

SEYCHELLES

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Gregory L. Mattson | 1973-1978 | Consul, Victoria |
| Anthony D. Marshall | 1974-1977 | Ambassador, Kenya |
| Wilbert LeMelle | 1976-1980 | Ambassador, Seychelles |
| Tibor Peter Nagy, Jr. | 1981-1983 | Deputy Chief of Mission, Victoria |
| David J. Fischer | 1982-1985 | Ambassador, Seychelles |
| Richard w. Carlson | 1991-1992 | Ambassador, Seychelles |

GREGORY L. MATTSON

Consul

Victoria (1976-1978)

Mr. Mattson was born in about 1940 and graduated from Georgetown University. He served in numerous posts including Lisbon, Nairobi, Seychelles, Athens and Copenhagen. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2000.

MATTSON: After Nairobi I went to Seychelles. Just in the way of a little bit of background. The Swahili-designated officer in Nairobi had responsibility to report on and generally to cover the British crown colony of Seychelles. I had some interesting predecessors in my Nairobi position who did that job. Ray Seitz, for example, had that position in the late 1960s. He was later to become ambassador in London and EUR (European bureau) assistant secretary. Bob Blackwill, who was another rather notable Foreign Service officer in his day, was a predecessor of mine, actually only once removed. Anyway, each of us had the responsibility to periodically visit the Seychelles, where we had a very important satellite tracking station manned by 120 Americans. Although it was a British crown colony, we had our specific interests with respect to the tracking station and, of course, Seychelles was gradually moving toward an independent status. I think I made about three trips to Seychelles in the two years of my Nairobi tour. I got to know the British governor and the leaders of the political parties and so forth. Our relationship with the Seychelles was an intriguing one because we established this satellite tracking station in the early 1960s, more than a decade before the international airport was opened in 1971. Throughout the '60s, we had a situation which I always thought was reminiscent of Tahiti during the period of Fletcher Christian during the Mutiny on the Bounty period. You had a small island country, 60,000 people, which was in a time warp. It was visited by a tramp steamer once a month, and the only other contact with the outside world was a U.S. amphibian aircraft which would go from

Mombasa on a weekly basis. This seaplane, landing in the harbor in Victoria in the Seychelles with a maximum of eight or 10 passengers and some mail, was the extent of Seychelles' physical contact with the outside world. Cable and Wireless would transmit messages, but it was a true backwater. In contrast to Kenya, for example, where the British poured lots of treasure into building an infrastructure, almost nothing was put into the Seychelles. Seychelles was a convenient place for exiles like Cypriot Archbishop Makarios, for example, but not good for much else. But we had our interests there and we were covering it.

Q: The tracking station was established as part of the space program in the early 1960s.

MATTSON: Correct, and mainly because it was nearly on the equator and exactly half a world away from Sunnyvale, California, which was the headquarters of the military satellite tracking program. So in terms of satellite coverage and downloading material from satellites and then sending it on to the headquarters in Sunnyvale, it was a very important installation. We entered into a relationship with the British to establish this tracking station at just the same time that we were establishing our presence at Diego Garcia in the British Indian Ocean Territories [BIOT]. We had five U.S. Air Force officers at the tracking station and about 115 or 120 civilian American technicians and support personnel contracted by companies like Boeing and Ford Aerospace.

Q: At that time, at the time you were in Nairobi, we had no Foreign Service post, no consular agent, no consular resident, so to the extent anybody from the State Department, from the Foreign Service, took an interest, covered the Seychelles, it was you from Nairobi. The ambassador and DCM didn't pay visits, or did they also?

MATTSON: During the period that I was there, I don't think either of them paid a visit to the Seychelles though in the past I gather they sometimes visited for a day or two.

Q: And the embassy in London didn't either, didn't take an interest?

