance. They were going to get the first shot of the earth from the vicinity of the moon, and they wanted to have that photograph distributed in Western Europe by us.

So we went out there. They said the camera would make strips of negatives, and these strips would be put together and then you print your photograph. The only trouble was, they didn't have a dark room in this very expensive lab. I said, "What the hell? I've got a dark room." So back behind the Casa Americana, in what used to be the stables, we had a little dark room. Arrangements were made. They would, by motorcycle, rush in these negatives with the scientists in the side car, and with my two little Spanish technicians, they would put it all together, we would print it and release it through the Spaniards to the press.

Everybody got so excited that half the NASA staff came, following the motorcycle, and they got there about midnight. They disappeared, the scientists and two kids, into the place. They came out with this wet photograph of that first thrilling shot of the earth with the rim of the moon on one side. That was turned over to the Spanish, and I went home. By now it was dawn. I got a phone call right away. They said, "My God, they made a mistake. They flopped that photograph, printed it in reverse." (Laughs) Well, somehow we managed to get it stopped, and we went back

and printed it right, and it went out to the millions of people in Western Europe. That's some of the behind-the-scenes stuff we are always hearing about.

One other thing I'll tell you, a highlight of our tour in Kuala Lumpur. My wife and I gave a cocktail party because they were having a parliamentary election, and we invited editors and some media people, to try to learn from them more of what was going on. Also there was a USIS TV team down from Korea that could photograph some of this stuff down there. Well, while we were having this party, all of a sudden rioting broke out, because the Chinese Party gained more seats and the Malays lost face. The Malays began attacking the Chinese. This thing spread rapidly. One of the guests, an Indian editor, tried to get to his home. He called us a bit later. His car had been stopped, windows broken. He had been punched in the face, but he somehow got home, though his car was ruined. The Koreans managed to get over to their hotel. They were Vietnamese veterans, and they got up on the rooftop to observe what was happening.

Our telephones were working, so in our little dining area I set up a command post. I had our gardener outside. I gave him a walkie-talkie in case anybody came, because the word was getting around that they were going to burn down houses of some of the Americans. This was a wooden house. I had my American secretary, she was assigned to keep a log, I had all the languages and dialects, because I had my senior locals there. I had Malay and Tamil, Chinese, and different dialects. We had the radio on, tuned in to the police radio, and these guys could listen and then telephone to the area where the trouble was going on and pick up information, which then we were putting into a report and periodically called in to the embassy, because the embassy was more or less cut off from its contacts. We had a big map of the city, putting tacks to follow the action. Then the prime minister came on the air, a state of emergency, and I got hold of the Voice of America on my telephone, and I gave them an update on the thing.

When it was over, my wife and some others volunteered to help, including our children. The Chinese refugees had been sent to the stadium in the city, thousands of them. It was a mess. My wife, Lorane, got ringworm from wading around in this mess. Just terrible. She was giving out milk for the babies and different things.

When it was all over, I sent this very careful report on our USIS contribution to our Agency. Dan Oleksiw was the East Asia Director. I didn't even get a "thank you" from him or word one.

Q: That's normal from Dan.

WILSON: Yes. It looked important from where we were, but really, that was rather annoying, to say the least.

I was doing batik painting on the side in Kuala Lumpur, and I got a skin eruption on my hands and feet. As they investigated this, they thought I might have a case of diabetes. So I asked to be relieved to go back home. I went back to Washington, and thank God it turned out to be a borderline case.

While there, I was given a Superior Honor Award by USIA Director Shakespeare. The citation said, "For exceptionally imaginative ideas and concepts over a sustained period which have

significantly advanced U.S. Government objectives in the field of public affairs and psychological operations in many parts of the world."

Ambassador Jim Bell had put that in for me. Jim was a very effusive man. I'm going to read for the record a paragraph of what he said in sending in his nomination, because it doesn't pay to be bashful all the time. He said, "In 25 years in the Foreign Service, I've never encountered a USIS officer who had a more imaginative, dynamic approach to the job. I believe he has made a greater contribution to the USIS effort in Asia over the past 20 years than any other single individual in the U.S. Government."

Also while I was in Washington, kind of thrashing around, Mary Painter, editor of the USIA World, the Agency's house organ, wrote a profile on me which was headlined "Idea Man for the Agency."

JOHN J. HELBLE
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1969-1973)

John J. Helble was born in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1934. He received a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Wisconsin. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. Ambassador Helble's career included positions in Puerto La Cruz, Saigon, Hue, Kuala Lumpur, Dacca and Honolulu. This interview was conducted by Thomas F. Conlon on April 5, 1996.

Q: *What year was that?*

HELBLE: 1969. I arrived in Kuala Lumpur, where I was assigned as chief of the Political Section in the Embassy there. There were three officers and two secretaries in the section, beside myself.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador?*

HELBLE: The Ambassador was James Bell, who was coming to the end of five years as Ambassador to Malaysia. He was replaced several months later by Jack Lydman. I'll talk about both of them in a few minutes.

Q: *John, you were saying that you wanted to touch on a number of additional points regarding Malaysia. Why don't you go ahead, then?*

HELBLE: On May 11, 1969, if I recall correctly, a few weeks after my arrival in Kuala Lumpur, very important national elections were scheduled to be held. There was no question as to who would win the elections and retain control of the government. That was the a multiracial coalition led by Tunku Abdul Rahman. This included Malay, Chinese, and Indian parties.

Q: I think that the coalition was called the "Barisan Nasional" [National Front]. I still have some familiarity with this because from time to time I do translations of articles from the Malay press into English for FBIS [Foreign Broadcast Information Service].

HELBLE: Well, the issue was whether the ruling coalition government could obtain a two-thirds majority of the seats in Parliament, which was their objective. This would then permit them to amend the constitution in any way they wanted. The Opposition, primarily the Chinese parties, was determined to prevent them from achieving that objective.

There was an ultranationalist, Malay party that was running against the coalition. There were strong, Chinese-dominated parties in the Opposition which, in particular, included the Democratic Action Party, the DAP, which was a spin-off from Lee Kuan Yew's PAP [People's Action Party] in Singapore.

During the first five weeks that I was in the country, in my job as chief of the Political Section, I was focused primarily on this upcoming election, as was my entire staff. One of my officers was a Malay speaker. Another member of the Political Section was a Chinese speaker. They worked their respective clientele. I got to know people from the various factions in those groups. Phil Gill was the Malay speaker, and Joe Moyle was the Chinese language officer.

As I said earlier, Ambassador Bell had been there about five years and was approaching the end of his tour of duty.

The election occurred, but the governing coalition fell short of a two-thirds majority in Parliament, although they got about 60 percent of the seats. Nevertheless, the Opposition -- primarily the Chinese parties -- claimed "victory." The day following the elections, May 12, 1969, they paraded in a large caravan through the streets of Kuala Lumpur, going past a couple of downtown, Malay *kampongs*, or residential areas. *Kampongs* were little villages within the city proper which were entirely populated by Malays. The parade was very loud and noisy. Those taking part were tooting horns. They were essentially youths, waving their party flags, and so on.

From this demonstration came rumors, which were widely accepted and which spread like wildfire through the Malay community, that some of the Chinese youths had not only made racial or religious insults at the Malays but had thrown pieces of pork on the front porches of Malay homes. Eating pork is prohibited to Muslims, although many Malays eat some from time to time, though they don't admit it. This display was very offensive to the Malays, who even believed that some of the Chinese youths had exposed their private parts to Malay girls living in these kampongs. These rumors were not believed by all Malays, but they gained a great deal of currency and aroused an emotional furor in the Malay community during the next 24 hours.

We then had a first class example of that old Malay word, *amok* and its meaning. In point of fact amok loosely means "to go crazy" or "to see red." Someone who is "amok" no longer uses any logic. You just run around in an uninhibited fashion, wreaking mayhem, which is frequently associated with amok. However, as I say, that didn't happen immediately. It developed during the following 24 hours.

On the afternoon of May 13, 1969, the day after the Chinese victory celebrations, the Country Team at the Embassy met with Ambassador Bell to discuss the situation and to get abreast of what other people in the Embassy knew, including the intelligence community and so on. It was concluded that the Malaysian Government was well aware of the sensitivities of the situation, knew enough about it, and would be able to maintain control. It was felt that nothing serious was going to happen, at least in the very near future.

Of course, I had only been in Kuala Lumpur for five weeks and didn't have any profound insights to offer. However, I suspected that, indeed, there might be more to this situation than we had anticipated. After the Country Team meeting I went back to my office and asked one of our two secretaries who lived close to the Embassy if she was going to be home that evening. She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'd appreciate it if you'd stay at home in case I have to call you to come into the Embassy." Then I discussed the situation with a communicator who also lived near the Embassy. He said that he'd be at home but would be on call. Then I talked to Phil Gill and a junior officer, Barbara Schrage. They were free, so I suggested that we go out for dinner at a nearby hotel. I phoned home and told Joan that I was not going to come home for the time being, as I suspected that there might be trouble of some sort.

So the three of us went to dinner at the Federal Hotel, which was, perhaps, six or eight blocks from the Embassy. There was a revolving restaurant on the roof of the hotel. We had ordered a drink and placed our orders for dinner. As the restaurant, with its magnificent view of that section of Kuala Lumpur, rotated on the top, we could see down in the alleys of the neighborhood a number of Police Federal Reserve trucks which were characteristically fire engine red, with blue uniformed, Federal Reserve troops aboard. They were essentially riot control elements. So we speculated that somebody else thought that there might be trouble that night, because this was not the normal pattern.

At about 7:20 PM, before we had been served our dinners, the loudspeaker on the hotel circuit announced that a curfew had just been imposed by the government, which would go into effect at 7:30 PM, and that any non-residents of the hotel should leave immediately. We dashed downstairs, caught the last cab that we could see in front of the hotel, and returned to the Embassy.

As we approached the Embassy, we noticed that the road was blocked by a very large group of people, who were non Malays and who seemed to be in something of an agitated state. We got out of the cab and walked the last half block to the Embassy. At that point we realized that, almost directly in front of the Embassy was another large group, separated perhaps 50-75 yards from the first group we had seen. The second group was composed of Malays. We were able to get into the Embassy building without any trouble and went up to the 12th floor, where our offices were. Shortly thereafter, the two mobs in front of the Embassy appeared to collide in hand to hand combat, beating each other a bit and throwing rocks. From our vantage point on the 12th floor of the building in which the Embassy was located we could look down and see this. Then we began to notice fires starting in various areas of the city in the view from our rooftop offices.

We began receiving phone calls from Embassy people, reporting that there was trouble here and there around the city. Then the city seemed to explode with violence in all sorts of areas over the next two hours, as word spread that there was rioting going on. Other people became involved in it. It seemed fairly clear that the violence was started by Malays in most instances. As I stated before, it was really an "amok" situation, as they just lashed out blindly at any non-Malays around them. We were concerned that anybody who was not a Malay by definition a potential target, whether they were white, yellow, or black. So we were concerned for the safety of the American community.

From the Federal Hotel, before I left there, I had called the secretary and the communicator and asked them to go to the Embassy, which they immediately did, arriving a couple of minutes before we did. One CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] officer and another communicator were able to get to the Embassy, making a total of seven in the Embassy. Civil authority had broken down almost totally; the riots spread very quickly in a couple of hours throughout the city. The DCM couldn't get in from his house. Curiously enough, Ambassador Bell was in an interesting position. He was playing poker with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, at the Tunku's residence, which was on a hillside overlooking the valley in which the bulk of the city was located. The Ambassador called the Embassy, found that I was there, and said that he couldn't get out of the Tunku's residence. So we were operational but on a very limited, staffing basis.

Q: Did the phone system work during throughout this time?

HELBLE: The phone system worked throughout this time. We had a radio on which we could tune in on police bands, so we were able to gain a fair amount of information about where the police were going next and the situation as reported by various police field units back to Police Headquarters and so on. We started calling a number of people in the Embassy who lived in various sections of the city to see what was going on in those areas. In some areas things were quiet. In other areas there were fires and a lot of commotion. Some people reported that they had been caught outside of their houses, driving home or something like that, and went through a very scary situation.

There was an AP [Associated Press] stringer in Kuala Lumpur whom we knew. Of course, in the best of journalistic traditions, he was out in the streets. Within hours he knew enough, for example, to check several of the local hospitals and find out something about casualties. The casualty figures came in slowly. The government casualty figures were never honest. We knew that from the diverse reports we were receiving. This is not uncommon in situations where governments don't want to admit the degree of disorder that has occurred and their inability to handle the situation. It was clear that the government had lost control. The police were totally outnumbered and didn't have the resources to deal with the situation.

These incidents started early in the evening of May 13. Within six hours or so one or more elements of the Malay regiments were deployed into the streets to restore order. They were not fully successful for at least 24 hours. On the morning of May 15, some 36 hours after the incidents began, the Ambassador and the DCM were finally able to reach the Embassy. The Malay regiments had not been trained in restoring order in the streets. There were several reports, none of which could really be confirmed but which were so numerous that there was

obviously some truth to them, that the Malay forces were shooting indiscriminately at Chinese houses. If anybody poked their heads out, the Malay forces would fire at them. I believe that there were enough incidents like that to aggravate the situation.

Meanwhile, moving groups of Chinese and Malays continued to encounter each other and fight. The AP reporter would report that he found 13 persons dead at such and such a hospital and an undetermined number of wounded, and so forth. The numbers of casualties grew, hour by hour. Ultimately, to round off that particular element of the situation, in its final report the government reported about 200 killed. Other sources claimed that the figure of persons killed was in excess of 2,000. From our review of the evidence, I would say that a good, round number of persons killed would be in the order of 1,300-1,500. So there was chaos for a time, widespread torching and extensive loss of life.

Q: Was there any breakdown of persons killed by racial community?

HELBLE: The government was very careful to avoid publishing that. However, the weight of the evidence was that there were far more non-Malays than Malays killed. Of course, in that respect, there was a companion allegation that that was in part because the Malay police and soldiers were backing up the Malays in the street gangs, rather than trying to suppress disorderly conduct by either side. So there were charges, which were widely believed in the non-Malay community, of gross favoritism, if you will, on the part of the authorities and that, in fact, some of the Malay police and soldiers contributed to the ratio of persons killed, who were largely non-Malays.

To give you an example, and we all know how difficult it sometimes is to assess the validity of reports under these circumstances, late on the second day of rioting say, Phil Gill, Joe Moyle, and I were standing at my office window, looking down on the street and the small river Sungei Klang that winds through Kuala Lumpur. One of them said, "Look, there's a body floating down the river." So we looked, and, yes, indeed, there was a body floating down there. Gill, a Malay language officer, said, "It's a Malay body." Joe Moyle, a Chinese language officer, looked at the same body and said, "No, it's a Chinese body." I said, "How can you guys tell?" They both said, "By the way it's dressed." I said, "But that body is naked. There are no clothes on it at all." So there were three, presumably reputable eyewitnesses, all seeing three different things. To this day I don't know whether that body was that of a Malay or a Chinese. It certainly didn't make any difference, but this was just a side commentary on how difficult it is, under circumstances like this, to determine exactly what happened in a given situation, even if there are eyewitness reports available.

Well, those riots really changed the power equations in Malaysia. The curfew, proclaimed on the evening of May 13, lasted for five months. During the first week it was lifted for an hour or two, in staggered sections of the city, so that people could get out to market and buy food.

Q: This was a 24-hour curfew?

HELBLE: It was a 24-hour curfew. For two days it was a total curfew, and nobody at all was allowed out on the streets. By the third day the authorities had to do something about the food situation, so they tried to open a market for two hours in this section and two hours over there, so

that the police forces could concentrate on whatever market was open. There were several, major incidents the first day the curfew was slightly eased, and it went back to a full, 24-hour curfew. Again, the authorities couldn't starve the population totally, so they opened up this or that market for one hour at a time, with a much heavier presence of police.

Emotions were extremely inflamed on both sides. The government security forces were very hard pressed. They had never seen anything like this. I should say that outside of Kuala Lumpur there were some incidents--in Penang and Ipoh--and some unrest, when people started to hear what had gone on in Kuala Lumpur. The rest of the country did not become as inflamed and did not have the explosive events that had taken place in Kuala Lumpur. Gradually, although incidents continued to occur, the curfew was relaxed for several hours--five hours for the whole city--as confidence began to be restored. And as people had time to reflect that maybe this kind of street violence wasn't quite the thing to engage in, and they were getting tired of it, over the next five months an atmosphere of quiet was reestablished.

Of course, some people were arrested who were thought to have played some sort of leading role. However, there were very few in that respect, and there were no mass roundups.

I said that the situation in Kuala Lumpur changed on an apparently permanent basis, because it became evident, as the political process developed, that it was difficult to know how to cope with all of this. Of course, there was never any official acknowledgment that the Malays had initiated the disturbances, so to speak, but it was clear that this was true. At the same time, there was plenty of evidence that the Chinese had taunted the Malays into the violence by their "victory" parade of May 12.

From a political point of view the long and short of the government's response was, "We've got to do more for the Malay community." For its political survival, the government needed to do that. Government leaders were convinced that the Malay community would not continue to accept a situation in which the Chinese community heavily dominated the economic life of the country and held most of its wealth. There had to be some greater share of the economic wealth of the country directed toward the Malays. So a number of economic programs and initiatives were undertaken, as well as the establishment of *bumiputra* (indigenous) Malay banks, manufacturing plants, and promises of greater educational opportunity. There was a movement toward the use of only Malay as the language of instruction in the school system. All of this was deemed essential if there were to be any degree of racial or communal harmony restored.

Of course, the Chinese community basically fought all of this, inch by inch. However, in the final analysis, they had little alternative to accepting it, at least in part. In the last analysis it really didn't hurt the Chinese that much, because they had always been successful in paying off Malay politicians to get breaks and favors where they needed them. Of course, Chinese financial influence led to a lot of corruption at the higher levels of the Malay community, including the leadership and the bureaucratic elements within it. That system had worked. Now, however, there was a question whether the Chinese could continue to do this on the same scale and whether Malay politicians and leaders could continue to be influenced by this process of corruption. Obviously, they would be risking their political necks if they didn't deliver some goods to the Malay community.

As time went by after the May 13 riots and the various sequels thereto, there were still eruptions going on five or six weeks after the outset of these disturbances. Some nasty incidents would erupt. The key point seemed to be that what the country needed to survive with some element of communal harmony or, at least, an absence of violent communal conflict, was that the economic wealth of that country had to expand. In other words, you wouldn't cut too much into the Chinese community, and there still had to be opportunities for them. They were the engine of the economy. You couldn't pour water into their gasoline tanks without creating severe consequences for everybody. Yet it would be necessary to expand greatly the opportunities and percentages of wealth held by the Malay community.

The good news is that, looking back at the situation from the perspective of some 25 years, this has essentially happened. The country, which had considerable natural resources, has now made major additions to its natural gas and oil wealth, in addition to what existed in terms of timber, tin, and rubber. It has now expanded its industrial framework to include more than light industrial production. Medium sized and more sophisticated manufacturing activity is now widespread. Over the past 20 years Malaysia has had a more rapid rate of economic growth than the vast majority of other, developing nations in the world, even in East Asia.

All things considered, Malaysia has had a stable, political leadership which has been relatively moderate but more Malay oriented, as they made the profound decision that they had to after the 1969 disturbances. Malaysia has been blessed with a fairly high quality bureaucracy and a relatively good judicial system, compared to much of Southeast Asia. In short, they have made a success of it.

However, as you said earlier, Tom, racial tensions have not disappeared, but they have been moderated and wrapped in the blanket of economic success. This has allowed all of the various racial communities to derive some benefit and to have some hope for the future. But the hostilities are too deep, as we know from our own experience, to dismiss the possibility of a resumption of the threat of open hostility and a breakdown of government, should economic conditions deteriorate.

Q: Have national elections regularly been held since the time of the riots of 1969?

HELBLE: They have always been held on schedule. This is a Parliamentary system, so the timing of the elections varies within the context of the constitution. The Malays continue to dominate the political process. After the May 13 riots Tunku Abdul Rahman regarded one of the ultra Malay nationalists as a threat to communal unity and harmony. This was Dr. Mahathir Mohamed. He was ostracized and forced to leave the country for about six months. When he returned to Malaysia, he was regarded as a real pariah. I invited him to my house for a small dinner not too long after he came back to Malaysia. It was the first time that a Western diplomat had invited him to a social affair since the May 13 riots. He was just considered a pariah by the government, and you didn't touch this fellow. He subsequently became Prime Minister and has continued as Prime Minister for about the past 10 years or so. He represented the Malays' demands for more opportunity for the Malays, to balance out the advantages which the Chinese had by dint of their own effort. They had the advantages which, the Malays felt they had been

deprived of, despite the fact that they had the political power and, if you will, the power of the gun to obtain a change in that equation.

It's been 12 years or so since I was last there in Malaysia. I don't follow the situation as closely as I did. I think that, basically, Malaysia is a very functional country. However, it will never be secure from communal problems.

Q: I last visited there in 1991 during a cruise through Southeast Asia. I was supposed to deliver lectures on the different countries we were visiting. The impression I had was that, on the whole, KL [Kuala Lumpur] hadn't changed that much. There were some new buildings, but the atmosphere was about the same. I think that you're absolutely right. Communal tension is a continuing problem, and it won't be resolved very soon. The Malays will barely remain in political control of the country, and it remains to be seen whether the Chinese will accept this arrangement, in exchange for the dominant economic position which they enjoy. Is there anything else you want to say about Malaysia?

HELBLE: Yes, there are several things. There are some specific highlights that I'd like to mention.

What I've just covered basically is what consumed my attention for the first year that I was in Kuala Lumpur [1969-1970]. Of course, it was the backdrop against which almost everything else that happened was measured, during my four-year tour there. There were a couple of incidents of at least entertainment value to myself.

In 1970--I don't recall the month--the Vice President of the United States, Spiro Agnew, visited Kuala Lumpur. We, as an Embassy, experienced what most Foreign Service Officers have experienced in one place or another. We went through the horrors attendant...

Q: This was Spiro Agnew.

HELBLE: Yes. I was effectively the Control Officer for the visit. There was an awful advance man who came and went and also visited Bali and Canberra. Vice President Agnew was going on to Australia, so this advance man bounced back and forth between Kuala Lumpur, Bali, and Canberra. Bali was a stop for the Vice President and his party, and the advance man seemed to need to visit Bali frequently. I won't bore you with all of the details of the pain created by the advance man but I'll give you one or two examples.

It had been decided that Vice President Agnew would play golf with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister. The Tunku only played the old course at the Royal Selangor Golf Club, which is the premier club in Kuala Lumpur. He did not play the New Course. The Old Course was a men's only course. Since about 1965, on one day a year women had been allowed to play the Old Course, but just for that one day. The golf event on the Vice President's program was so short, from the point of view of time, that it was agreed that they would play just nine holes. If the Tunku played only nine holes, it was his custom to play only the second nine. Agnew's advance man said that he didn't like the back nine course. He said that there were too many trees and that it was too much of a security threat to the Vice President. They would have to play somewhere

else. Well, the long and short of it was that they ended up playing the back nine, but it was not an easy process to arrange. Then the Vice President's advance party found out that the Tunku always walked, and, in fact, there were only two golf carts in Malaysia. The Tunku himself had a golf cart but he never used it. The King of Malaysia had a cart. Well, Agnew's people said, "No, no, Agnew's got to ride. You can't make him walk." We made every effort to explain why the Malaysians wouldn't use carts and that the Tunku always walked--never used a cart. Yes, somebody gave him a cart many years before, but he never used it. So, it was going to be a walking event and was going to be on the back nine of the Old Course.

The advance people had their own set of requirements. At one point they said, "It's perfectly clear that what they want us to do is to bring in a couple of carts and then donate them to the Tunku at the end of the visit," which, of course, was a lot of baloney. The Malaysians didn't use carts. Nobody wanted carts. In fact, I saw the King playing golf a number of times. I won't say that he never used the cart, but I never saw him using the cart. I saw him walking the course. In any event, there was that sort of nastiness going on.

Vice President Agnew was scheduled to lay a wreath at the National Cenotaph in memory of those killed during the war against the Communists, 1948-1960. The advance person inspecting the cemetery found that the base of the Cenotaph was surrounded by gravel. He said, "This will never do, because the Vice President could step forward the two steps to lay down the wreath. He could slip, twist his ankle, and he'd be wiped out for the rest of his trip." He said, "They'll have to pave over the base of the Cenotaph." [Laughter] I said, "You can't do that. This is their National Monument." He said, "Well, it's got to be done. We can't take the chance."

Well, I finally sent him a telegram when he was in Bali or Canberra, reporting on the progress in arranging for the various events. I reported, "The base of the Cenotaph will be 'stabilized.'" He took that to mean that we were doing what he had told us to do. It was a euphemism for me. I got the caretakers to rake the area a little bit. [Laughter] When the advance man saw that it was still gravel on the morning before the arrival of Vice President Agnew, he went ballistic. I said, "It's too late now. It's all in the program."

Q: It was all printed. [Laughter]

HELBLE: Well, the Agnew visit to Kuala Lumpur was another one of these "smashing diplomatic successes." When Agnew got off the plane, another issue had been how many hands he would shake. The Malaysians said, "Well, the Chief of Protocol will meet him on the plane and shake hands with him. The Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister will meet him at the foot of the steps coming down from the plane, so there are those three people to shake hands with him. Then the Cabinet will be lined up to shake his hand." As I recall, there were about 20 members of the Cabinet. Then there were the Chiefs of Mission of the Diplomatic Corps. The advance man said, "No, no. The Vice President will shake the hands of the Chief of Protocol, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, and that's that."

Well, there was a big battle over this. The Malaysians were very offended. They said, "No, every Chief of State who comes here and all of the VIP's who come here must shake the hands of the members of the Cabinet." The long and short of it was that Agnew got off the plane. We didn't

know how this issue was going to work out. Of course, our Ambassador was present at the foot of the steps. Vice President Agnew was introduced around and shook hands. The Prime Minister took him down the Cabinet line and introduced this minister and that. Agnew went down the line and shook hands. At this point the Chief of the Advance Party, J. Goodearl, got extremely upset, grabbed the Foreign Minister, and said, "This has got to stop! He's not supposed to be shaking these hands. This has got to be stopped!" He was making a very audible scene. Tan Sri Ghazali was the Foreign Minister, and he was a very independent and outspoken person. He was very quick and very bright. He wheeled on Goodearl and the advance man, and said, "You want him to get back on the plane? We'll put him back on the plane. Right now. He can go. We've had enough of a visit." Poor Jack Lydman, our Ambassador, was witnessing this. He physically stepped between the advance man and Ghazali and said, "Of course, the Vice President doesn't mind shaking all these hands. There's no problem." Meanwhile, Ambassador Lydman was pushing Goodearl away from Ghazali. We almost had a diplomatic breakdown. If anybody could do it, Ghazali would have done it. He might just have said, "Mr. Vice President, you're not welcome here any more! Get back on that plane!"

Q: Was there ever any indication that Agnew really objected to shaking hands?

HELBLE: No.

Q: This was a staff-manufactured incident entirely. Sad to say, it happens all the time.

HELBLE: It happens all the time. Imagine this incident. In preparing for the dinner which the Prime Minister was going to host at his residence for Vice President Agnew, the Secret Service told us that they would have to inspect the Prime Minister's residence and do a security check prior to the dinner. They would do an early check and then, an hour before the dinner, they would do it again. Well, they insisted that the security check would involve the entire residence, including the bedrooms of the Prime Minister and his wife. You can imagine the response from the Malaysian security officials, who were not incompetent. They were competent and efficient people, as police and security officials go in the developing world. Malaysia is not really the Third World. It is much better than that. Of course, there was a big to do about this "inspection."

Finally, the matter came to Prime Minister Abdul Rahman's attention. The Prime Minister said, "You can go anywhere you want in this house, but NOT in my bedroom." [Laughter] In any event, these were these types of demands. The whole point of the story, of course, is that nothing useful ever eventuated from the visit. It was just like the Honolulu Conference episode involving the Vietnamese and President Johnson, though not on as grand a scale. It just involved the formalities of a high level visit, which was for show -- nothing else.

I have to finish off this episode with what, to me, was one of my great coups in the Foreign Service. I may have told you this story, Tom, but at the golf event Phil Gill, one of my Political Officers whom I mentioned before, was the event officer because he was a golfer. Actually, he got to use the Prime Minister's golf cart. Phil was there, in the golf cart, in the event that some urgent requirement for Vice President Agnew would come up. Agnew was walking the course but might have to get back to the club house in a hurry--for a "national security crisis" or something, said his staff. The Vice President would have a cart available there, under Phil's

control. However, Phil's responsibility was to stay well behind the party as they walked down the fairway--and not get near the action.

After the golf event J. Roy Goodearl, Agnew's chief staffer, came to me and complained that Gill had followed the party too closely. Gill had allegedly refused to obey a Secret Service agent's orders for him to fall farther back. Phil said, "I have to stay within shouting distance." Anyway, Goodearl made this oral complaint to me. He was very upset.

That evening, after the dinner at the Prime Minister's residence, the party came back to the Merlin Hotel, where we had them quartered and where we had a Control Office. Some of them went to the dance show at the hotel which featured two Australian strip teasers. By about 11:45 PM several cars in the Motor Pool under my control had been dispatched on various missions or were checked out by various members of the vice presidential party, with our Malay drivers. I was down to three vehicles. I received a call from the lobby from Yusof, my Malay Motor Pool Coordinator, who said, "Mr. Goodearl would like to take a car."

I'm trying to think of the name of the Secret Service guy involved in this episode. You may know him. He's the guy who jumped onto the back of President Kennedy's car at the time of the assassination in Dallas in 1963. He was seen in a great picture, being pulled into the car by Jackie Kennedy. Yes, his name was Hill--Clint Hill. He was the chief of the Secret Service detail assigned to Vice President Agnew. Anyway, his name will come up in a minute.

So Yusof said, "Mr. Goodearl would like a car to go to the Federal Hotel." I said, "Yusof, how many cars do you have?" He said, "I have three." I said, "OK, you can release one." I wanted to keep one car at all times for the ultimate emergency, whatever that would be. About five minutes later Yusof called again from the lobby and said, "Mr. Clint Hill would like a car to go to the Federal Hotel." I said, "You have two cars left. Is that correct, Yusof?" He said, "Yes." I said, "OK, Mr. Hill can have one." But I said, "Don't let the last car go under any circumstances."

About 45 minutes later I had a call from Yusof, who said, "Mr. Helble, could you please come down to the lobby immediately?" Both of the drivers had returned from their missions, supposedly to take Goodearl and Hill to the Federal Hotel. Actually, both Goodearl and Hill had separately taken one of the Australian strippers in their respective government cars. In both cases the Malay drivers were absolutely livid and were threatening to walk off the job and get all of the other Malay drivers to walk off the job. Yusof was about ready to walk off the job himself. Yusof was a very dedicated employee of the Embassy. Both Malay drivers reported to Yusof, and then to me directly, that Goodearl and Hill had used the back seat of the government vehicles operated by Malay drivers for what one might call a rather intimate, social experience. The Malay drivers, good Muslims that they were, as well as good Embassy employees, were deeply, deeply offended by this behavior. As I said, they wanted to leave the job.

I told them, in no uncertain terms, that I would see to it that this would not happen again. I asked them, as a favor to me and in view of their responsibility to the Embassy, to stay on the job. Certainly, if anything like this happened again, I wanted to hear about it immediately.

The next morning, at about 6:00 AM, I received a call from Mr. Goodearl, who wanted to see me in his hotel room. When I got there, Mr. Hill was also present. They now indicated that they were going to file an official complaint about Phil Gill's alleged violations of the understanding about the arrangements out on the golf course involving the golf cart in which Phil was following the Vice President's party. They intended to make very clear that this complaint should have an adverse affect on Gill's career.

I said, "Well, you'll probably have to file that cable at the next post, because it's not getting out of here through our communications facilities. But you can file it. That's within your rights." I said, "By the way, the behavior of you two gentlemen in the back seats of your respective cars last night with your Australian female companions has been fully reported to me by the Embassy drivers, who were very upset about your behavior." I said, "You know, it's amazing how stories of this kind get around. We don't have a lot of American journalists coming through here, but we fairly regularly have the 'New York Times' and the 'Washington Post' representatives visit here. Then we have the American wire services represented here, and other journalists coming through here. The kind of behavior of you two gentlemen, particularly last night, is the sort of thing that just makes a lovely story if it somehow happens to slip out and is presented at the appropriate time and to the appropriate people. It's the sort of thing that really would look 'nasty.'"

They sat there for, I would say, 30 seconds. It seemed like 10 minutes, but it was probably 30 seconds. They just looked and glared at me without saying anything. I said, "Do we have an understanding now about Mr. Gill versus the other side of this thing?" Well, they were defeated. They could see that. They said, "All right, all right. Now get the hell out of here." [Laughter] So no complaint was filed against Gill, and I had no particular reason to see that the story was leaked to the American press. However, I fully intended to get it into somebody's hands if anything was done about Gill. As I say, that was probably my greatest coup.

Q: Well, I think that one thing about prominent personalities is that some of them are very impressive and very good people. But some of them are really terrible. Our country is no different from any other country in this respect. It's just appalling that this sort of thing happens, that you have to put up with this sort of business and that these people are in a position to cause serious harm and serious damage to someone else.

HELBLE: One good thing came out of the Agnew visit. It took place about nine months after Ambassador Jack Lydman and his wife, Jody, arrived in Kuala Lumpur. In the Lydman's first week in Kuala Lumpur and after consultation with the Ambassador, I had angered Jody by inviting the Ambassador to a stag bridge game. We had the Japanese Ambassador playing, as well as the Thai DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], the Canadian DCM, and so forth. I thought that it would be a nice, informal, casual setting for our Ambassador to get to know some of these people. He had exhibited an interest in playing bridge. Mrs. Lydman was absolutely furious and would not shake my hand at a reception given for them by our Military Attachés at a hotel. On the spot she stopped the reception line, glared at me, and wanted to know why I had invited the Ambassador to a stag bridge game. She asked if I understood that she and her husband did everything together. She said, "By the way, it's important for you to understand that my husband brings home the Evaluation Reports on all of his officers before he finalizes them." He would

show them to her and ask for her comments. This was a bare threat which, of course, totally turned me off.

So, in effect, for nine months, although I went to the Ambassador's residence repeatedly for official functions, Mrs. Lydman never said more than a perfunctory hello and never shook my hand. I never offered it again after the first time, when she refused to shake it. We had a very hostile relationship, which worried my wife, Joan, considerably but didn't worry me at all because the Ambassador's attitude toward me didn't change a bit. I thought that he was too decent a man to let this be a factor.

Q: This was a gross violation of privacy. In today's Foreign Service this would have been a basis for a grievance case.

HELBLER: Right, but this was before 1972...

Q: When the edict was issued by the Department clearly restricting Ambassadors' wives from interfering in Embassy business.

HELBLER: Right. But in any event the Ambassador had had so many "crises" come up during the preparations for the visit of Vice President Agnew, which I was trying to manage.

Q: Well, he had to know about them.

HELBLER: He did to know about them. The bottom line of this episode of conflict with Mrs. Lydman and its relationship to the visit of Vice President Agnew was that Mrs. Lydman had become very much aware of the nasty problems that I had to wrestle with and, she concluded, I had rendered her husband good service in that connection. After the Agnew visit, she immediately expressed these sentiments. She did not express her forgiveness over the stag bridge episode in so many words. However, it was clear that our previous confrontation was over, and there were no further problems from that point on.