MATTSON: Correct. In any event, the political dynamic on the island was very unusual. James Mancham was the head of a party called the Seychelles Democratic Party or SDP. He was a British-trained lawyer, one-eighth Chinese, who was the chief minister having won the election which was contested by the other party which I'll get to in just a moment. He actually campaigned in the last election before independence on the basis of "British forever." He was not independence minded at all. He rather liked his position as chief minister with very limited responsibilities and a lot of perks. His rival, who is the current president of the Seychelles after the coup d'etat of 1977, is France Albert Rene. He was the head of the Seychelles Peoples' United Party, or SPUP. It was a socialist party, aligned with other socialist parties in the Indian Ocean area, in Reunion, in Mauritius, in Madagascar, and in Tanzania. They were very much in the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace frame of mind and had relations with the independence movements in Africa such as the ANC (African National Congress), SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization), and the Portuguese equivalents. Rene wanted independence; Mancham wanted the situation to continue as before. The British were inclined to divest themselves of the Seychelles, and so brought the two leaders together in London to hammer out arrangements for independence. Mancham, having narrowly won the previous election, was to be

the president, and France Albert Rene was to be the prime minister in a coalition government. There were various negotiations as to who would perform which functions and have which responsibilities. This was early in 1976, and Seychelles' independence was fixed for, I believe, the 28th of June of that year. I was then in Nairobi completing my assignment. The Department decided to open an embassy in Seychelles. Congress said, "No, you must first open a consulate," while the British were still present and then that entity would be transformed into an embassy with accreditation from Nairobi. The position was designated at the FSO-1 level, which was two grades higher than my own, and our ambassador, Anthony Marshall, went back to Washington and interviewed a number of officers who were at grade or close to grade and didn't particularly care for any of them. He had liked the work that I had been doing in the Seychelles, came back and, much to my surprise, said, "Would you be willing to go out there? Would you like to go out there as chargé, DCM/chargé, and open this post?" Well, it caused me a certain amount of pause, because it's one thing to go to the Seychelles for a few days or a week, but it's quite another thing to move a family of five into a place which is so isolated, with problematical schooling and so forth. So I said, "I want to go out for one more visit to take a look and see if it's workable as a family enterprise." I thought it was less than ideal, but decided to press ahead because it was such a wonderful career opportunity. So we went out in late May of 1976, opened the so-called American consulate, literally in a broken down house trailer on the grounds of the tracking station. We put up a shield that said "American Consulate," sent a cable, using of course the communication facilities of the tracking station, announcing to the world that we were up and running. Of course, we couldn't perform any consular functions or really do anything, but we were present, as Congress had dictated. Independence week, the week of the 28th of June, was an absolutely fascinating period. The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester came to give the country its independence on behalf of the Queen. You had dignitaries from all over the world. The British spent the then extraordinary sum of three million dollars on various independence-related activities, and it was a one week-long party leading up to the establishment of independence, in the stadium where Mr. Mancham became president and Rene became prime minister. They were very affectionate with one another, talking about unity and moving forward and so forth.

Q: Who was the United States representative at this event?

MATTSON: We had a cabinet secretary, and I just don't remember offhand who it was. I was scurrying around just trying to handle some of the logistic matters. Of course, Ambassador Marshall had come out for that occasion. One of the really unique aspects of this particular assignment was that I was there for 27 months as chargé, and the total number of days when we were visited by the ambassador in Nairobi, the total number of days spent by either Tony Marshall or Wilbur J. LeMelle, his successor, were under ten in the entire 27 months. So I had a tremendous sense of personal responsibility, a kind of empowerment, to really be the U.S. representative on an ongoing basis.

Q: What sort of staff did you have, or did you do this pretty much by yourself?