Q: Did you shake hands with her after that?

HELBLER: I certainly did. We went back to hand shaking.

In 1971 there was a massive flood in downtown Kuala Lumpur, a major disaster. I was very much involved in running the disaster relief program and organizing the C-130 aircraft flights which the U. S. Air Force brought in, laden with boats, blankets, food, medicines, etc. It was a good experience in crisis management. I had never handled anything like that previously. Fortunately, this was a relatively short term problem. After four or five days the problems eased off. This was one thing that certainly gave me another set of experiences during my tour in Kuala Lumpur.

I did a lot of travel out of Kuala Lumpur--to Sarawak, Brunei, and other parts of North Borneo. In the Malay Peninsula itself I traveled to Penang, Ipoh, and to the East Coast, including Kota Bharu, as well as to Johore, and Melaka. This came naturally to me after the experiences I had in

Hue, where travel outside the city was just another aspect of the job. I looked forward to the opportunity to get out and spend three, four, or five days seeing different parts of the country, meeting different political leaders and local officials, and so forth. I enjoyed that, with one exception. I ended up in a jungle north of Kota Bharu State of Kelantan with a Malaysian politician who was a doctor. He had an urgent call to make out in the jungle late one night. He took his Volkswagen down what was literally a jungle path. I waited for him outside the little hut while he treated his patient. I was bombarded by mosquitoes. I came home and in a few days had malaria, which passed fairly quickly and never recurred. However, one experience with malaria in a lifetime was quite enough. It was not a lot of fun.

Of course, political attitudes outside of the capital city, just as was the case in South Vietnam were quite different from the attitudes that you heard expressed in the capital city. People tended to be, of course, more parochial in their concerns. However, in some cases their views were more vividly expressed. If you went to the upper East Coast in the State of Kelantan, for example, where Kota Bharu was, strong Malay nationalist sentiments were very acute there. There was a very small and insignificant non-Malay community in that area. If you wanted to get close to the heartbeat of the Malay soul, it was very useful to talk to a number of Malays in that particular, geographical area. Indeed, they had very considerable influence on long-term Malay political development and on the Malay orientation of government policy over a period of years.

It was worthwhile getting out and meeting people like that. I would go up to the American Consulate in Songkhla Thailand, where my good friend, John Kelly, was Consul for two of the years that I was in Kuala Lumpur. Kelly, of course, later went on to be Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, and Ambassador to Finland and Lebanon. We would discuss a number of border issues, including the small, Communist-led insurgencies that existed on both sides of the Thai-Malaysian border. These insurgencies were differently based and involved different political and ethnic groupings. Some Malay irredentist activity proliferated at various times along the border. Of course, there was considerable smuggling and gangsterism in southern Thailand, in particular, which had some impact on the border area.

At least once every six months I would go to Songkhla, and once every six months Consul Kelly would come to Kuala Lumpur. I would take my family to Songkhla, and he would bring his family down to Kuala Lumpur. On one occasion our mutual good friend, Jim Montgomery, came down from his post as Consul in Chiang Mai [Thailand]. This had nothing whatsoever to do with official business. He and his family came down and joined us. The Kelly's, the Helble's, and, subsequently, the Montgomery's were able to get together and develop close friendships. So it was entertaining for all of us, as well as politically useful from our respective points of view.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to go into in terms of your four years in KL ?

HELBLE: I did want to say that during the first five months of our time in Kuala Lumpur we had lived on the western side of the city. Then we moved to the lowlands near the golf course, where there were 45 holes of golf to play, 18 grass tennis courts, a big swimming pool, and so on. This afforded the whole family good recreational opportunities. My opportunity for recreation was

probably more extensive in Kuala Lumpur than it was at any other post in the Foreign Service, with both golf and tennis available, which I enjoyed very much.

One bad part of this, however, was that we had moved with a pair of what were known as Black and White Chinese servants. That is, they habitually wore old style white jackets and black trousers. They were really professional servants--women who, in effect, had almost taken an oath to serve. You might almost consider them as nuns. They were very dedicated people. One of them was the cook. She was an absolutely great, Western-style cook, and a great Chinese-style cook as well. The issue every night was, "What are we going to eat now?" We got into a routine of one night Western-style cooking and the next night, Chinese-style. We loved both of them so much. In any event, they moved with us.

The week after we moved into the new house the cook got sick. It seemed to be a bronchial complaint, with a little fever and so on. Ultimately, she decided that when she cleaned her room after we arrived in the new house, she had touched a little, glass bowl that had some ashes in it. She concluded that those ashes were a talisman burned by a Malay servant of the previous residents of the house. The Malay servant had lived in the same room that our cook now lived in. The Malay servant had not wanted to leave the house. When obliged to leave because the family she was serving was leaving, she had sought the assistance of a Malay *bomoh* --someone who might crudely have been described as a witch doctor.

So the Malay servant of the previous residents of the house sought the assistance of the bomoh to ensure that she could, in fact, stay at the house. He allegedly gave her this talisman to burn, telling her that this would help her to stay in the house. Of course, this didn't have the desired effect, from her point of view. However, our Chinese cook felt that she had been contaminated by this, and it was causing her to be ill.

This situation went on for several weeks. I thought that it was all a joke. However, one day I came home, and Joan said, "They've left and they'll never come back, because this is a 'bad' place now." I really bemoaned the loss of two extremely capable members of the household staff--and particularly that marvelous cook. However, it seemed that there was nothing to be done about it. We offered them more money, but they said that that had nothing to do with it. So we hired a replacement cook, and that cook also became sick within a week or so. We then had the water checked, we had various inspections made, but the second cook left us. A third cook was hired, lasted for three days or so, and left. Then we ran into what was really a dry hole. We couldn't find anybody who would work for us.

Q: The word had gone out.

HELBLE: The word had gone out on the bamboo telegraph that this was a bad house. We had many potential servants come in for an interview. Joan would sit down with them and start to talk to them. They hadn't discussed wages or anything of that sort. Joan would notice that the person being interviewed would become flushed and start to perspire on her forehead. On several occasions she just got up, said, "I can't work here!"--and then dashed off. By this time it was clear that we had a problem.

Meanwhile, I had fairly heavy representational responsibilities, with dinners, parties, and so on. We had to suspend all of that activity. Therefore, the issue became a matter of concern for the Country Team, and it was discussed on more than one occasion at Country Team meetings. The Ambassador would say, "We've got to do something--we'll have to move you to another house." I, of course, regarded this with derision. What nonsense! I felt that this was just silly. I thought that we would get through this. I said, "Don't worry, I'll do my job. I'll do the entertaining I have to do in some way," and so forth. Well, they said, you're having trouble, and so on. I said, "It's an Embassy-owned house. Somebody's got to live there. I'm going to live there. That's what it was intended for," when it was acquired years before. It had been a rubber plantation manager's house.

In any event, we couldn't hire anybody. Joan was doing the cooking. Then Joan came down with some mysterious ailment. She got weaker and weaker. The doctors couldn't figure it out. We had a U. S. military research team doing research on tropical diseases in Kuala Lumpur. The head doctor there looked at Joan. Our own British doctor looked at her, as did an Indian doctor and so on. Finally, she got so weak that she couldn't get out of bed for more than an hour and ultimately couldn't get out of bed at all. She had no stamina. We took her to the British doctor again. He did a blood test and then told her, "You have a spirochete." Well, I didn't know what a spirochete was, but it apparently gets into the blood system and the vital organs and, in short order, you're dead! In fact, this British doctor said to her, "It is my judgment that you have three to five days to live!" Joan didn't call me at the office and tell me this. I came home and said, "Well, what did the doctor say?" She sort of straight-facedly said to me, "He says that I have three to five days to live." Obviously, I was horrified. She seemed to be taking it pretty well but she was just probably numb.

So I said, "We're going to have to get you out of here," and immediately made arrangements for the U. S. Army Fifth Field Hospital outside of Bangkok to take her. It was the judgment of the doctors that she was too weak to fly all the way to Manila, because there were no direct flights. So we put her on a stretcher, loaded her on a commercial flight, and flew her up to Bangkok. She was greeted there by the Embassy in Bangkok. They checked her into the U.S. Army Fifth Field Hospital. They kept her for a week and did various tests. They thought that it was a liver-type disease but could never confirm anything. After a week in the hospital under strict, dietary control she seemed to regain some strength but not very much. They released her because they said that there was nothing more that they could do.

They sent her back to Kuala Lumpur. We put her back in bed and kept her diet under control. We did not yet have any domestic staff. We hadn't been able to hire anybody for months, at this point.

In any event it took several more months, but gradually she regained her strength. There were never any after effects once she was fully operational again. The whole episode lasted for five or six months. It was all very scary. We never did know what the cause of this was. It certainly wasn't a spirochete, but something else. We just didn't know.

Meanwhile, we had to hire some staff. Eventually, a couple came along. The husband was the cook, and he said, "Oh, I know all about that story. That's targeted against female cooks only. It

won't affect me." Well, he was a lousy cook. His wife was a very harsh taskmaster, keeping the house clean but sharply correcting our kids and so on. But this husband and wife team were there, and so we lived with it. We kept them because we couldn't hire anybody else. They were there until we left Kuala Lumpur, except that, about five months before we left, the cook got off a bus at the Central Market, stepped on a banana peel, fell, and broke his hip.

However, the other thing that I haven't mentioned is that we had an exorcism done by C. C. Too. He was the Director of Psychological Warfare Planning in the Ministry of Home Affairs. He had been trained by the British in the war against the Communist guerrillas. He was a very clever fellow and was considered by most people to have extraordinary powers. When he heard the story of our problems at a dinner at the Ambassador's, he said, "I have to come over and do a 'job' on your house."

Well, I thought that it was a joke, but my wife said, "We're going to try it." So, on the next day, he visited our house and explained to Joan what he was going to do. Joan called me at the Embassy and said, "He's going to come over at 7:00 PM tonight. He said, 'Invite any friends that you want, and they can witness this.'" So we lined up a dozen friends, all on the spur of the moment, all of whom knew about the problem.

They came over. C. C. Too explained to the group that he was convinced that this involved an evil force --not a ghost, but an "evil force." The question was whether C. C. Too's powers were greater than the powers of the bomoh, the Malay witch doctor who had brought the evil force into the house. So he went into what I can only describe as a period of deep concentration --not quite a trance. He told us that we could keep talking, so we sat there on our verandah. After about 45 minutes he said, "I have made contact with the 'evil force,' and there is no question that it is a 'force.' It is not a ghost. Now I have to demonstrate to the 'force' that I have greater powers than he who controls the 'force.' I have to repel him." So he went on in this way.

A little after 9:00 PM he said that he had succeeded in repelling the 'force' from the house. It was no longer there. He could not be certain how long it would stay away. It could return. It might be in three days, three months, or maybe it would never return. He said that he couldn't tell that. However, if it returned, we should contact him, and he would come right back.

At this point we had two young women who had just started working for us as domestic servants two days before. They were going to leave us that day, when Joan convinced them that we have a very strong man coming to take care of this problem. They decided to wait. They watched the whole ceremony from a distance, a few feet away from the kitchen door. After it was over, he went over to them and explained to them what he had done and said that everything was all right. Then he went next door to the companion house, where another American officer lived, got their servants out of their quarters, explained to them what had happened, and said that this house was now free of the evil force. Here was the psychological warfare expert, getting the word out on the bamboo telegraph as to what had happened.

In any event after about two weeks the two girls decided to leave. A little while after that we hired this elderly couple I referred to earlier--the poor gentleman who slipped on a banana peel in the Central Market. We had them as domestic employees for the next two years. It was quite an

episode and quite the talk of the town. Everybody said, "Well, C. C. Too did it again." It was an interesting experience. I had never seen an exorcism, but that's what it was.

All in all, Kuala Lumpur was a very enjoyable and comfortable posting. We had more facilities in Kuala Lumpur than we had at any other post, except, perhaps, Honolulu. We made a lot of life-long friends, including the current Japanese Ambassador in Washington. He has been a good friend of ours ever since we shared many experiences in Kuala Lumpur. The Deputy Japanese Foreign Minister is a good friend. Whenever he comes to Washington, I see him. We exchange Christmas cards. The Australian Ambassador to Rome was also a very good friend in Kuala Lumpur. You may have known him--Duncan Campbell. We still stay in touch with them. He was the First Secretary in the Australian High Commission when I arrived there. He had an American wife, Barbara. We had a lot of good friends, both Americans and non-Americans, including many Malaysians.

However, if you are lucky in the Foreign Service and make some effort to sustain relationships, you can make two, three, or four close friends in each posting. They carry on. At the end of a career you have a list of valued friends, if you stayed in touch. Some of them you'll never see again. But just staying in touch with them via the Christmas card routine is rewarding. If we hadn't stayed in touch, we wouldn't have encountered some of these people in subsequent years. They've come to stay in our house, or we've stayed with them during our travels. It's one of the real benefits in the Foreign Service, but you have to work a little bit at it or you just lose them. You leave a post and never see them again. You don't pursue the relationship.

Kuala Lumpur was a good assignment. Our children went to the International School, a small school with about 120 students, covering kindergarten through 12th grade. Our son Stuart did his 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grades there. He became very involved in sports and other activities. Our daughter Mona made a number of friends, several of whom she is still in contact with. We had delightful vacations at Fraser's Hill up in the cooler, mountains of central, West Malaysia or at the beaches in Penang. It was a wonderful posting, marred only by that disaster of May 13, 1969, the riots in Kuala Lumpur, which did, in fact, take a lot of the comfort out of our life.

Q: It reminded you that you were on the edge of disaster at any given time and you had no possibility of preventing it. It could happen.

HELBLE: That wraps up the Kuala Lumpur assignment, even though I had six months left.

RALPH J. KATROSH
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1972-1975)

Ralph J. Katrosh was born in 1927 and raised in Kingston, Pennsylvania. He attended Virginia Military Institute. From there, he joined the military and became a part of the Third Army Palace Guard. It was here in Europe that he developed a desire to join the Foreign Service. Upon returning to the States, he

entered the Foreign Service School at Georgetown University. He then went to the State Department to work with China in Taiwan. He has also served in Burma, the Philippines, Malaysia, Israel and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 28, 1992.

KATROSH: So in 1972 I went to Kuala Lumpur and lived in probably the most famous house there, Jalan Murchu, located on top of the highest point in Kenny Hill, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur.

Q: What was the situation in Malaysia then?

KATROSH: I was there for a three year tour. The big thing in Malaysia was the formation of ASEAN, and oil.

Q: This was the economic union of...?

KATROSH: Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand to start with. Now Brunei is in the formal group.

Very typically European diplomatic process to organize very productive and now maturing Asian style democracies. Malaysia is the only country that successfully contained an internal Communist armed uprising. By the time I got there the uprising was over. When I was in Singapore, one of the big issues was the Communist insurgents in Malaysia. We did a lot of work on that in the Consulate.

The United States government was doing what it could in terms of support, diplomatic support, to put it down.

Q: But it was the British military..

KATROSH: Well, yes. But the Malays too. Their leadership got on top of the situation and said, "Damn it we are not going to give in to them." They did an awful lot of the hard work and they are justly proud of it. One is not in Malaysia very long before being told they are the only country in Southeast Asia which for the most part contained Communism on their own. The British and the Aussies were in there to stiffen them and to train them. The British Special Branch also did a lot of work, ferreting out the Communist leadership and that sort of thing, but by and large, if the Malays didn't get with it, it wouldn't have happened. It would have turned out like Vietnam - Cambodia. But the Malays decided they wanted to get rid of the Communists as quickly as they could, and they did.

That was the difference between Malaysia and Burma. Malaysia kept the British there about ten years after WW II to rebuild the superstructures, get the road systems in, get the bridges in, get the universities operating, and then go. But Burma, after the war, said, "Hey, we can run this thing, so go." Of course they couldn't but the British said, "Fine," and went.

During the early 1970 years we were winding down in Vietnam and Malaysia was very concerned about this. When the Embassy in Vietnam was evacuated, a Malaysian official came up to me...as a matter of fact the Foreign Minister, who was a friend...and said, "Look, if you fellows weren't there, we would not have had the ten years to build up the democracy we now have. The Chinese would have been down our throat; we couldn't have contained the insurgency. You fellows took the pressure off. Now I think we can make it on our own. Thank you very much and don't feel so bad."

Q: I have to say that I subscribe to this, although we did it poorly.

KATROSH: Nevertheless there were benefits.

Q: This was not a popular theme in the United States at this time.

KATROSH: I know, I quite agree. We did it poorly, but we did it poorly for different reasons. Anyway these fellows said, "Thank goodness you were there." The officials whom I knew from Singapore days also said, "Don't feel badly. We benefited from it, you fellows didn't. You have your problems at home. You have a terrible split in your social structure, but be happy that some good came out of it."

In my own mind I think one of the reasons why we are one of the dialogue partners in the ASEAN group, despite many mistakes, is because of our stand against Communism in Southeast Asia. We still have an awful lot of influence in Southeast Asia. Go in and give them the US point of view, try to point out the options they have. By 1970 I think almost all of the Embassies in Southeast Asia were operating this way.

We had a little group in the early 1970s which would meet in Singapore, upper level Embassy officers, about once every three months. We would talk about Southeast Asian internal conflicts and send a report back to the Ambassadors about what we discussed and what we concluded. It was very interesting. This was the way the reports generally went. "We are on the right track. We shouldn't insert ourselves into ABC situations. We should offer consultation or advice if they want it and some help if we can afford it." I think that paid off. It certainly paid off in Malaysia.

We have serious oil interests in Malaysia and I worked on oil issues. The relationship between the oil companies and the Malaysia government were tough and businesslike.

Q: You are talking about the time you were in Malaysia?

KATROSH: We worked on US interests as required. For example, the Malaysian Foreign Minister came up with the idea for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. We talk to him and say there is heavy conflict going on in Southeast Asia, how about standing back. He said, "We want you here, just stay over the horizon."

As noted earlier, another daily issue was the

oil business. Exxon is very powerful in Malaysia. Sometimes they get a little too uppity and the Malaysian government grabs them by the nose and tweaks it a little bit. Exxon then gets upset. But these events, from my point of view, were good events.

After Vietnam one of the things the Malaysians wanted very quickly was a Vietnamese Embassy in town. So there was that. They also were recognizing Beijing at the time. Kuala Lumpur put an embassy in Beijing and Beijing people were coming to Kuala Lumpur. Compared with all of my experiences in the Foreign Service, the time in Kuala Lumpur was the most "traditional"; what I thought an Embassy should be doing. We weren't fighting a war, we weren't shouting "These dirty Communists are coming over the wall." From 1972-75 you could see real growth and progress and construction in bilateral relations. You could see Southeast Asia coming into its own. The Thais began to think independently and Jakarta was well under control in terms of US interests. The Southeast Asians didn't vote with us half the time in the U.N. but when the chips were down and we really needed their cooperation they gave it, and not reluctantly, they gave it willingly.

So I would say that if someone wanted to understand effective Asian diplomacy, if they looked over the period 1970-1985 and see how the Embassies operated in that part of the world, there would be some lessons to be learned.

STAN IFSHIN
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1973-1975)

Mr. Ifshin was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1942 and graduated from John Hopkins University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967. He has served in numerous posts including Saigon, Taiwan, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Philippines. He was interviewed by David Reuther in 2001.

Q: [laughter] So you are out of language training and you get home leave and then you go to KL.

IFSHIN: I don't know if I got home leave at that juncture or not. No, because I had home leave before leaving for Tai Chung. As a matter of fact, when I was supposed to leave for Tai Chung I was on home leave. And my father died in an accident that weekend. I was leaving that Monday and he died on the Friday before. Originally I was going to go to Europe on my way to Taiwan, I was going to go the long way. But of course, I stayed with my mother and her family I think a month or a month and a half, and then flew directly to Taiwan from New York. I was pretty shook up at that point actually, I was in emotional turmoil.

Q: But your foreign service assignment now is in Kuala Lumpur, were you in the political section?

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: Was it is a joint political/economic section?

IFSHIN: No. We had three FSOs, and one other officer. And one other officer in the political section. There was the chief of the political section, a Malay speaker, and myself as the Chinese speaker.

Q: So of the three, were you the lowest ranking, youngest officer then?

IFSHIN: Yes.

Q: So you that meant you got to do the biographic reporting, or... what were your duties?

IFSHIN: It's interesting, actually, because Kuala Lumpur or Malaysia, as you know, the politics are very much ethnic politics. You have these Chinese-based parties, and the Malay-based parties, even a couple of Indian-based parties, and a few mixed parties which tend to be Chinese. So I'm basically responsible for the Chinese parties. So in addition to the usual, being the protocol officer and the biographic reporting officer and the normal cats and dogs, and map procurement and publications procurement and those other good things, I had these very distinct responsibilities for covering the principle opposition parties then, as well as component parties of the ruling coalition. Which was an interesting way for it to fall out.

Q: Fairly serious. This was basically your first foreign service overseas tour.

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: And you're talking to the highest level of the opposition party... senior gentlemen in their own...

IFSHIN: Yes.

Q: How did you feel? They were obviously older than you were by 30 years... the aura of being from the American embassy can carry a young officer quite a ways?

IFSHIN: In Malaysia, then at least, the U.S. carried somewhat less weight than it was to subsequently. They tended to be very British-oriented at that point. But I didn't find any problem getting in touch with people. Maybe I dealt with the second level people more than the first level.

Q: But that's good liaison anyway.

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: You have a very distinct portfolio and it's a crucial one. Malaysia has gone through the insurgency period and they're trying to integrate these groups so the trends and whatnot that you are picking up are telling. Where was Malaysia at that time?

IFSHIN: The traumatic event that pretty much hung over things was the '69 race riots. Just to trace the history there, if you'll recall Malaysia was formed of Malaya, Singapore, and Borneo provinces, east Malaysia. The Chinese-Malay balance tended to be fairly close at this point. At least from the Malay point of view, the understanding was that the Chinese would dominate economically but they [the Malay] would dominate politically. Of course, Lee Kuan Yu was not going to take a back seat to anybody. I think it's unrealistic to expect that, and he was making a bid for power nationwide, so they expelled Singapore. Subsequently the remnant Chinese still made a bid for political power and came darn close to winning the '69 elections. The Malays came out and rioted and all sorts of rules were instituted to ensure that the Malays would continue to hold political power indefinitely. Plus the various, for want of a better word, affirmative action programs which were meant to promote the *bamiputra*, the sons of the soil, the Malay, as opposed to the other communities. And there was a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of the Chinese. There were Chinese who of course were interested in working out a different kind of accommodation and there were Chinese who were interested in overthrowing things and radically changing them. There were all sorts of movements and currents and developments among the Chinese. And then quite a few Chinese were leaving, a big Chinese emigration to Australia at that time.

Q: So in fact from this position, you are talking to all kinds of Chinese groups, not just the established political opposition. You're getting around town and you have a fair arm around the Chinese community. What were their concerns at this time, which is '73-'75?

IFSHIN: Well, they were, what's our future in Malaysia. We've got it okay now, but what's the future for our children was the major question. Are we going to continue as second-class citizens here?

Q: You're there through the American withdrawal from Vietnam, which is just up the street, if you will. Is that impacting on the domestic situation in Malaysia?

IFSHIN: There was tremendous ferment in that part of the world at that time. I remember... a little back-patting here. I was out on a trip when somebody threw in some sort of anti-U.S. remark in the context of Vietnam. I was speaking to some group, I don't remember what it was. But I kind of exploded and said, let's remember the context of American involvement in Vietnam. You as Malaysian should remember Konfrontasi and the Pyong Yang, Hanoi, Jakarta, Beijing axis that was going to sweep Southeast Asia or Asia. America sacrificed to give you time to build your country, etc., in fact all of the southeast Asia countries were allowed to have that time, and now you have a chance to either use it or our sacrifice has been in vain. It cost us a lot but you've gotten a lot out of this. There was a lot of applause, and everybody was rah rah, and I felt very good about it at the time.

The other thing was we were dealing with boat people.

Q: The fall of Saigon in April '75.

IFSHIN: Right. A number of them evacuated to islands... Well, they evacuated to Malaysia and the Malay government put them on islands. They approached us and asked when are you going to

take these people? We said we're not going to take them until we at least have a chance to interview them, or talk to them. Well, that was very unsatisfactory to the Malay government, they just wanted us to take them, pick them up and take them home to America. Eventually we did get a chance to talk to them and we formed a little team of about 4 or 5 of them and went off to this east coast Malaysian location. It was an island offshore and we'd take a banca over to the island every day to interview. We were staying in a rather ramshackle government guesthouse on the mainland. I tell this story because there was a fairly amusing incident. It's amusing now. I wake up one morning and I have an enormous welt under my eye. I don't know what it is, but it's this really ugly looking welt. It gradually goes down and I continue doing my work. We go back to Kuala Lumpur and I see a British physician who was the embassy doctor. He said, oh, it's a centipede bite. And I said, aren't centipede bites supposed to be fatal? He said, well, sometimes... obviously yours wasn't. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] Well, let's look at the fall of Saigon for a moment. Saigon falls, people start floating in to the isthmus both in Thailand, I was up in Songkhla, as the counsel there. Were you aware of any interchange we were having with the Malaysian government, or what was this and whose responsibility... and what not?

IFSHIN: I can't really tell you a lot more than I've already hinted at. They just wanted us to take them. They didn't want to give us access. I know that, early on. And our position was, well, we're not going to do anything until we've had a chance to talk to these people and interview them. If we can develop that they have a basis for entry into the United States, that is they have a relative, or they worked for the U.S. or there is some other reason, we're not just taking them. But if we can develop this, we'll take many.

Q: As far as the way the embassy handled this flow of people... most of that fell to the political section to report on the refugees, to carry the messages?

IFSHIN: I'd say it was a general embassy effort. The team that we formed included me, a political officer...

Q: With your Vietnamese...

IFSHIN: Yes, I knew that, that's why I was on the team I believe. Although, as I told them at the time, I'd made a deliberate effort to forget my Vietnamese when I was studying Chinese. In fact, it was interesting how my Vietnamese came back as I was hearing it every day. But we had an economic officer on the team, and I believe a consular person. Maybe a USIS person as well. It was just an embassy effort, we tried to get people to go off and interview.

Q: With the American withdrawal from Vietnam, which is '73, I believe, are you getting any feeling this is impacting on Malaysia. That they're thinking that their situation is more delicate than before?

IFSHIN: I'm trying to remember when Sukarno was overthrown...

Q: '65, I think.

IFSHIN: Yes. I think they were really more relaxed than they might have been. That really changed the whole constellation in that part of the world, when Jakarta was no longer hostile. When Malaysia was no longer being attacked as a creation of British imperialism. They now had friends and while they were sympathetic to us, they were not as anxious about their own situation as they had been.

Q: Your major reporting responsibility was the Chinese political parties. Did you see opportunities to touch bases with colleagues in other embassies who were also looking at the same issues?

IFSHIN: Yes, basically the Australians of course and the Brits had very good contacts in Malaysia. And the Japanese on occasion.

Q: This is a regular procedure? In Beijing, we had Tuesday monthly lunch.

IFSHIN: No. They were a group of youngish diplomats who sort of hung out together and gravitated together, but it was never... It was more social than work related. Although as Al LaPorta, who was number two in the section, used to tell me... I remember once something had happened, I can't remember what, but it had us all puzzled and I would say I'm going to a party tonight and maybe I'll learn something. The next morning I would come in and Al said, what did you learn? I said, it wasn't that kind of party. He looked at me all disgusted and said, Stan, they're ALL that kind of party. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] What did you think was America's priority in Malaysia at that time?

IFSHIN: Our priorities were almost strictly economic. Malaysia was a major provider of natural rubber and tin, and we were interested in its continuing in that role and being a trading partner of the U.S. Human rights did not exist at that time as part of foreign policy. We were sort of interested in democracy, out of our own personal predilections we favored those things. But our basic interests were economic.

Q: Just about the time you arrived...

IFSHIN: Let me just mention that during the time I was there, our ambassador was succeeded by Frank Underhill who had been political consular in Manila and then deputy chief of mission in Seoul before coming to KL as ambassador. He was really a brilliant political officer in many ways, a brilliant drafter, and a lot of fun. Again, another anecdote just popped into my head. The South Korean ambassador was calling on him. The Korean issue was coming up in the UN and he had been to see the Malaysian foreign minister and had gotten their agreement to support our position, that is the U.S. – South Korean position. Our ambassador, Frank Underhill, reported this conversation, whether the Malaysian said 'yes, I hear you', or 'yes I hear you and agree with you', or 'yes I hear you and agree with you and will do what you want' remains to be seen. [laughter]

Q: Free will always is one of the great diplomatic problems, isn't it?

IFSHIN: Bringing it back to my Peace Corps anecdote about getting people to commit. People don't like to say no in that part of the world. They will always say yes if they possibly can, but what they mean by yes is another question. Pinning them down and circumscribing their freedom of operation pretty sufficiently so that you can be pretty certain of what they will do is the trick.

Q: After you arrived in KL, the Thai government fell. Did that get any notice in Malaysia?

IFSHIN: When you mention it, I have vague recollections, but I can't say that it did. Part of my responsibility was to cover the area around Penang because it was largely Chinese, so I would at least get that far up the coast. When I left Tai Chung and went to KL I got a boondoggle in which I had stopped off in Bangkok and Songkhla and the Philippines as well to discuss insurgencies and the Muslim problems in the border areas. So I was aware of these problems and of course they were always the Communist remnants in southern Thailand. But I can't say that people were terribly concerned with what was happening in Thailand. Maybe they were in the foreign ministry.

Q: Malaysia's focused basically in other places, they're looking at Indonesia, that where threat, danger was coming to them.

IFSHIN: I think so.

Q: As your first full tour in the foreign service, what did you think of your duties and what you were learning professionally?

IFSHIN: I found it professionally rewarding and very interesting. One incident occurred when I was there which we have not talked about which might be of interest, and that was the Japanese Red Army seizure of the American consulate and the taking of the consul and other persons as hostages at that time. The American embassy occupied the eleventh, twelfth, and penthouse floors of a downtown office building. The Consulate was on the ninth floor, a suite of offices. The Swedish embassy was also on the ninth floor, in an adjacent suite. I forget what floor, but the Japanese were in the same office building. The Japanese Red Army seized the consulate, and took our consul and a bunch of other people hostage. I was happened to be outside the building when this all occurred and there was a big mob scene in front of the embassy when I was coming back. I spoke to police and they weren't letting anybody through. I called the embassy and they said, go stay with our consul's wife. I went off, she was Latin American, and I was doing my best to comfort here and various other American wives started showing up.

I went back to my apartment and spent the night in my apartment, a full night's sleep. The next morning I got up and the siege was still going on. I went up to the police and identified myself. They let me through and I actually went up to the embassy this time. They wanted me to go down to the Japanese embassy to act as liaison. I took a walkie-talkie and was in the Japanese embassy for the next 24 hours or so as this drama unfolded. What the terrorists were demanding was the release of prisoners as I recall. Eventually, the Malaysians agreed to their demands and the exchange was to take place at the airport where they were to get a plane and fly off.

I went off with our charge d'affaires, Bob Dillon, who was the DCM. I don't remember if Ambassador Underhill was out of the country or what, but in any case he was not there. I went off with Bob Dillon to the airport where the home affairs minister was on the phone with various heads of state around the world trying to persuade them to allow this plane to land. Eventually, we got Madame Bandaranaike to agree to let them refuel in Sri Lanka. Colonel Qadhafi agreed to let them land in Libya. Eventually we had our hostages released, and they left with the prisoners. I think the prisoners had been flown in from Japan. They wanted Japanese prisoners. They flew in from Japan and the exchange took place at the airport.

Q: Your job as liaison at the Japanese embassy, were you talking to the ambassador or their DCM or their political consular ?

IFSHIN: I think basically their political consular, more often than not.

Q: He was finding out what was going on in Japan and then you would be able to pass that on to our own people?

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: Who was the consular officer?

IFSHIN: There was only one consul. It might have been Bob Stebbins. He was released eventually. There was also an embassy employee who was taken hostage. Everyone else was Malaysian, visa applicants of one sort or another.

Q: Anything else about that full assignment that struck you as an interesting description of either the foreign service life or how an embassy operates? Did you get the feel that we did understand what was going on in Malaysia, that we did have enough contacts?

IFSHIN: Yes, I think so. As I say, our interests tended to be economic rather than political. But I think we basically understood what was going on and we had a broad range of political contacts. More than I've seen in other places I've served, in fact.

Q: You're saying our interests are mainly economic and you're the officer liaisoning with the large Chinese community which is economically oriented, and I see that the next thing you're going to do is go to FSI for economic training. Is there any connection? [laughter]

IFSHIN: Well, I thought, this is making me a well-rounded foreign service officer. Again, this was lack of understanding of how the foreign service really worked and what the foreign service wanted me to do. But I thought I should know about economics and that would make me a better political officer.

Q: When did you leave KL then?

IFSHIN: As I recall it was December of 1975.

ROBERT S. DILLON
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kuala Lumpur (1974-1977)

Ambassador Robert S. Dillon was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1929. He received a bachelor's degree from Duke University in 1951 and joined the State Department in 1956. In addition to serving as ambassador to Lebanon, his career included positions in Venezuela, Turkey, Malaysia, and Egypt. Ambassador Dillon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: That is very interesting background to a continuing thorn in US foreign relations. As you mentioned, when the Cyprus crisis sprung up in 1974, you were headed to Malaysia as the DCM. How did you get that assignment?

DILLON: I was "GLOPed". You will recall that Henry Kissinger had decided that all area specialists should have out-of-area assignments. As I understood it, he had gone down to Mexico to a big conference and had run into all these Latin American types who had never served anywhere else. He instructed that they be reassigned out of the area. When it was pointed out that his instructions would mean that lot of other reassignments would have to take place, he decided that all Foreign Service personnel would have to have at least one tour out of their area of specialization. So in my case, it meant an assignment to South-east Asia--out of the eastern Mediterranean. A friend of mine had told me that the Bureau for East Asian Affairs was looking for a DCM for Malaysia; he said that if I were interested, he would put in a plug for me with the Ambassador, Frank Underhill. Frank had the opposite problem; he had many years of experience in South-east Asia. He was a wonderful man and an excellent professional. He was on his second tour in Kuala Lumpur; therefore he was under pressure from the Department to chose a DCM who had had no experience in Malaysia or the area. He had gotten a list of seven or eight candidates; why he chose me I don't know, but I am glad he did.

So off I went and arrived towards the end of August, 1974. Most of the time, it was a happy tour. I confess that towards the end, I became somewhat bored. When you are accustomed to dealing with Turkey-Greece-Cyprus, there is constant tension and never a dull moment. There were real American interests at stake in that area. This was my first assignment where there really weren't strong American interests at stake. We didn't wish the Malaysians any bad luck and there was always some interest in the on-going emergency on the Thai border--oil had been discovered there. But it was very different from being in the eastern Mediterranean. Malaysia was a much more typical diplomatic assignment during which you spent a lot of time going to the Foreign Ministry, arguing with officials about obscure U.N. resolutions which neither they or we cared very much about. So by the time the three years had expired, I was bored and ready for a change. For the first two years, I enjoyed it very much, particularly because Underhill was so good and I felt that I had learned a lot from him.

My job as DCM was a fairly standard executive officer role. He encouraged me to get as far into substance as I wanted. There wasn't that much pressure on the substantive side. I did get

involved to some respect and tried to become familiar with the issues, but both the Ambassador and Frank Bennett, who was the chief of the Political Section, were very good and were both long-time experts in the area. I didn't feel the need to compete with them on substance, even though I was very interested. So I played the standard DCM role: I served as the executive officer of the Embassy, sort of running the mission, and stood in the place of the Ambassador when he was gone. But I didn't try to become a South-east Asia expert.