MATTSON: We were only three people: Willard Wynne, who was an East Asia bureau telephone tech who wanted to broaden his responsibilities. He was put in charge of administrative and consular affairs once we got up and running. Then there was a secretary, Joan Pavlik, who was another hearty soul who came out to basically do the secretarial work and be the

communicator. Our communications were all transmitted through the tracking station. We prepared telegrams on an antiquated system, what they call poking tape, which is actually typing the coded message into a perforated tape which is then transported to the tracking station, put on their machinery, and sent out to the world, all in all a very laborious process. So there were just the three of us. I was the only officer, and the other two were staff personnel.

Q: You were still in this trailer?

MATTSON: We worked in the trailer for quite a lengthy period. At first, all of us were living in hotels. We had to find, of course, a suitable place for the embassy and housing for the staff. I was getting my kids into Seychelles International School, which is a bit of an exaggeration, as it only had about 60 students in a large island house where the various classrooms were separated by shower curtains one from the other. The teachers, who were superb, were all the wives of British assistance workers. The atmosphere at the school was terrific and our three sons had a marvelous educational experience.

Q: Were there some other American students from the tracking station?

MATTSON: No, because the staff at the tracking station was comprised almost exclusively of bachelors, that is to say bachelors in name only. They almost all had live-in Seychelloise girlfriends, but there were no children. If tracking station personnel were married, their kids tended to go to local schools, but, again, very few of them had children. So, our three kids were the only American children there, and the others were mainly the children of British businessmen, assistance workers, or missionaries. There was, for instance, an evangelical broadcasting operation broadcasting to South Asia from the Seychelles from which there were six or eight kids.

Q: Did you find a location either to live more permanently other than a hotel or to move out of the trailer for the embassy?

MATTSON: Both. We rented a house on a hillside close to the tracking station. The main island in Seychelles, which is called Mahé, is only four miles wide by 17 miles long but is probably 3,000 feet high, so you have tremendous heights for a very small area. We found a house which was close to the top of the mountain overlooking Victoria harbor. It was a rather nondescript sort of plantation house, linoleum floors, of course completely unfurnished. Its attraction was that it was cooler there because it was much higher up. As far as an embassy location, there was a building under construction in downtown Victoria, a two-story building which made it the tallest building in town, and we took the top floor of that building - it's called Victoria House - and set up our offices there. So we were all in permanent housing and in our office building about four or five months after the beginning of the tour. That office remained the embassy until the embassy was closed about 1997 or 1998. But, the residence of the chief of mission was changed to a much more desirable location and to a wonderful home, by far the best in the country. It was a hardship for an extended period because we had no furniture. We had rental cars, and were doing everything with a checkbook. It really took us about six or eight months to be fully functioning, although we never had our own communications.

Q: Did you go directly there from Nairobi?

MATTSON: A direct transfer, arriving just at the end of my tour in '76 and staying until the late summer of '78.

Q: I think you mentioned that there was a coup in 1977.

MATTSON: That's true, yes.

Q: And that was while you were there?

MATTSON: Yes. Let me discuss a little bit of that very first year. I knew President Mancham and Prime Minister Rene very well from my visits from Nairobi, and I had made a very concerted effort to maintain good relations with both of them, especially because they were coming from different political streams. The breakdown of responsibilities between them was that Mancham was in charge of foreign affairs and promoting Seychelles as a desirable island location for investment and tourism; and Rene, in a way the more serious-minded of the two, would be involved in economic development and education. So one was sort of domestic policy oriented and the other one was foreign relations oriented. I made it a point of calling on Rene in his office at least once a month; we always had productive discussions. I also had frequent contact with President Mancham, who was of course in State House just up the hill from the embassy. I would actually be invited for a *tête-à-tête* lunch with him about once every two or three weeks during which we would discuss all manner of developments in the Seychelles; he frequently wanted impressions from me as to how I thought things were going in this early period. Only five countries established a diplomatic presence in the Seychelles, the five permanent members of the Security Council. I was a then mid-30s *chargé* with an accredited ambassador in Nairobi. The four others were senior career ambassadors from China, the Soviet Union, Britain and France. All of them were in their mid-50s if not into their 60s. All of them had much larger embassies than we had. The Soviet embassy in Seychelles was at least 30 people. The Chinese embassy was of a similar size. The British had maybe 15 or 20 UK-based personnel, and the French a similar group.