It was the first assignment since early in my career during which I did not feel that I contributed on the policy side. I occasionally drafted messages, but frankly this was a situation in which the policy judgments were very much the Ambassador's. I agreed with them; he was a brilliant man and very nice. I did see eye-to-eye with him, so that there weren't any policy differences. We both had the same point of view. Neither of us was very enthusiastic about American involvement in the area. We were reducing our presence in Vietnam heading towards the final disaster. Underhill had served all around the area; he was annoyed with a lot of Washington initiatives which tended to involve us more deeply and didn't make any sense. Everyone--AID, CIA or somebody--always seemed to have some great scheme to save Malaysia. Well, Malaysia didn't want to be "saved"; it was happy with the way things were going.

In the early summer, 1975, when Underhill was gone, a team came from Washington to explore the provision of assistance to the Malaysian armed forces to help them in their battles against the Communist terrorists (CTs). Who were these Communist terrorists? They were probably something like 1,200 Chinese who had been in the jungle for many, many years. They were the remnants of the old emergency, which had never ceased. It was kind of a nasty little jungle warfare that was just continuing. At any time, there would be 10 or 11 battalions of the Army or from the Police Field Force (PFF) deployed in northern Malaysia, just south of the Batong salient in Thailand. The guerrillas would move back and forth across the border. They would find sanctuary across the border and then move south periodically. They supported themselves by terrorizing the Chinese merchants in the towns on the fringes of the jungles. They would occasionally assassinate somebody. In fact, shortly before I arrived, they had managed to murder the Chief of Police. Casualties on the Malaysian side probably ran two or three per month. It was an insurgency that in fact was very well contained. The Malaysians were probably putting the right amount of effort into this low-level warfare. In any case, Washington sent a team headed by an Admiral, who turned out to be William Crowe, later Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Ted Shackley, a well known CIA man who used to be the station chief in Laos, was on the team along with an Army Colonel who was an expert in irregular warfare. When Underhill heard that this team was coming, he was sufficiently concerned that he almost delayed his home leave. But he decided that if I couldn't handle it, then I didn't deserve to be a Foreign Service officer. And I agreed with that judgment. I promised not to give away the store. Underhill felt that we should not involve ourselves in the Malaysian affairs. The team talked to a lot of people in Kuala Lumpur, particularly on the intelligence and psychological side. They spent about a week or ten days interviewing and talking about the insurgency. Members of our staff went along on one or two meetings; I went to a couple of them. But in general we gave the team a free hand. I thought that the team was very nice; I was particularly struck by Crowe. At one stage, we went to the jungle to observe the insurgency. We got in a small plane and flew to Ipoh, a primarily Chinese town on the border of the area. Then we got into a helicopter, flew off into the jungle, landing at a firing point, manned by a PFF battalion. There were distinctions between the PFF and the

Army; I considered the former to be more competent even if it was lightly armed. The Army tended to be commanded by Malay royalty and they weren't very great soldiers in my view. The PFF and others were good soldiers. In any case, we had dinner at the firing point, we stood by while a howitzer fired into the jungle, but we never did see any insurgents. Crowe loved it; he really got a kick out of this trip. He enjoyed the PFF officers and was happy with the display they put on for him and his team. It was a lot of fun. Crowe had been in Vietnam and had served on a jungle river boat there and was therefore familiar with the environment. He kept saying how much fun it was and that he hadn't had as much fun since having left Vietnam. I enjoyed the visit myself, but I began to worry that Crowe was becoming so fascinated with the activity that he might just pursue the wrong policy. We helicoptered back to Ipoh, where we got on our small plane and back to Kuala Lumpur. Three days later, the team came to my office. Crowe had a big smile on his face. Shackley was glowering. So I sensed that there was some tension in the team. Crowe sat down and in his "old boy" Oklahoma style said: "Bob, I think these folks are doing just fine. I don't think they need any assistance from us!" I could have kissed him. Shackley obviously strongly disagreed, but there wasn't much he could do. So ended the Washington mission. I think the story illustrates that Crowe was a brilliant guy and had the right instincts. It also illustrates what mischief Washington can sometime dream up. Shackley and his crowd were desperately looking for some way to carry on what they had been doing for a long time in South-east Asia--Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It was not needed in Malaysia and would have been a great mistake for us to get involved there; certainly the Malaysians didn't want us. If it had been a lesser person than Crowe, he might have gone along with the Washington desire, but Crowe very clearly saw the potential pitfalls and had enough stature and strength of character to say "No" to Shackley.

Q: How about AID?

DILLON: It wanted to have a program in Malaysia. The Peace Corps had a presence and we thought that that was a worthwhile activity. But we did not believe that there should be an AID mission in Kuala Lumpur. AID was interested because Malaysia was successful; that is a little facetious, but AID was so tired of being given work in the "basket cases", that it wanted to work in a country which might well succeed. Malaysian exports were doing very well: oil, rubber, tin and palm oil. Oil was just beginning; the other commodities had been traditional exports. During the mid-70s, these commodities had a good world market. That provided enough foreign currency for economic development. The Chinese business community in particular was extremely competent. The Malays, who dominated the government, were not as concerned with "economic development" as they were in getting their own people into the private business sector. That was called the Bumiputra program (Bumiputra meaning "the sons of the soil"). There had to be Malays in on everything. Much of the government's effort was directed to what we would call an "equal opportunity program" or quotas. There were Australian, New Zealand and British businessmen located in Malaysia who were under a great deal of pressure from the government to employ Malays, not Chinese. Malaysia is not a big country; it might have had 10-12 million inhabitants. It was not a wealthy nation, but the economy was growing fast. I have a lot of respect for AID. I have enjoyed my association with AID over the years. But in this case, I thought it was very clear that the Agency wanted to get into Malaysia because it appeared that there would be a successful economic development effort and it wanted to be part of a success story. I didn't consider that a very good reason to establish an AID mission.

Typically, the US Government was also interested in selling arms to Malaysia as soon as it became clear that the country could afford to pay for them. Every time you turned around, there were salesmen from our Defense Department, wanting to sell F-5 planes (the Northrop built fighter-bomber). The Malaysians were finally persuaded to buy 20 or 30 of them. It was not clear that they needed them; on the other hand, it really isn't up to foreigners to tell a sovereign country that they don't need armaments. They certainly did not need them to meet the insurgency. Interestingly enough, when they finally got them, they immediately (within weeks after the arrival of the first planes) mounted air strikes against the insurgents in the north and pounded their own positions instead, killing 15-20 of their own troops. What made it even worst was that under ordinary fighting circumstances, Malaysia would have lost that many soldiers in 6-7 months. This time they managed to do the same damage in 15-20 minutes.

These are examples of our activities in Malaysia. We had a very good agricultural attaché, John DeCoursey, who was a lot of fun because he knew a lot. An agricultural attaché in a country like Malaysia knew everything. If you are out in a plantation, he can tell you where everything is, what the markets are, etc. His reporting was interesting and important. We bought commodities from Malaysia and we exported machinery and other things.

The three years in Malaysia were conventional in a lot of ways, but a happy assignment. I have already described the Crowe mission. I should mention another episode which happened a few days after they left. This had to do with terrorism. My wife was going to Indonesia for a teachers' conference--she was teaching at the International School of Kuala Lumpur. I went to Jakarta with her for about three days and then I returned to K.L. I was back at my desk, trying to look important, shuffling through telegrams, thinking undoubtedly deep and important thoughts. All of a sudden, I heard a series of shots. I recognized immediately the sound of small arms fire, 9 mm pistol shots. I ran to the door of my office; there were people outside milling around wondering what was going on. It was hard to tell. The Embassy occupied the top three and a half floors of a skyscraper in the middle of Kuala Lumpur. The half floor was occupied by our consular section. The rest of the floor was occupied by the Swedish Embassy, which was run by a Charge'. We recognized quickly that the shooting was taking place on that floor. So we rushed down the steps to see what was going on. There was still some shooting going on. We could see the door of the elevator opening and one of our Malay guards being shot at by someone in the corridor. The guard took a bullet right under the eye and fell back into the elevator. The door then closed and we managed to get the man out on a different floor and to a hospital. Then another guard came up and he was shot through the chin--the bullet came out through the jaw. It was then that I understood for the first time why in situations like this the traditional metal jacket is the wrong kind of ammunition. Fortunately, in this particular case, it was the "bad" guys who were using steel jacketed bullets. But our guys were both shot in the head; fortunately they both survived. One wasn't even knocked down. But the ricochet effect of the bullets was the worst. Every time someone fired, the bullets would bounce all over the place; that was terrifying. You get a sense of being shot at from all sides. We sealed the floor off very quickly with Marines and our security officer standing on the stairs to prevent the perpetrators, whom we did not know at the time, from going upstairs to our other floors. The elevators were shut off. The Malaysian police arrived very quickly and sealed off the floor from below. So the terrorists were locked into the 9th. floor. We didn't really know what was going on; we were speculating whether it was

some "nut" who had a perceived grievance against the consular section or was it a terrorist attack. In effect, we reached a stalemate for several hours.

Occasionally, we would hear firing. Fortunately no one was killed, although there were four wounded. At some stage of the siege, one of the Indian guards attracted attention and was wounded. At sometime during the early afternoon, a note was thrown out by the perpetrators, announcing that they were members of the Japanese Red Army. Their demands were primarily on the Japanese government. The Japanese Deputy Prime Minister happened to be visiting Washington at the time; we assumed that the attack was timed to coincide with that visit. The Japanese had some JRA people in prison; our "invaders" threatened to harm their hostages if their colleagues in Japanese prisons were not released. At about the same time, a Foreign Service officer, Dick Jackson, who had a beautiful voice, and I were standing at the switchboard. The telephones were still working and a Malay operator was on duty. She answered one of the incoming calls and turned to me: "The head of the terrorists wishes to speak to you". This was my first experience in this kind of a situation, although I had picked up a couple of pointers somewhere along the line. One was that the decision maker should avoid being one of the intermediaries; that puts one in an impossible position.

As I said, Dick Jackson was standing next to me. For the next four days, he brilliantly distinguished himself. In any case, since he was standing there, I asked him to answer the call. He instantly appeared to understand the game, although he also had never had any experience. He spoke in a nice, friendly, unthreatening voice. He kept saying; "You know I don't make the decisions, but I will relay your concern to our Charge' who is here in the building". He sounded just like the text book said he should. So we had conversations with the JRA, especially about their demands and threats to execute some hostages if the Japanese government did not release some of their prisoners in Japan. By this time--the episode had now lasted several hours--a huge crowd had gathered outside our building. Newsmen began descending from all over the world. The only areas outside that were not filled with people were those which could have been targets of the terrorists' fire. The Japanese Ambassador arrived. A "war" room was set up on the ground floor in some offices belonging to the bank that owned the building. The Minister of Interior, Ghazali Shafi, came personally. It is important to understand the configuration of the elevators because they played a major role in the incident. There were three elevators in the building. Two faced into the lobbies; by this time, both of those had been disabled and were stuck on the 9th floor. The other elevator, although in the same bank, was the freight elevator and it had doors opposite to the passenger ones. Our communications were through this elevator because the way it faced, no one could shoot through its doors. The steps were closed because we and the terrorists had established fields of fire on the steps. So I went down the freight elevator to the meeting on the first floor. That was the beginning of an exhausting four day siege. The Japanese sent their Minister of Transport to supervise their side of the process; he brought with him a man from their Middle East office because for some reason they assumed that the JRA has something to do with the Middle East--why they came to that conclusion is still a mystery to me, although I knew that some of the JRA had been trained in Lebanon. One of the interesting parts of the story is that that Middle East man, with whom I became friendly, is the Japanese Ambassador in Washington today.

A negotiation ensued. I was getting lots of unhelpful advice from Washington. Henry Kissinger, who was the Secretary of State, was on a plane to Belgrade. He communicated with us; he seemed primarily interested that the American Charge' not agree to anything because "the United States does not negotiate with terrorists", etc. Later, Larry Eagleburger became the main point of contact. He repeated many of Kissinger's injunctions, but in a much more palatable way. I think I understood my role. When I realized that the JRA's demands were against the Japanese and not against us, I was probably the happiest man in the world because, among other things, it made my role a lot easier. The pressure was on the Japanese; the Malaysians just wanted to give in to the terrorists because they wanted to end the incident as rapidly as possible.

Naturally, the electricity was turned off. Kuala Lumpur is in the tropics and the temperature was in the '90s and very humid. We sweated gallons and gallons of water. We had a generator which ran the elevator. I would run up and down from my floor to the ground and back. We continued our communications with Washington. Our telephone line to the Operations Center was kept open the whole time. At the beginning, when Washington called, I answered; then I realized that the same principle which applies to negotiations with terrorists also applies to Washington: let some one else answer the phone. I told my staff that when I was asked for, I "couldn't be found". Al LaPorta, who is now the DCM in New Zealand--a very capable Foreign Service officer--became the liaison with Washington. I can still see Al, somewhat overweight, bearded, naked to the waist, saying very politely to Washington: "I just don't know where Dillon is. He may be downstairs, but in any case, I will get a message to him." It didn't take me long to figure out that if I were always available to the phone, I would be talking to Washington 24 hours each day. Every ambitious so and so in Washington wanted to be in on the action; so they all wanted to talk to me and give me their advice. We wanted advice, in small and well conceived doses, but Washington is very difficult to deal with, particularly in situations like this. People there panic; we felt tremendous tensions, but not panic.

I should mention one particular phase. We had a security officer--Wayne Algire--, who was a large and overweight. He was inventive and resourceful. He was running all over the place as was the Station Chief. We were dropping mikes through the walls in an effort to hear what was going on on the 9th floor. We didn't know how many terrorists there were; we didn't know how many hostages there were. We knew our consul was there. We tried to put together a list of whom might be held hostage. We speculated that there might have been 20-32 hostages. It turned out that there were 52, six or seven Americans and a few other foreigners. But most of the hostages were Malaysian citizens. We provided food and water to all of them during the four days. The terrorists were very suspicious of the food and water. They were afraid to drink anything we sent because they thought it would be drugged or poisoned.

The freight elevator, which moved agonizingly slowly, was of tremendous importance to us since it was the only way we could move up and down. A Marine guard stayed on the elevator at all times. At one point, the elevator stopped running. It had broken. There was great consternation. We finally located by phone the Chinese technician who maintained the elevators. He came to the building. It turned out that the motor that drove the elevator was on the roof. How does the Chinese man get to the roof when the sole elevator was not working and the stairs were blocked by gun fire? We suggested that he walk to the ninth floor, crouch there until an opportune moment arrived and then run across. The maintenance man was no dummy. He said

that if we Americans wanted to be foolish like that, that was alright with him, but there was nothing in his job description that required him to risk his life that way. We tried all sorts of persuasions, but nothing happened. Finally Wayne Algire, overweight as he was, went up on the roof and crawled into the tiny space where the motor was housed. He laid on his back, with a telephone cradled in his ear, taking advice from the Chinese mechanic downstairs. The conversation went on for some time, but eventually the security officer of the American Embassy fixed the elevator! There were many heroes in this incident, but Dick Jackson and Wayne Algire stand out. Finally, the Japanese agreed to exchange some JRA prisoners which they were holding for our hostages. A JAL 747 flew to Kuala Lumpur.

Then another crisis ensued. One of the four JRA prisoners, who was supposed to have been brought from Japan, refused to be part of the exchange. The terrorists didn't believe it. There were extended exchanges. Finally, we were able to patch through a telephone call from our building to the jail where this fourth JRA member was being held. Everybody of course could listen in to the conversation. So we could hear what was going on. The fellow in Japan just didn't want to be any part of this exchange; he wanted to stay in jail. So the terrorists were finally reassured. Then the question arose about asylum. Who wanted them? That was the job of the Malaysian Minister of Interior. That was a further excruciating process. He looked around all over the world. We suggested Libya, but they refused. No one else would take them. Finally, the Libyan government agreed to permit the JAL 747 to land in their country. I remember sitting with the Japanese Ambassador who was sweating buckets; he was very good, but as you can imagine this was a very difficult period for him. We used English because most of the senior Cabinet officials had been educated in England. As the Japanese Ambassador came under greater and greater pressure, his English deteriorated which made matters even more difficult. When we heard that the Libyans would accept the plane, the Japanese Ambassador drew a big sigh and said "Ah So"--exactly what you see and hear in the movies.

Then we had to worry about air clearance for the plane between K.L. and Libya. We managed to get everybody's agreement except from Iran where the Shah--in what I viewed as a grandstand gesture, but which Kissinger might have considered quite appropriate--said if that plane entered Iranian air space, it would be shot down. So we had to work out a longer route, avoiding Iran. The plane had to be refueled once; Ceylon was chosen for that. Mrs. Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister. The Malaysian Gazali Shafi, who was a very persuasive man, was on the telephone to her. We were all sitting around listening attentively. Mrs. Bandaranaike was saying "No" in a very excited tone. She didn't want any part of the refueling. She said if the plane tried to land, she would order her troops to shoot. Gaz refused to take "No" for an answer; he oozed charm. He was full of understanding for her plight and reassured her of his understanding for her position. On the other hand, he kept pointing out that if Ceylon didn't let the plane land, some innocent people would die which he was sure no one really wanted. After an exhaustive forty-five minutes, Mrs. Bandaranaike finally gave in. The plane would be allowed to fuel, but would be surrounded by Ceylonese troops which would be instructed to shoot if anybody tried to get out. Gaz turned around and gave us a big smile. The Japanese Ambassador once more drew in his breath. By now, all the arrangements were made, except working out the modalities of the prisoners' exchange. That also proved to be excruciating. Every step had to be covered. The terrorists had to come down the steps and board a bus which would be waiting at the entrance. They would be accompanied by all the hostages. The bus would then go to the airport. The

terrorists agreed to take out all the explosives which they had dug into our walls and take them to the airport with them. There they would explode them on the tarmac before boarding their plane. They demanded that the JRA prisoners be exchanged at the airport. They also demanded that four senior officials fly to Libya with them where they would be released. At this point, we were talking to the terrorists over some hand-held sets. That enabled us to come down in lock-step; Wayne Algire would say: "I am now going to take one step backward" and the terrorist would say: "OKAY. I will now take a step". It took us three hours to clear the building--that was to come down nine flights. You can imagine how our nerves were at this stage. We had not slept for four nights, which, incidentally, was a great mistake which I never repeated again.