Q: All resident in Victoria?

MATTSON: All resident in Victoria. So we became, as the very able and amusing British High Commissioner John Pugh used to say, the "village diplomatic corps." He used to euphemistically refer to us as that. And, of course, our status gave us tremendous access to everything. For anything that was going on in the Seychelles, we were the natural five people to be invited, and during that first year when James Mancham was trying to promote the Seychelles, he hosted many very interesting visitors. A frequent visitor was Adnan Khashoggi, at that time at the height of his power as Saudi businessman, middleman, facilitator. He would winter his enormous yacht, *Kalidia*, in Seychelles, would fly in aboard one of his 727s every couple of weeks. He was then heavily engaged in agriculture in Sudan and Kenya and had other enterprises in East Africa. We would have Saudi princes visit regularly. I remember one time a Saudi prince and his entourage met with Mancham. We went to a sumptuous dinner subsequently with all of these visitors and Mancham began referring to Seychelles as the Acapulco of the Indian Ocean. Peter

Sellers, the actor, and George Harrison, the Beatle, were involved in a local hotel project. An “Emmanuel” movie was filmed there; Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue was shot there. It became a jet-set kind of spot, very much promoted as such by Mr. Mancham. During the same period there was very little progress made in terms of development. Rene, of course, was tapping into the resentment generated in a subterranean way that we didn’t fully appreciate at the time. But overtly it seemed that their relationships were good. We had a very productive relationship with the government of Seychelles under Mr. Mancham. We had frequent visits from COMMIDEASTFOR (Commander, Middle East Force), Admiral Crowe, which was essentially our destroyer squadron in the Indian Ocean. Seychelles was ideally located as a hub for P-3 patrol aircraft based in Diego Garcia roughly 1,000 miles due east of Seychelles. Seychelles was another 1,000 miles to Mombasa, more or less 1,000 miles to Masirah and Bander Abbas in the Gulf area. So we had naval visits coming all the time, we had P-3 aircraft transiting and overnighing in the Seychelles all the time, and we had our tracking station. A lot of interests were at stake and I felt a keen sense of personal responsibility for the success of our Indian Ocean policy.

Q: We may have lost a little bit of the last comments about the use of the Seychelles for the patrol aircraft and also the ship visits. Why don’t you go on talking about that.

MATTSON: Okay. Just to recap, of critical importance was the satellite tracking station, which was established during the period of British rule. We also had frequent ship visits. It was our goal for these to be continued. I believe during the time that I was in Seychelles, there were about 30 or 35 U.S. naval vessels that visited. In addition, maritime patrol aircraft were using the Seychelles as a refueling and rest stop between Diego Garcia and Mombasa and between Diego Garcia and the Gulf region. So this was a very important hub of U.S. naval activity in the Indian Ocean. At that time, you have to recall that there was a true Indian Ocean naval rivalry going on with the Soviets, who had a very large naval squadron in the Indian Ocean. The British and the French had a large naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and there were also some regional players with blue-water navies who were aspiring to play a role in the Indian Ocean, notably the Shah’s Iran and India. So it was really, by virtue of its location, an important embassy country despite Seychelles’ small size and lack of any economic significance. Within three weeks, for example, of my arrival in Seychelles, we were called upon to assist the USS Ranger, one of our large attack aircraft carriers, in receiving mail, spare parts and other high priority items when it deployed into the western Indian Ocean to counter a threat that Idi Amin had made against a group of American missionaries. So the airport, the seaport, and the tracking station were all very important to the U.S. Of course, the Soviets realized that, and their objective there was to deny us access to the extent that they could and, if possible, obtain use of these assets for themselves.

Q: Let me just ask sort of an organizational, bureaucratic, jurisdictional question. I assume that the Air Force personnel at the tracking station came under your responsibility and authority once the embassy was established and you were chargé. Was there any U.S. Navy presence on any kind of permanent basis within the embassy?

MATTSON: There was no naval presence, and you’re right, the Air Force people were under our jurisdiction. In fact, after the coup, the then commander of the tracking station, a major, just was

not capable of adjusting to the new situation and had to leave, which was very difficult for him and very difficult for me.

Q: Anything more about this first year?

MATTSON: Well, it was a period in which we had, again, a very close relationship. Mancham, who was decidedly pro-West, was having a wonderful time in his first year as president, doing a lot of globe trotting and welcoming dignitaries and personalities and what have you. The embassy was sort of consolidating its presence and ensuring that the access and other advantages the Seychelles had to offer were maximized. Once again, to go back a little, I was only on my third Foreign Service tour. I couldn't believe my good fortune in having been given this degree of responsibility. I was reporting directly to Washington, not going through Nairobi, and quickly came to understand that, even though Seychelles in terms of population and size is one of the smallest countries in the Africa bureau, it was considered by the leadership of the Africa bureau to be one of the most important because of its concrete U.S. interests, which were hard to quantify in many African countries but easy to define in the Seychelles. So I was very conscious of the fact that my reporting and policy recommendations were being read routinely by the assistant secretary, and Seychelles became an important item in AF (Africa) bureau considerations.

Q: Seychelles had quickly become a member of the United Nations.

MATTSON: Immediately on independence.

Q: Did the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs or other people from the bureau try to come early on, or was it so difficult to get to even with this international airport that you were again pretty much on your own?

MATTSON: Pretty much on my own with the ambassador's very infrequent visits. I don't think in that first year we had anyone from the U.S. government of a senior rank come to the Seychelles.

Q: And your successor in Nairobi, as Swahili language officer, no longer had any responsibilities for the Seychelles?

MATTSON: Exactly.

Q: Well, maybe at this point we should talk about what happened in 1977.

MATTSON: In early June 1977 unbeknownst to anyone - coups d'état tend to be secretive affairs - France Albert Rene and his co-religionists within SPUP were organizing a coup d'état. Now, Seychelles was without an army. Seychelles had just formed a 120-man police force which was armed and being trained by a sergeant major from the Grenadier Guards! I remember his name, Sergeant Major Walker, because his name was frequently uttered on the radio the day of the coup. This was a ceremonial unit which would appear at the airport as a guard of honor when some dignitary came or when the president left the country and that sort of thing. The other