We finally got the terrorists and their hostages on the bus driving through streets that were filled with people who wanted to observe this action. The bus went to the tarmac. I didn't involve myself directly in the prisoners' exchange. I waited where our hostages would be released. The exchange was finally completed. They blew up their explosives--turned out that it was most, but not all. When I saw what a huge crater was made by the explosion, I was shocked; I hadn't realized the full extent of the power on the 9th floor just below us. I was glad that I had been ignorant. The terrorists let the hostages go, one by one, starting with the non-Americans. The last man out was Bob Stebbins, our consul whom we later found out from the other hostages had behaved with great courage and dignity. The plane flew off. The four official hostages, one of whom is now the present Japanese Ambassador to Washington, went with the plane to Libya. There they were released and returned to Kuala Lumpur. I must say, in conclusion, that Stebbins was badly treated by the Department. Just as he was being released, a newspaper man shouted a question at him. Stebbins answered by saying that at another time he would like to have coffee with his keepers and talk politics. That comment infuriated Henry Kissinger. Now the guy had been under tremendous pressure; he was after all the chief hostage. Everybody who had been a hostage paid high tribute to Stebbins for his leadership, steadiness, etc. But the damn State Department held his comment against him. I realized when he spoke that his remark was injudicious and I was sorry that he said it. I grabbed him, hugged him and told him not to say anything more. I rushed him to the car, but the damage was done. His comment was widely reported. When a few days later he went to Washington, he was stunned when Phil Habib, then Under Secretary for Political Affairs, bawled him out--on instructions, undoubtedly. It took me a long time to get over the bitterness of how Stebbins was treated; he was deeply wronged because his performance as a hostage had been an inspiration. It was very sad and insensitive how the Department behaved.

Later, typically, people came out to see the Embassy. We were chastised for not having taken sufficient security precautions. We turned Wayne Algire loose on the project--we called the Chancery "Fort Wayne" from then on. Less than a year later, we had another group visit us from Washington. It represented the General Accounting Office. It criticized us severely for the "Fortress" we had built. I don't want to exaggerate this aspect; we just shrugged it off and accepted the irony of two bureaucracies, one condemning us for not locking up the Chancery and the other for doing so. What I really felt very strongly about was the treatment that Bob Stebbins received. In my eyes, he was a hero.

Q: As the hostage episode was winding down, were you continuing to get gratuitous advice and instructions from Washington?

DILLON: Indeed I was, but Al LaPorta, who was another kind of hero, was simply intercepting them and was smart enough, after a while, not even to give them to me. You may think that was dangerous; it would have been, except that Al was a smart, savvy Foreign Service officer who could be trusted to make the right judgments. So he didn't bother me with the unhelpful advice and that was good because we had enough on our minds. The problem was that in the Department there were people that were reacting to Henry Kissinger's strictures that we should never negotiate with terrorists. Apparently, he was quite concerned that I would do that. In fact, I wasn't, but I must admit that I have some reservations about the policy. The Japanese Minister of Transport became so angry at what he considered to be our negative attitude that, at one point, he refused to speak to me. That went on for about 36 hours. Murata, whom I mentioned earlier and who was then one of the Japanese involved in the negotiations and now the US Ambassador in Washington, picked up the communications slack and so he became our contact. In any case, the Japanese were very upset with us, even though we did give them some assistance, such as providing communication facilities. We can do that in a crisis. I found that interesting. The Department issued a very restrictive LIMITEL world wide in order to insure that our traffic went unimpeded. We communicated to Washington on a FLASH basis, so that we had instant communications with Washington and world-wide. We also had instant telephonic communications.

The USIS people did a good job. In a situation such as we had in Kuala Lumpur, you not only need to keep the Secretary of State advised, but also your USIS staff. In a hostage crisis, the town immediately fills up with newsmen. There are hundreds of calls from news organizations and from concerned people from all over the world. It is very important for the person in charge to get that public relations operations away from him or her as soon as possible. We put it in the USIS office. That staff took every incoming inquiry, except those that we received from the Department. They dealt with all the newsmen and media representatives. They shielded me from them. They performed very effectively. Unless you go through one of these experiences, you can't fully appreciate the contribution that a professional P.R. staff can make. We didn't have any instructions on this aspect of the incident. Somewhere in the Foreign Service manual, there was the beginning of a chapter on terrorism. It included a check list which was helpful. I began to appreciate check lists because, in truth, once an incident begins, you don't have time to make one up. You also don't have time in a crisis to pick up a thick manual and read about the philosophy of terrorism or Henry Kissinger's strong views about negotiations. What the leadership needs is a list of things that should not be overlooked. As I said, we fortunately had some of that.

The biggest mistake I made was not to set a duty roster to insure that everyone, including me, got sufficient sleep. After K.L. in subsequent crises, that was one of the first things I did. I did not do that in K.L. because it always seemed that the crisis was about to end and then it would drag on for more time. I was so tired at the end of the four days that I literally couldn't see straight. I think everyone was in that same condition. We were absolutely exhausted and that was dangerous and I never repeated that mistake again.

Q: Let me just ask one more question about the terrorist episode. After it was over, and particularly when you returned to Washington, did you have the feeling that if anything would have gone wrong, it would have been viewed as your "fault"?

DILLON: I did indeed get that feeling. I should mention one other thing. When the K.L. crisis developed, a task force was established in Washington. It did good work. It was very supportive. When it sent a message, it was always an encouraging one which was always helpful. It was the people at the top that were a problem. You do get the feeling that if things go awry, it is your fault. I don't know whether that is paranoia or whether it was just Mr. Kissinger in this case; it probably is just endemic to the way our government works: if things don't go well, it is your fault; if they go right, a lot of people take credit. We did in his case get a certain amount of credit. Everybody got a Superior Honor award; I got a piece of paper saying that I had done a great job. I was very glad to get it. But during the episode, I must say that I did not feel that I was getting much support from the top of the US government. You feel that everyone else is running for cover so that if something awful happens, they can distance themselves from catastrophe. I had the impression that at the top levels in Washington, where the ambitious people work, everyone was making it quite clear that whatever happened, he or she had done the right thing and that if matters went awry he or she could not be faulted. I had that same feeling during later incidents in which I was involved.

Q: We are now in 1991. I guess a current illustration of that attitude is what recently happened to Ambassador Glaspie in Baghdad when the Secretary of State and Washington in general distanced themselves in a hurry from her actions.

DILLON: If one of the hostages had been killed or something else had gone wrong, probably the Charge' in Kuala Lumpur would have been held responsible. Of course, when the incident was over and all had been settled satisfactorily, there were plenty of people who shared the accolades. I must say that your colleagues are fine in cases such as the K.L. one. It is at the higher levels that the problems begin. That comment covers both political appointees or career people who work with them. I was well treated after the K.L. incident; I got a nice telegram signed by Henry Kissinger which I may still have in my files. I don't assume that Kissinger wrote it, but I assume he signed it. The message said all the right things and was very complimentary of the staff. That staff had not been picked because of its expertise in terrorism; it was just a regular Foreign Service staff, but it was very good under very trying circumstances. Almost all of them acted almost automatically; they didn't have to be told what to do. They just reacted and did what needed to be done. They adapted very quickly. I have named two or three of them already, but in all fairness, all had to be complimented. The communicators worked their tails off. I was on the 11th floor; they were on the 12th. We had emptied the 10th floor. The 9th floor soon became completely occupied by the terrorists. They occupied not only our half, but soon took the whole floor including the Swedish Chancery, manned by the Charge' and his secretary and probably one of their employees. Most of the hostages had come to the 9th floor for US consular business or were our employees or had been pulled off the elevators--some people had been trapped in the elevators. I don't remember why that last group was even in the building.

As I said, there was nothing special about our staff in K.L. A couple of them--Al LaPorta, for instance--were people whose subsequent careers demonstrated clearly that they were above average, but most of our staff were typical Foreign Service people. It just so happened that at the time, our two area specialists (Ambassador Underhill and Bennett, the Chief of the Political Section) were gone, Al LaPorta was the acting chief of the Political Section. The Station Chief

had left only a few days before. His replacement arrived the day before the incident began. He was a good officer--sensible, professional. He didn't conspire to take over the show, as sometimes happens. He made it clear immediately that he and his resources were at my disposal. We discussed what could be done and the station played a role. The communication staff were typical common people and turned out to be absolutely superb. They never got excited. They worked around the clock, snoozing when they could. Three floors beneath them were many pounds of explosives placed in the walls; if anything had gone wrong, all the people from the 9th floor up at least were likely to be killed. That didn't seem to bother them. Algire was a very good security officer; he was probably above average and performed superbly. He didn't get excited; he was inventive and resourceful. For me at least, the picture of Wayne Algire on his back in that cramped space with a telephone cradled next to his ear, sweat pouring off of him as if he were in a stream, fiddling with those mysterious pieces, following the instructions of the Chinese technician whom I never did see, making various attempts to get the equipment working again. He must have been there for an hour and a half or two hours. It wasn't an easy task. Then all of a sudden he announced that he thought the machine would work again. And it did! If I had had to do that, we'd probably still be there; I could never have figured it out.

That was K.L. and the highlight of my tour there. It happened in August 1975.

Q: What was the Malay reaction to the fall of Saigon which happened while you were there?

DILLON: It did particularly not upset the Malaysians. It upset us because many people in the Saigon Embassy were our friends and we saw pictures of them running for planes and helicopters. As far as Malaysians were concerned, Saigon was a long, long way away. They didn't have a feeling that the events in Vietnam would effect them. At an earlier time, there were Americans who saw Malaysia as part of the "domino chain" and threatened if Vietnam were to fall to the communists. But when it actually happened, the Malays did not feel threatened and I am not only referring to Viet Cong sympathizers. I am speaking of the broad population spectrum. Thailand was in between Vietnam and Malaysia. The Malaysians were gaining confidence as they managed to repress their own insurgency. It certainly didn't do American prestige any good and some of our people worried about that. If I had been an old Southeast Asian hand, I might have worried more. But I didn't.

The only thing that I remember of Malaysian strong reaction to foreign affairs--and I was very surprised by it--was an outpouring of emotion when Zhou En-lai died. I was always interested in China and had followed developments there as best I could. But I had never understood until that event the degree to which Zhou En-lai had become a hero among the "overseas" Chinese and others as well. I was just struck by the outpouring of emotion when Zhou passed away. He had at the end become the symbol of the "white hats" in China as opposed to Mao and the Gang of Four. But the Malaysian reaction was an eye-opener to me.

PETER B. SWIERS
Political Counselor
Kuala Lumpur (1979-1981)

Peter Swiers was born in Brooklyn, New York and graduated from NYU. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961. He served in numerous posts including Athens, Frankfurt, Moscow, Berlin, Kuala Lumpur and Copenhagen. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994.

SWIERS: Then was I was called in by Walt Silber and Jim Rosenthal who had been involved in Vietnam affairs when I was in the Paris peace talks. They saw that I was available and the Department was reestablishing the political counselor position in Kuala Lumpur which had been abolished during the Vietnam war but there was so much was activity in Malaysia that the department agreed to reestablish it. It was a rare thing when you think about it. Jim saw my name and asked whether I like to come out. You remember we had that GLOP.

Q: A program to get regional specialists into other regions.

SWIERS: I thought it was a wise thing; it was a perfect GLOP assignment for me; it should look good on my record. So I agreed to go to KL. Within a month or so before we were ready to go, Jim Rosenthal was reassigned, and Lyle Brecken who was the other of two officers who had worked for Ambassador Bob Miller was asked by Bob to be his DCM. I was practically on my way to KL., but clearly Lyle had much different ideas.

I think Lyle really wanted to have a Malaysian hand in the job. This was going to his first DCMship; he was an FSO-02 and quite nervous about it. We had known each other in RPM, he had succeeded Leon Firth as director of the office of security affairs. I mention this for the record; this was the second time where I had a job offered to me, as in Berlin, where I was not the choice.

I'd just like to back up because there is an interesting anecdote for the record about Leon Firth. It was in RPM when I met Leon for the first time. He was a Foreign Service officer when he and his wife Lynn had their second set of twins - twin daughters. Leon was offered a position on the House Intelligence Committee. I believe it was by Les Aspin rather than Al Gore who was still a congressman at the time. Leon had served in Belgrade and was an absolutely brilliant person; he had a real dilemma because for him to join the House Intelligence Committee was not go on leave without pay - the traditional route. They wanted him to sever his ties entirely to the Foreign Service so there would be no conflict of interest. Leon was in a real dilemma because here he was with four children all of a sudden. I remember him talking about it to me and I said: " I just don't know how to address it. Do you really want to go abroad again, number one? Number two this is a great opportunity." He made the decision to go to the House Intelligence Committee and everything else is history. He was brilliant. A real loss to the service, but actually to our country an even greater gain.

Q: You were in KL from when to when?

SWIERS: I was in KL from '79 to '81. I keep using the word "transition" because I think it's so important to be understood. We were beginning to realize that we had not only withdrawn from Vietnam but that we also tried to lower our profile throughout southeast Asia. The ASEAN

countries were quite nervous. I'm one of those in retrospect who felt we should not have gone into Vietnam in the first place, but I'll never fault the people who made the decisions because as we know there was a different perception of the world.

Vietnam taught us a number of things which we probably didn't see before - i.e. that communism is not monolithic, that there were differences of interest between the Chinese and the Soviets which were profound. It was only in Vietnam that we began to understand the real hatred between the Vietnamese and the Chinese. These were things on which sadly we were not well-informed, or at least nobody paid attention to those who knew them.

There are two basic concerns in southeast Asia in 1979. One was the U.S. willingness to meet its commitments - a familiar sound today. Even those in southeast Asia who may have criticized our policies on Vietnam were worried by the precipitousness with which we pulled out of Vietnam. Did that mean that the U.S. would not meet its other commitments? We know SEATO died in the process of our withdrawal. Secondly our focus was on the Soviet Union. ASEAN's focus was on China with perhaps the Thais having oddly more of a more benevolent view.

Q: What about Malaysia?

SWIERS: The Malaysians had a great concern which went back to the emergency of 1948 when there were conflicts in that country between a 55% ethnic Malay population, a 35% Chinese population, an 8% Indian population and a 2% residual European population. I would note of course that the country was 45% Moslem, all of whom were Malay. So there was an immense concern about what the Chinese role might be. I don't think we fully grasped these differences in our policy because we were focusing on the Soviets.

Q: This is still in '79.

SWIERS: Yes. We did not have as much a focus on the Chinese in terms of our presentation to these countries. This changed somewhat sometime between '79 and '80 while we were there. The Soviets, who can always pull your chestnuts out of the fire for you, rather clumsily sent the aircraft carrier "Kiev" - not a full aircraft carrier but a half aircraft carrier - into the South China Sea on its way to Vladivostok and its way made it had it go up and do a little circle into the Gulf of Thailand.

This was part of the Soviet plan, under Admiral Gorshokov, to develop a blue water navy which they could project into the Pacific. Until that time, the Pacific was largely a U.S. lake except for Soviet nuclear submarines, which were aimed against us, not perhaps against others. I think I have mentioned before that I have to give Harriman great credit for his rejection of the Soviet demand for a role in the occupation of Japan which would have given them an access to the Pacific which they did not get until nearly 30 years later.

Q: Peter, you left Malaysia when?

SWIERS: I left Malaysia in July of 1981.

PAUL P. BLACKBURN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Kuala Lumpur (1980-1984)

Paul P. Blackburn was born in Hawaii in 1937. He received his BA from Haverford College in 1960 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1962. His postings abroad include Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Udorn, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur. Mr. Blackburn was interviewed by Charles R. Beecham on November 18, 2002.

Q: Okay, tell me about the Malaysia job.

BLACKBURN: I was very happy to be assigned as PAO to Malaysia. I had been fascinated by the country when I first visited it in 1963, and then in 1970 had briefly done dissertation research there on the Malaysian media. On that latter visit I stayed with Jodie Lewinsohn in the grand PAO mansion that I later “inherited.” Not only was I pleased with the job, I was nearly ecstatic that I would be living in an abode with a clay tennis court in its front yard.

Before I left for Kuala Lumpur I called – on successive days – on USIA Director John Reinhardt and East Asia Area Director Jodie Lewinsohn. After saying they thought K.L. was an excellent first PAO assignment for me, each had quite different advice about my dealings with the Malaysian FSNs. John said I should exercise strong leadership and try to overcome my tendency to be too easy going and lenient with FSN employees. In contrast, Jodie said she feared that, because I was so awfully stubborn, I would be too demanding and pushy with the staff, so should go easy on them. I never did figure out which one had me sized up accurately – perhaps they both had!

Malaysia was an ideal place to begin my 15 years as a PAO. For starters, support from my Ambassadors – Barbara Watson, Ron Palmer, and Tom Shoesmith – and my DCMs – Lyall Brecken and Mike Connors – could not have been better, and the American and FSN staffs were highly competent. A complete turnover of American staff accompanied my arrival at the post to replace Wes Fenhagen. Tony Sariti came in as CAO, Edie Russo as IO, and Joann Quinton as EO. Craig Stromme, then the JOT, returned as CAO my last year in K.L. and much later joined me in the EAP Public Diplomacy Office. Among the many standout FSNs were cultural specialist Sharifah Zuriah Al-jeffrie, senior FSN advisor Selvendra Rajendrum, IV/exchanges specialist Dorothy David, librarian Sophia Lim, and my secretary, Helen Lee, who later became the DRS specialist and was replaced by Tina Chee.

I learned to chair a binational Fulbright commission – the Malaysian American Commission for Educational Exchange, or MACEE – and I enjoyed interacting with the excellent contacts my predecessors and the FSNs had developed at all levels of the society. In my first months on the ground, I met political leaders from all the major parties, the educational and cultural elites, and revered figures such as the country’s first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the President of the High (Supreme) Court, Tun Suffian. The latter had been an Eisenhower

Exchange Fellow and chaired the EEF selection committee.

It was exciting to work in a country with such a rich racial composition. Both the post's DRS and our USIS staff reflected the tapestry of Malays, Chinese and Indians – Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians – that is Malaysia. Although the USIS FSNs were by and large excellent and worked together well considering their disparate backgrounds, I had to handle some challenging management problems. When easing out certain long-time staffers and tightening up procedures, I tried to apply lessons learned from my inspecting days.

Americans in Malaysia at that time enjoyed a special status. American investors were setting up semi-conductor factories in large numbers, military cooperation was close, and the Malaysian Government was sending the cream of its Malay students on undergraduate and graduate scholarships to American universities. People wanted to meet Americans, and took pains to explain to us the ins and outs of Malaysian society and politics – typically from the ethnic perspective of the particular speaker. And, best of all, they did it in fluent English, a fact I appreciated after having been at sea so often in conversations in Thai and Japanese during my previous assignments.

Q: Tell me more about the educational exchanges.

BLACKBURN: Malaysian officials, like then Education Minister Musa Hitam, and our Embassy paid considerable attention to the Malay students in U.S. academic programs, especially those who had gone on to study in America. Typically they were young and impressionable. Often they had negative reactions to the permissive environments in which they suddenly found themselves, and for which they were not well prepared. Some analysts believe that Islamic radicalism in today's Malaysia got its first major impetus from disillusioned Malay students who were part of that big wave that went to the U.S. Though we recognized such dangers at the time, overall we thought that having thousands of bright young Malays go to the U.S. was an exciting and hopeful development. Our USIS Country Plan for Malaysia even included promotion of educational linkages as a major objective, nearly up there with our security and trade goals. The focus of the post on advising U.S.-bound students led us to hire Marti Thomson, who first ran the volunteer-based student advising operation at MACEE and then became the first – and most distinguished – “Regional Educational Advising Counselor” for USIA and later the State Department.

Besides promoting educational exchanges and linkages, I spearheaded the formation of the Malaysian Association of American Studies, an organization that continues to flourish to this day.

Q: Wasn't a new U.S. Embassy constructed in Kuala Lumpur about this time?

BLACKBURN: Yes, it was completed in 1983. All USIS facilities, including our off-site “Lincoln Center,” were moved into the new building. I developed a public affairs strategy aimed at both showing off the new facility – which had a terrific design that incorporated Malaysian motifs and did not give one the impression of being the fortress it really was – and encouraging in-person and off-site usage of the library holdings and reference services we had brought over

from the Lincoln Center. In carrying out the latter objective, Sophia Lim developed and implemented a brilliant outreach strategy that later was used as a model for other USIS posts throughout the world.

To bring Malaysians comfortably into the Embassy, I dreamed up an art exhibition titled “American Experiences, Malaysian Images.” It featured the work of Malaysian artists who had spent time in the United States. Each artist was invited to show one piece completed before going abroad, one while in the U.S., and one after returning to Malaysia. The catalogue we produced gave each artist his or her own spread. It was a beautiful product, all paid for by a grant from ESSO. The show was opened by a Cabinet minister and proved a great success. I was so happy with the idea that I replicated it in Thailand on my next assignment, though in that case with very mixed results.

My work on the Malaysian media led me to pay particular attention to the Malaysian press. I had many excellent contacts, some of whom I inherited from legendary Information Officer Mike Brown and some of whom I developed on my own. Helpfully, a convivial gathering – that Mike had earlier promoted – of Malaysian journalists and foreign information officers was held on Friday nights at one or another of the local watering spas.

My marriage to Winona having come to an end by that point, I married Pek, a Malaysian-Chinese academic about six months before leaving the post. Our celebratory wedding dinner was held under a big tent on the fabled tennis court at the PAO residence. Pek, who currently teaches at American University, takes Washington-based students to Malaysia for summer courses – so I feel still connected to the bilateral educational exchanges I started working on during that assignment.

DONALD MCCONVILLE
Economic Counselor
Kuala Lumpur (1981-1984)

Mr. McConville was born and raised in Minnesota and was educated at St. Mary's College in that state. After service in the US Army overseas, he joined the Foreign Service in 1962. Specializing in Economic and Trade issues, Mr. McConville served in a number of posts abroad, including Panama and Vietnam as Economic Officer and as Economic Counselor in Korea, Malaysia, Mexico and the Philippines. In Washington, Mr. McConville also dealt primarily with International Trade and Economic matters. Mr. McConville was interviewed by Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You were in Malaysia from when to when?

McCONVILLE: From '81 to '84.

Q: What was the situation, both politically and economically, when you went out there?

McCONVILLE: Politically, a new prime minister had just been elected, and he's still in position. His name is Mahathir. Earlier he had been involved with the riots in 1959 or something like that in Malaysia when there had been these race riots and so forth. He had a reputation at least as being a radical and a rabble-rouser and so forth, and he had been exiled from the major political party there in Malaysia and only recently had been restored, and having been restored to the party, he succeeded in being able to take it over and be elected the prime minister when the previous prime minister either died or was in ill health. I think he had died, or maybe was in ill health and had to step down. So there was a certain degree of apprehension about just how this would work out with this man who had at least been a militant in his younger days. He also had adopted a policy, which he called "Look East." He had professed to be very unhappy that Asians were looking too much to the west, to England and the United States, for their models and that they should look instead to Asians, and he had identified particularly the Japanese as being very successful Asians. So he had something called a "Look East" policy, and there was apprehension about that. The fact is it turned out that he did hold some of these beliefs but he was also very pragmatic. A number of the people close to him were very conscious of the importance to Malaysia of having good relations with the United States and with the UK, so there was much less to this than appearances. But it was sort of a delicate situation to handle.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

McCONVILLE: When I first got there, it was a guy named Ron Palmer. He was there for two years, and then the final year - I'm trying to remember the guy's name; it was Tom. He was an old Japanese hand. He had actually been the consul general in Hong Kong. It was his last tour and he became ambassador to Malaysia. Both of them were career officers. In any event, it was an unusual relationship. Economically Malaysia was doing very well. They're very blessed with natural resources, particularly rubber and tin, although rubber and tin were becoming more of a problem area at that time than they had been, but also with petroleum, and petroleum might have been particularly significant. It wasn't produced on the scale of Indonesia or any of the Arab countries, but it was generating a lot of resources. One of the legacies of the British colonial rule in Malaysia had been to leave in place a very capable civil administration. The civil servants and so forth were of pretty high quality. Now, they were almost all Malays under this sort of arrangement that Malaysia had this understanding between the races that the Malays would dominate the political situation as long as the Chinese were left to pursue their economic interests without too much interference. The Indians, being a much smaller minority, also had to carve out their own role. But it was, in appearance at least, a democracy, but it was a democracy in which the Malays ran the government and the elections were open and fair, but the Malay political party was pretty authoritarian in its own right and could pretty much dictate what happened within the country. The press was free up to a point, but if they overstepped their bounds at all, they could quickly be controlled. At this particular time, tin was still important in Malaysia, and Malaysia was the world's largest tin producer, but Mahathir, in his early days as prime minister, shortly before I had gotten there, he and some of the people around him had been enticed by one Mark Rich into a scheme to corner the tin market. They had done this all covertly, of course, and the attempt ultimately had failed. They hadn't succeeded in cornering enough of the market, and what really had thrown the real wrench into it was that the U.S. had significant stocks of tin in its GSA (General Services Administration) stockpile and the U.S. began making

releases of tin from that stockpile, and this had undercut this effort to corner the tin market. Mahathir never admitted that the government of Malaysia was in fact involved in this effort, but he was personally intensely angry at the U.S. for what he considered had been this effort that had scuttled his plans. So literally during the first year or so I was there, Mahathir never failed to mention, whenever he spoke to anybody, whether it be a group of little old ladies that came by or the visiting prime minister of the UK (United Kingdom) or whoever it was that had any kind of meeting, that he would denounce the USA GSA tin sales. Some of the people who were very pragmatic and also very pro-American within his inner circle saw this as being harmful to Malaysia's interest but they still had to deal with this quirky sort of personality of Mahathir. So they had been approaching us, and we had done a little ferreting on our own, we in the embassy, Ambassador Palmer and myself and some others, and they indicated to us that they would like to find a way to develop a better relationship between Malaysia and the United States but we had to find some way of finessing this tin issue and to come up with some sort of agreement on U.S. tin sales. The most important tin producers, other than Bolivia, which was sort of a wild card, were Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, so this was to be a U.S.-ASEAN agreement on tin. Also, GSA at the time that was like a black box. They would absolutely refuse to discuss their policy about releases and so forth. What the ASEAN countries -- primarily Malaysia; Indonesia and Thailand were willing to settle for almost anything that Malaysia would be -- wanted was to just get some kind of agreement with us that GSA would just consult with them, just give them an opportunity to have their say. They weren't expecting any promises or any commitments but simply just to be able to have annual consultations. Fortunately, about this time there was a new man named to head GSA in the United States, and when he came to understand this, this made eminent sense to him because he saw the importance to the U.S. of having good relations with these ASEAN countries and there was practically no cost to this. We simply had to go through the motions of having a consultation, letting them have their say. So we ultimately were able to work out an agreement, and we in the embassy were largely the instigators of this. We were dealing with some inner circle of Mahathir's that was outside of the regular foreign policy establishment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and so forth, in Malaysia, and we ruffled a few feathers there.

Q: I would imagine you would have.

McCONVILLE: But these people were truly close to Mahathir and included the Deputy Prime Minister, a guy who subsequently came...

Q: Anwar?

McCONVILLE: No, it was before Anwar. Mahathir subsequently turned on him later on and severely punished him. Anwar was a young militant at the time and was a favorite of Mahathir. In any event, that again was a pretty interesting period to be in Malaysia, and Malaysia was doing very well economically. Politically, as I say, Mahathir was a wild card, but essentially they were a fair and open government if you accepted the fact they had this unusual relationship with the races there. There was a massive affirmative action program for the Malays, but the Chinese, on the other hand, were doing very, very well in Malaysia, and while they resented a great deal this sort of favoritism of the Malays, they still felt that they were doing very, very well and didn't really want to go anywhere else.

One thing that was happening at this particular period of time, there was tremendous expansion in the number of Malaysian students going to the United States and studying at U.S. universities. Malaysia, again, because they had all funds from petroleum, were able to fund Malaysian students studying abroad, undergraduate studies as well as graduate studies, but all the people who were funded by the government were Malay. Now, the Chinese, those who were making enough money, would send people off at their own expense. Earlier in Malaysia's history, most of these people had gone off the UK or maybe to Australia or Canada or something like that, part of the Commonwealth nations, because of Malaysia's orientation, but at this point in time they were becoming more and more oriented to the United States so by this time at least half or more of these people were going to the United States. Again, this was going to have a very positive impact ultimately on U.S.-Malaysian relations because of all these people who were coming back and were basically bringing back a lot of American ideas and basically good feelings toward the United States. So that was also something that was very much in the interest of U.S.-Malaysia relations and something that we were able to help foster. On the whole it was, again, a very healthy relationship but there were traps out there you had to be careful of. I think one of our major accomplishments was bringing off this U.S.-ASEAN tin agreement during this period of time, which we did manage to pull off despite great odds.

Q: While you were dealing with ASEAN both times, were there any sort of problem states from your perspective in dealing with ASEAN?

McCONVILLE: Mahathir himself was one of them because of his particularly quirky personality. Indonesia was always difficult to deal with, but it would depend upon the issue. They all had their reasons for wanting to have a good relationship with the United States, but you had to recognize that ASEAN itself and the relationships between those countries, it was not going to become a European Economic Community, certainly not anytime soon. They were going to move at their own pace, and you simply had to accept that. It was becoming more and more in our interest to have them functioning at least as an economic cooperative arrangement in that in the international economic arena generally the ASEAN group was a very moderate, pragmatic third-country group. You could work with them very effectively in international economic organizations. They represented a third-country group and had stature within that world, but at the same time they were pragmatic, they were generally Western-oriented, they followed reasonably market-oriented economic models themselves, so it was a very positive force, and for them to be able to come up with a collective position, it generally was easier to work with them as a group rather than trying to deal with each of them individually, although you still did this on a number of issues as well. But it was a group that was getting more and more stature internationally. Again, by this time I had spent a good deal of my career in Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia, and many of these people were people that I had come to build up some pretty good relationships with, and I had an awful lot of experience in dealing with the Southeast Asians as well as Northeast Asians. I was very comfortable with that and felt I was pretty effective. Then when I finished my tour there, I went back....

FRANCIS J. TATU

**Deputy Chief, Political Section
Kuala Lumpur (1984)**

Francis J. Tatu was born in New York in 1929. He served in the US Navy from 1946-1952. Afterwards, he received his bachelor's degree from University of California in 1955. His career includes positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Washington D.C., Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia. Mr. Tatu was interviewed by Susan Klingaman in October 2000.

Q: Direct transfer to the embassy in Kuala Lumpur, and it says here as Deputy Chief of the Political Section, concurrently counsel to Brunei. That sounds very intriguing

TATU: Well, I never got a trip to Brunei. much.

Q: The embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I would think, must have been quite large.

TATU: Yes, at the time I got there, though, physically it was a disaster.

Q: What was the problem?

TATU: It was located in an old office building on the top floor with a nonfunctional elevator, or a sometimes functional elevator, just totally crummy. But a new embassy was built, and the time I left it was opened up.

Q: How large was our mission in KL?

TATU: It was not as large, by any means, as Jakarta, but I can't really cite it in terms of figures.

Q: I assume it was the traditional political, economic, admin counselor sections plus what other agencies were there?

TATU: There were a lot of refugees there, because refugee boat people were coming over.

Q: From Vietnam?

TATU: Yes.

Q: Was there a special office there for refugees?

TATU: Yes, detached from the embassy.

Q: Who actually ran that? Was that State Department or INS or a combination?

TATU: I believe it was State.

Q: There was an Office of Refugee Affairs in State at that time.

TATU: That's right.

Q: You were Deputy Chief of the Political Section. The political counselor was who?

TATU: Murray Zinoman. Ronald Palmer. He lives very close here, too. I just realized we're in a cluster.

Q: This is the Southeast Asia enclave in Washington. And the DCM was...?

TATU: Lyle Brecken. Lyle is not too far either.

Q: Lyle Brecken was political/military officer in EUR when I was there. So what was your primary responsibility.

TATU: It was fairly unstructured, the political scene, you know. When I say all this, I wonder what Murray was doing, but to look at the Chinese community particularly, what were the Chinese up to, also the narcotics thing there, human rights, the whole spectrum. I was also consul to Brunei.

Q: I wanted to ask you this. Did you use your Chinese? I know you had Chinese language training.

TATU: Not adequately. Chinese, like the other languages, is a door opener. They are flabbergasted. I'll say this again, modesty aside. I have very good accent and very good presentation, because our tutors were all Beijing language-speakers. I started to say were all from Peking. So we had that at least attempt to get us to emulate that. When you get out in Southeast Asia, the local Chinese pronunciations are horrible. They can understand you and you acquire great "face" for being so clear, and having the Beijing accent.

Q: You had the high quality...

TATU: So I used it for those purposes, but I couldn't get up and give a speech. But when I graduated from language school, I could.

Q: I would assume that many of the Chinese spoke English, didn't they, particularly in Malaysia? They certainly did in Indonesia.

TATU: But every now and then you'd come into a situation where Chinese was not only handy but necessary.

Q: Were they mainly involved in business?

TATU: Yes, in nefarious business, they were into narcotics, anywhere where you can make a buck. Back on this language thing, though, another anecdote: We had this tremendous house. It

was just breathtaking. It had been the CIA station chief's house traditionally, so, of course, there I am again - everybody thinks I'm the station chief. It's on a great promontory, and it had a hill behind it and a gardener who had worked there forever. He was a Tamil, a real little guy with huge arms; we used to call him Popeye. He would go up there on the hill with a power mower and lower it down on a rope to mow the hill, and then pull it back up. So the mower breaks down and we've promised to have somebody come to take it away and repair it. The purpose of this anecdote is to illustrate language difficulties. At about the same time, my wife is doing an article on Salangor Pewter, and the head of Salangor Pewter says, "I will send my car for you." So as Marian approached the car, a new Mercedes with a liveried chauffeur, she sees the gardener is opening up the trunk attempting to put the lawnmower in it. He thinks the Mercedes has come for the lawnmower. The driver thinks some funny deal that has been worked. The two of them couldn't communicate with one another at all. You run into that in Malaysia much more so than in Indonesia, because Prime Minister Mahathir had some confused policies. It is said that when he came into office Malaysia had the best English-speaking population in Southeast Asia, but he discouraged the use and the study of English. Now he's back on track, having perceived that English is the language of Business.

Q: Well, it sounds like the way English went down in the Philippines for reasons of nationalism, which one can understand to a certain point, but it's too bad they can't elevate their national language while maintaining English as their second international language. So you did have some dealings with the Chinese community. How about Malaysian politicians?

TATU: Yes, the various known politicians. I had a particular in with I guess you'd call him the staff aide to Mahathir and saw him very frequently. I got a lot of information and good leads from him. On the subject of contacts, I might mention that a retired Malaysian diplomat I had known in Manila, Ivor Kraal, was very helpful. Through him we got to know many middle-class Malaysians.