police were not armed. This unit of police had all of their weapons in an armory, and the coup, was euphemistically called the "Coup of 60 Rifles." This was, by the way, a massive exaggeration, because it was carried out by a few score people with at most 20 weapons, who took over this armory. The night before the coup - the coup occurred about 3:00 AM on a Sunday morning - I was attending with my wife an Air India party at one of the leading hotels where all of the coup makers were present. Mr. Mancham, the president, had gone off to a heads-of-state meeting of the Commonwealth in London a few days earlier. I remember now in retrospect that they did seem a bit nervous that night. But at 10 o'clock the reception was over, we all went home, and then at about four o'clock in the morning I was awakened when a car came racing up my driveway full of now deposed government ministers from Mr. Mancham's party, shouting up at my window, "Mr. Mattson, we have to speak with you." My wife suggested I not go down, but eventually when I saw who was there, I went down and was informed by these ministers that there was fighting in the capital, in the town of Victoria down below, that Rene "was taking over the government," and they asked me what I was prepared to do about it. I, of course, demurred, and I told them I was going to turn the radio on, because it had been my "experience," which was nil, that whenever there is a coup, the radio, which was supposed to be dark, usually had something on it worth listening to. So I managed, through various comments, to get them off my front lawn and went in and turned on the radio and, sure enough, there was revolutionary rock music at an hour when there shouldn't have been anything at all on air. Within a few hours, the government had fallen, the coup makers had killed three people. They were manning roadblocks all over the island, imposed a curfew, and the country went quiet. From the morning when I first heard about this coup and for the next eight days I don't think I slept more than an hour or two a night. We had a ship visit due the next day, we had P-3s in the air, and we had sensitive relationships with the previous government which had to be handled with some care. On top of all of that, at eight o'clock in the morning, I received a telegram from Nairobi informing me of a Reuter's article that was in the newspaper, the Daily Nation. This piece I subsequently learned was carried all over the world, front page of the London Times, front page of the New York Times, quoting me as having told Mancham that Mr. Rene was going to overthrow him with "Soviet help." Now, I'll give you a little bit of background on that quickly. I mentioned before that I used to meet with Mancham quite often at his behest for lunch, and we had very interesting conversations. He always harbored some suspicions about Mr. Rene's intentions, which he would occasionally voice. It was normal island gossip, nothing more than that. Well, he was informed of his overthrow actually indirectly by me because the coup makers, of course had taken Cable and Wireless off the air and the only person who could communicate with the outside world was myself through the tracking station. So at five o'clock in the morning I sent the first cable that reported on this coup, and the British High Commissioner, who didn't know anything about it, said, "Oh, by the way, would you mind copying this cable to FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) in London, because they have to know and I can't tell them, and also they're handling Mancham who's in London for this summit." So, Mancham organized a five- or six-o'clock-in-the-morning news conference in which he said that Rene had overthrown him with Soviet help. He was pressed to find a source for that assertion, was reluctant initially but finally said, "It's because Greg Mattson, the American chargé, told me he was going to do it," which of course was a completely false statement. So in addition to reporting on the coup, canceling the ship visit, handling the P-3 visits, dealing with another delicate matter, which I will not go into here, I had the real prospect of either facing recall by my own government or expulsion by the new government. Interestingly,

Mancham, in exile, later sent his brother from London with guidance to see me. The brother came to my office and said, "Greg, I had to come to the embassy. Jimmy said that the first thing that you have to do is go to the American embassy and say, 'Jimmy's sorry.'" I subsequently saw Mancham in London. He was living in a small but lovely place in Putney, one of the suburbs of London. He's now back in the Seychelles, by the way, cohabitating with Mr. Rene. But that was a very tense period for me professionally because I had all of these things to juggle and thought that my assignment, if not my career, was going to be terminated by these developments. So I basically did the best job I could reporting on the coup, protecting our interests, and making policy recommendations. It took us actually eight days to recognize the Rene government. This option was presented to President Carter several times over eight days before we actually established relations with the new government. During that period I traveled around. In fact, one incident nearly brought about my demise. The first morning at 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning, with a total curfew in effect, I wanted to get out and get an appreciation for what the situation on the ground was like. I telephoned the central police station in downtown Victoria where now President Rene was installed running the coup and tried to get through to him several times unsuccessfully, but finally reached him and said that I wanted to travel. I'd drive my own car, fly the American flag, and check up on our tourists who were in various hotels. He said, "Give me an hour or two to send the word out to the roadblocks, and that will be fine." So I waited the full two hours thinking things might be a little slow, but then when I proceeded into town, two coup makers with Sterling machine guns jumped out from behind a bush and leveled these guns at me. They were shoeless and shirtless with cut-off jeans and were obviously drunk. They hadn't gotten the word that I was supposed to be allowed to pass. It took about 10 or 15 seconds for an unarmed Seychelles policeman to explain to them that I really wasn't going to be a major threat, but that was a very frightening personal experience. Those eight days were incredibly busy for me. My reporting, I later found out, became an AF primer for coup reporting. There were so many coups taking place in Africa at the time, but they thought that this one, in terms of the reporting on what was important and what the Department needed to know and recommendations, was pretty well done. I know I worked as hard as I could. Eight days later we reestablished relations. I went in to see now President Rene, conveying the various messages that Washington was telling me to deliver, and then at the end said, "And there's one more matter that I would like to raise with you," referring to my own being misquoted by Mancham. He cut me off and said, "Greg, I know you for who you are. Please don't even bring it up." So Washington didn't recall me, Seychelles didn't expel me, and, much relieved, I was set for the second year of my assignment.

Q: I think that's probably a good point to stop this session, but just before we do that let me ask you about the Soviet role in the coup, the point that you were quoted on. What do you think the Soviet role, if any, was in retrospect?

MATTSON: There's never been any evidence that surfaced to my knowledge that they were involved, but they certainly benefited from it. Rene, who had been a mild socialist, became a very hard-left socialist for at least 10 or 15 years afterwards, essentially until the demise of the Soviet Union. He aligned Seychelles as one of the most Soviet-leaning countries in the non-Bloc world. Every vote at the UN was along Soviet lines. The Indian Ocean Zone of Peace was promoted. U.S. ship visits were curtailed by the 1980s. The only thing that remained intact was the tracking station, for which we then had to pay many millions of dollars. There's no doubt that

the Soviets after the coup gave tremendous financial backing to Rene and to the Seychelles. In fact, Rene's political preferences, I think, would have been much closer to the Soviets than to, let's say, Swedish socialists. With the downfall of the Soviet Union, all of a sudden Seychelles again became a democratic country and allowed a free election. Rene is there still but now as a moderate to left-leaning socialist, which is what he said he was during the period when he was prime minister and during his first year or two in office as president.

Q: Okay, let's stop for now, and we'll pick up again next time.

This is the second session of a Foreign Affairs Oral History interview with Gregory L. Mattson. It's the 30th of January 2001. My name is Raymond Ewing. This is being conducted at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Greg, last time, which was several months ago so my memory's a little bit hazy perhaps, we were talking about your assignment to open the post in the Seychelles. You served as chargé d'affaires with an ambassador resident in Nairobi, as I recall, and during the first year, right out of the box, so to speak, there was a coup d'état, the government was taken over, and, as I think we discussed last time, there were articles in the international press attributed to you about who was behind the coup and perhaps some of the ramifications of it. What sort of fallout, if any, was there from that statement later on, either locally with the government or from the State Department? Did they feel that you had misspoken or gone out on a limb?

MATTSON: Well, I felt very strongly supported by the State Department in that regard. As I believe I mentioned in our last session, the statement was made by the deposed president, James Mancham, that Mr. Rene, his prime minister, had overthrown him with "Soviet help," and he attributed that assertion to me. That appeared in the international press the next day. It was also a feature article, actually a full-page article, in Newsweek magazine. Being in the Seychelles, isolated with only a very thin thread of communications capability back to Washington, I was very concerned about the career ramifications stemming either from the now installed government of Mr. Rene or from the State Department. I was very strongly supported, as I mentioned, by the State Department. In fact, it was never mentioned, much to my relief and delight. I, of course, took an early opportunity to disassociate myself from that false statement, and that disassociation was never challenged. As far as Mr. Rene was concerned, when I did go in to see him on the establishment of diplomatic relations with his government, which was about eight days after the coup, I mentioned at the conclusion of our meeting that there was one more matter that I wanted to discuss with him. Knowing what I was about to say, he basically cut me off and said that he didn't care to go into that, that he did not believe the statements that had been in the press, and that he was looking forward to a good relationship with me and with the United States during his time in office. He was, of course, at that phase very much looking toward international acquiescence since this was, after all, a violent coup d'état against a government that was duly recognized. Even though he may have felt somewhat differently, he certainly didn't indicate other than that we were going to have a good relationship, and in fact we did have a very good professional and personal relationship throughout the remaining year-plus that I was in the Seychelles.

Q: So the coup took place in 1977 perhaps.

MATTSON: In early June of 1977.