My prime contact, however was the late Tunku (Prince) Abdul Rahman, who you might call the equivalent of George Washington. Tunku (as is always the reference when speaking of him) was an avid reader. He was having some trouble with his eyesight, and he had read of laser treatment in the U.S. for cataracts. One of his aides contracted the embassy and asked if someone could brief the Tunku's doctor on this procedure. As so often happens when something comes up that doesn't fit in any category, it is referred to the political section. I got some material from the Department, and read up on the laser procedure, and was instructed to visit the Tunku's doctor, a Dr. Singh, and deliver to him what I had developed. To my surprise, the Tunku himself was there. Subsequently the Tunku proceeded to Seattle Washington for the operation, which was a success. But the Tunku seemed to have attributed it to me. Every time we were in the same location at the same time, such as Penang, or Kuching, he would send for me and instruct his staff to see to my needs.

Malaysia didn't look at first like a good assignment but I went there anyway. It was one of those funny assignments, you know, that look bad to promotion panels. My predecessor left prematurely, so I went over to replace him, and it was not a full assignment. because the intended incumbent was already in language training.

CHARLES A. MAST
Economic Counselor
Kuala Lumpur (1984-1987)

Charles A. Mast was born in South Dakota in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Calvin College in 1963, he received his master's degree from the University of Maryland in 1967. His career has included positions in Kastamanu, Curacao, Teheran, Tabriz, Ankara, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Dhaka, and Bombay. Mr. Mast was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in February 2001.

Q: Today is the 5th of April, 2001. Chuck, let's talk about you went to Kuala Lumpur, and when?

MAST: I think it was August of 1984.

Q: And you were there how long?

MAST: Three years, until August 1987.

Q: What was your job there?

MAST: I was economic counselor.

Q: Before you went out, what were you told about Malaysia?

MAST: Well, I had visited Malaysia a couple of times before, once while I was in Indonesia from 1981-84, but even more importantly perhaps, earlier, in 1978, I think, when I was working on a trade program for developing countries. I had a chance to get to know a little bit about the embassy. I had given a couple of seminars and called on some Malaysian Government officials at that time.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

MAST: Tom Shoesmith.

Q: Tom Shoesmith, a Far Eastern hand. He was in Japan a lot.

MAST: He had served a lot in Japan. I think he was DCM in Japan before he became Ambassador. I think he was deputy assistant secretary for East Asia. I really enjoyed working for him. He was unflappable and the most knowledgeable on economics of any political officer I served with.

Q: What was sort of the both political and economic situation in 1984 when you arrived out there.

MAST: Well, Mahathir Mohamad was the prime minister, which is not unusual. He still is and

was before that, although he was having, as often happens within the UMNO, the main united Malay party, a squabble with his number two. He forced out Musa Hitam, who was his vice president, just as he forced out Anwar Ibrahim not all that long ago.

Q: He doesn't like vice presidents, and his own particularly, I gather.

MAST: That's right. Anybody who is vice president for Mahathir has a particular problem. In order to get the job, he has to be in some ways a sycophant of Mahathir, but also has to make his own way in the party as well, because other people are going to be challenging him for vice-president. The party is quite democratic below the prime minister level, and there is great competition for vice-presidential positions.

Q: In 1984, your main focus was obviously going to be on the economy. What was the economy and how did it look at that point?

MAST: Well, when I went there in 1984, and I think looking back in retrospect, I think it's still true that for an FS-1, Malaysia was one of the best economic counselor positions in the world, and there were several reasons for that. One was that, while it was a Malay-speaking country, there were a lot of Chinese and Indians as well, so that you had that sort of diversity of population, as well as an English-Speaking country, so that documents that came out from the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance, were going to be in English. They were going to be very well done, because the people were highly educated, a real meritocracy in the upper levels of the government. Also, Malaysia had a wide range of economic resources and economic problems, and we had a wide range of interactions with them. For example, they were a relatively large oil and gas producer, Exxon and Shell were there, for example, so that gave us that side of the equation. They were large in the commodities area - rubber and palm oil, tin - so this gave us the whole commodities sweep that we had a chance to interact with. They were a major trading country, in commodities but also increasingly in manufactured goods. There was a lot of Japanese investment. Matsushita, for example, had six plants in Malaysia. And there was a lot of American investment, particularly in semiconductors and radios, peripherals, of that type, so that we got a lot of experience in trade policy and investment policy. Citibank and AIG also had large banking and insurance interests there. So it had the broad range of interest.

Q: Where was their port?

MAST: They had a couple of ports. One of the ports was at Johor Baharu in the south, another at Penang in the north. The major port was Port Kelang, which was the port really of Kuala Lumpur, although Kuala Lumpur was about 35 or 40 miles from the sea.

Q: Was Singapore a -

MAST: And Singapore, of course, was also a large port for Malaysia.

Q: I wondered whether they could bring things in essentially duty-free.

MAST: Singapore was a very efficient port and many shippers to and from Malaysia preferred to

use it. Malaysia ran a large service deficit, however, in its balance of payments, so they tried to encourage shippers to use Malaysian ports. They encouraged businessmen to set up their own insurance and banking and shipping and air services in order to shut out Singapore to a certain extent.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Malaysian bureaucracy?

MAST: I really enjoyed it. It was probably the best experience of my life in terms of interacting with foreign bureaucracies, not that the Malaysians couldn't be a little prickly and couldn't be a little tough at times, but one of the things that I enjoyed the most is that there are always several layers of Malaysian bureaucracy. Whether that was in the trade ministry, Trade and Investment, or whether it was the Central Bank or whether it was in Finance or Transportation, I had several levels I could deal with. And their own bureaucracy was open, something like ours, so that if you dealt with the deputy office director, you were pretty sure that the deputy secretary general was actually going to be briefed in person or with a memo as to what you had had to say. I really enjoyed that, and it gave me a lot of flexibility as well. Some times as counselor, rather than try to go up in the bureaucracy and work on his nickel, so to speak, I would go down, and go to a deputy director-general or somebody who was actually dealing with the problem. They were often flattered to be called by the US economic counselor. I really enjoyed working with them, particularly the Trade and Investment bureaucracy.

Q: Obviously, one lives and dies in the economic world by data. How was the data?

MAST: The data there was pretty good. Both the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance would do - one in the spring and one in the fall, fortunately - a major economic analytical survey of the country. It was historical - what had happened - but also looked ahead as to what they projected would happen, so that we always had a lot of information, a lot of their own analysis that we could use to do our own projections, as well for an economic trends report. And they were pretty good, actually, though probably a little bit overly optimistic.

Q: What were American interests at the time?

MAST: We had a number of them. As I said, Exxon had major investments there in the oil and gas sector. Motorola had as many as 10,000 employees in two or three plants. Intel, National Semiconductor, RCA, Texas Instruments all had large plants there, so it didn't take long to get 40 or 50 thousand people working in American plants. Of course, rubber was a very important concern of ours. We bought a lot of rubber. We were members of the International Rubber Organization. Timber, which I haven't mentioned before, but Malaysia had major timber interests, and we were purchasing timber and plywood, things of that kind, hardwood particularly. Also in the palm oil sector, while we bought palm oil, probably the chief US interest - and our agricultural attaché spent a lot of time on that - had to do with the competition that palm oil posed for US soybean oil exports.

Q: Are they essentially interchangeable for their use?

MAST: More or less. I think soybean oil is generally a healthier oil than palm oil, although you'll

get an argument from the Malaysians about that.

Q: During this time, you mentioned maybe there were 50,000 people working for American firms. Probably into the next decade it became rather popular in the United States to take a look at a lot of these overseas producers and looking, are they using child labor or are they paying good wages? Part of it was inspired by American concerns of losing jobs, but others were sort of in the human rights thing. Were we looking at that at the time?

MAST: Not particularly in Malaysia. I got into concerns with that in Bangladesh, as you can imagine, and also we had to a certain extent earlier in Indonesia. But there were a couple of things that happened. First of all, in the electronics area, these were pretty much high-tech jobs, and so their people are in rooms that are absolutely spotless, so it's healthy in that sense to work - although I suppose there were some acid-etching and things like that for semiconductors. People were relatively well paid. In that sector, however, we did have some problems. A lot of this took place in a Duty-Free Zone, and Malaysian law did not permit union organization in the Duty-Free Zone. Malaysia had quite well established labor unions involved in a lot of association with US unions, and Malaysian unions wanted to unionize free-trade zones. Obviously American unions wanted the free-trade zones unionized. So we did have some union - I don't know if I'd say pressure, but a considerable amount of union interest on unionization issues. It wasn't so much that they would argue that working standards and wages were substandard. And in the textile and apparel area, too, generally Malaysian plants made higher, top-of-the-line shirts and so forth. They were not making the cheap stuff, so that usually their wages and working conditions were one or two steps above Indonesia or Bangladesh, for example. So we had very little problem in that area.

Q: Why would there be an exclusion of unions in the free zone?

MAST: That's not so unusual in developing countries. It often happens because, of course, the overseas firms prefer to have a minimum of problems when they're going to invest in a developing country. It was true in Bangladesh also. It was true in Indonesia. Of course, Indonesia did not have a democratic labor union like Malaysia or even, to a certain extent, like Bangladesh did.

Q: Well, now, as you were working with it during this time, later - I'm not sure what happened in Malaysia, but certainly Thailand, Japan, South Korea, and all that really found that they had overextended their bank loans and that there was too much cronyism and all that. Was this an issue, or were we looking at this?

MAST: There were waves of this sort of thing that would come through. For example, when I got to Malaysia in 1984, the economy was booming - real estate particularly. Everybody was building large, new apartments and large, new office buildings, particularly in downtown Kuala Lumpur and other cities, and that clearly overextended. You had a boom-and-bust cycle, and by 1986, there was actually no growth; in fact, growth was slightly negative. Now a number of other things happened at the same time. Commodity prices were down around the world, so they got hit with a double or triple whammy. Malaysia as a primary commodity producer was not unaccustomed to going through these periodic upheavals. The one you're talking about with

Thailand and Indonesia did not hit Malaysia quite that hard. There was a lot of cronyism, but because of the fact that the overall economy was probably a little better run and they were a little more diversified, as I mentioned earlier, all of these - from oil and gas to commodities to manufacturing to textiles, services - they tended to be able to ride these kind of crises out probably a little easier.

Q: Where did both the technical staff - I'm talking about the engineers and all that, but also the bureaucrats who were trained in economics - where were they getting their training? Were they going to Europe? Were they going to the United States?

MAST: The people that I would deal with by and large were Malaysian-educated, University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. Some had had graduate training in London. That was not unusual. The London School of Economics or the Imperial College, or sometimes Cambridge or Oxford, And increasingly people were going to the United States; however, that tended to be the people who were in their teens and 20s in the 1980s. By the time we left in 1987, I think Malaysia was number three or number four on the US foreign student list. A lot of them also were going to Australia, New Zealand. What happened, of course, was that it primarily was Indians and Chinese that needed to be trained abroad privately because Malaysia had very strong affirmative action programs for Malays, and so they tended to have preferences to university positions and to government scholarships abroad. Some of the Chinese, if they were good enough, could get into the University of Malaya; otherwise, they really had to pay their own way abroad.

Q: How did the president -

MAST: Mahathir Mohamad.

Q: What was his role in the economic world?

MAST: He was actually the prime minister. They had a sultan, who was in effect the president, but the sultan rotated every five years, and while they had a certain amount of power, it actually was the prime minister who ran the country. He was *very* interested in economic problems, as you can imagine. We considered Malaysia an economic interest post, and I suspect he considered his position an economic interest position. I mean, domestic politics were intensely important. Obviously he had to maintain his position amongst a lot of competitors and a lot of people who wanted the job, but he was very knowledgeable on international economic affairs. However, he tended to be someone who had a powerful chip on his shoulder - sort of the British colonial type of individual - who went around the world and gave these blasts at the United States and Britain for being colonial powers and for how they were exploiting the Third World, proletariat of the world, etc. And the interesting things about Mahathir was that he could give that kind of speech one day, we would have a country team meeting the next day, and my political colleagues would be complaining about how he was lambasting the United States and creating a lot of problems with the State Department. That afternoon, I could go with a major group of American investors to call on Mahathir, and it was great. So he was able to compartmentalize between these anti-colonial speeches he gave to get politicians concerned and to deal realistically with private investors.

Q: What was the complaint that Mahathir was making about the United Kingdom?

MAST: It often had to do with commodity prices, that the Anglo-Saxons were exploiting the commodity producers of the world. This was particularly true in the tin area, but also to a certain extent in rubber and timber and palm oil. The Malaysians always wanted, obviously, to manufacture as much of these products that moved downstream as they could, and they felt that the developed countries exploited them, that they refused to permit them to be competitive in the downstream area. This was also true in manufacturing. They wanted to set up their own automobile industry, but they argued that American and Japanese companies were refusing to make the kind of investments and to transfer the kind of technology which would permit them to become competitive.

[Inaudible portion of text]

Mahathir argued the extreme point one day, and then the next day, when he met with foreign investors or had to make decisions on trade policy, for example, he could be realistic and know exactly what the interests of the country were. So he himself, in a sense, admitted that there was validity to both points of view.

Q: What about the neighborhood? What about Thailand and Singapore?

MAST: Well, Malaysia had pretty good relations with most countries. I would say in many cases they had excellent relations with Singapore, but there you had the competition with Lee Kwan Yu, who never really has accepted the fact that he wasn't president of a much larger country than Singapore. He really would have liked to have a much larger stage to play on, and of course the Malaysians were always a little bit concerned that in terms of services or transportation or banking or the stock market, the Singaporeans were getting revenue that the Malaysians should be getting.

Q: Did we ever get in between on that?

MAST: No, we pretty much managed to stay out of that. Occasionally there would be problems with American banks or American firms. I don't remember, though, any serious problems in that area, no.

Q: At this time, were the Malaysians look at Vietnam to bring them into ASEAN, or how did they feel about Vietnam?

MAST: No, I don't remember very much about that. There was quite a debate going on about how close they should come to China, the PRC, and in fact, I think it was during that time, sort of the mid to late 1980s, that Mahathir led a trade delegation to China. This was quite a major step, because during the 1950s, they had fought a major civil war, where the Communists very clearly supported and subsidized by the Chinese Government.

Q: How were racial relations at this time?

MAST: Well, they ebbed and flowed. In 1969 there were major racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, and

Mahathir himself was determined that this would not happen again. So his philosophy was that the Malays have to get an increasingly larger share of the economic pie, but that's only really the second point. The first point is the pie has to get a lot larger very quickly, so that the Chinese particularly, but also the Indians, could also continue to have their share of the pie grow even though overall more of the percentage of the pie will go to the Malays, who were, after all, 45 to 50 percent of the population.

Q: Were there any trade problems that came up? This was mainly during the Reagan Administration, and every once in a while Congress will come up with some law or something that screws everything up for people out in the field.

MAST: Well, there was a rather esoteric one that came up, which of course maybe 10 people in Washington even knew about, and it became a political problem. This had to do with tin. For decades, tin had been part of the national security stockpile, and we would buy x thousand (whatever it was) tons of tin per year. Well, obviously this provided a nice little floor below which the world price of tin could not fall, and regardless of what the demand was, you were always going to have that demand, and other world demand would fluctuate based on that. And we decided somewhere - I don't remember exactly, but somewhere between 1984 and 1987 - that this was ridiculous. We had thousands of tons of tin, more than we were ever going to need for national security concerns, so we would stop buying tin. Well, that really was a problem, because the price of tin plummeted. Basically, other things going on in the world were affecting tin prices as well, as other commodities were being used as substitutes for tin. Tin was no longer needed in certain areas, so the price of tin plummeted, and it was a real problem for the miners in a couple of key constituencies in Malaysia. That became a serious political irritant. There wasn't anything we could do about it, really, just try to manage it.

We also had a problem at the time with palm oil. There were some scientists and pseudo-scientists in the United States that got engaged (probably funded to a certain extent by the soybean industry), in a major campaign placing, large ads in US newspapers, arguing that palm oil was detrimental to one's health. That was also about the time that McDonald's had started buying a lot of palm oil - because it was cheaper - to use for French fries. So that got to be a political problem as well, because the Malaysians insisted it was a "conspiracy by the American Soybean Association," which "used the US Government and the press" to try to stop the exportation of palm oil and drove the price down.

Q: How did that play out?

MAST: It sort of, like many things, gradually dithers away. We had to manage it for a while, and their exports continued to flow. There's a growing market for fat in the world, and the Malaysians were very competitive, so their exports continued to grow.

Q: ASEAN - how did we see ASEAN at this time?

MAST: Well, we were always quite interested in maintaining a relationship with ASEAN, encouraging ASEAN. ASEAN was primarily a political association, although they were so strongly committed to non-interference in each other's internal affairs that many times ASEAN

became little more than a discussion club. And one of the things that did happen - and I attended several ASEAN meetings - was that because of that, the ASEANs would gang up on us on economic interests, so that we always had discussions on commodities, or we always had discussions on US protectionism. They always wanted discussions on the new international economic order, which was the big thing at that time, a UN program. On UNCTAD, they would argue with us that we were not supporting UNCTAD. These kind of trade and multilateral issues became a lowest common denominator for them, and so our poor Secretary of State, who really wanted to discuss important, burning political issues of the day - China, and how ASEAN saw that and so forth - would be scolded with this laundry list. It was sort of as if every secretary had to say, "Oh, dear, in order to get the good political and security stuff done, I'm going to have to sit there and listen to these guys harangue me for an hour or two about this other stuff."

Q: Did you get involved in ASEAN meetings where the Secretary of State would come out?

MAST: Yes, sometimes, although usually there would be a more senior economic DAS, or there would be couple of office directors along, and I would sometimes be working with them in the corridor. ASEAN meetings on economic issues were surprisingly open, however, so I sat through most of these. I sometimes thought the ASEAN Foreign Ministers wanted to be sure their staffs saw them making their esoteric economic points.

End of reader