Q: And you were there into the following year, 1978?

MATTSON: Right, into mid-August of 1978.

Q: Had the Seychelles by then become a significant tourist destination for Americans?

MATTSON: With the opening of its international airport in 1972 by Queen Elizabeth II herself as it was still a crown colony, it had grown gradually into a sort of high-end tourist destination. You had none of the backpacking crowd, because there was very limited hotel space and everything was very expensive. It became a very popular destination for European honeymooners, for example. At the time that I left, there were about 40,000 or 50,000 tourist visitors a year, which nearly equaled the island's population. Since then I understand that the number has grown to about 150,000 per year.

Q: I suppose they mostly came from Britain?

MATTSON: Well, many of them were from Britain; there was a direct British Airways flight, not direct but via Nairobi, to the Seychelles. There was an Air France flight via Djibouti, and there was an Alitalia flight. Those three countries furnished the bulk of the tourist visitors. I remember especially that a lot of Italians actually were visiting during that period.

Q: And a few Americans found their way there?

MATTSON: Very, very few: certainly on an annual basis not more than a few hundred.

Q: Why don't you talk a little bit about the place of the Seychelles in the broader context, both regionally and perhaps... This was the Cold War period. Was it of strategic significance to the West in some way?

MATTSON: I think we covered much of this the last time, but it's worthwhile to recap a little bit. The Seychelles, because of its geographical position and because of the fact that it had an international airport that was capable of handling the largest aircraft, was a hub in a series of spokes which went out from the Seychelles toward Diego Garcia, about 1,000 miles to the east; to Iran and to Oman to the north where we had landing rights for P-3 aircraft; and then about another 1,000 miles due west to the Kenyan coast. So it was very strategically located. It was also a very popular port for visiting naval vessels. We had very frequent visits from the then Middle East Force, which was comprised of the USS La Salle and three destroyers. French ships would come in regularly, and British and Soviet units as well. So in any given week we might have visits by combatants from those countries plus occasional visits from the Indian and Iranian navies, which were then getting into blue-water navy operations in the central Indian Ocean for the very first time. As a former naval officer - I had spent eight years in the Navy - this was, of

course, personally as well as professionally very interesting to go aboard these ships and to basically realize that this was almost a throwback to a 19th century sort of naval way station in the middle of nowhere.

Q: A calling station.

MATTSON: Exactly that.

Q: To what extent at this time, not long after independence, were the Seychelles involved with other East Africa countries? The Seychelles were a member of the Organization for African Unity, for example?

MATTSON: Yes, and Mr. Rene's party, the SPUP, before independence was part of that group that included the ANC and SWAPO in Namibia, all of the Portuguese guerilla insurgent organizations from Angola and Mozambique, and so forth. So they would periodically go to these meetings usually held in Africa to strategize about various issues. They became a fairly radical party with ties to all of these insurgent movements, and after Seychelles' independence those party-to-party ties were maintained. After Mr. Rene's coup they were intensified. So Rene had very strong relations with many of the insurgent organizations, freedom-and-independence-seeking organizations, in East Africa and southern Africa and was especially close to Tanzania. Interestingly, that country dispatched a battalion of soldiers to Seychelles within days of the coup to bolster Rene's regime. And that battalion of Tanzanians set up an army camp very close to the airport and were there throughout the time that I was there and for many years after that. At the same time, Rene had very unusual arrangements for his personal security. In addition to bodyguards composed of militia which had helped him in the coup, he had - I forget the number exactly - perhaps 40 or 50 North Koreans who were on the State House grounds providing personal security to him and to the regime. That always reminded me a little of James Bond movie sets with North Koreans doing their various calisthenics and so forth on the lawn of the State House.

Q: Were things pretty stable the rest of the time that you were there after the coup?

MATTSON: Not really. Rene, I think, felt never particularly secure in the early period. He realized that Mancham was plotting to return from abroad. Many of the supporters of Mancham were in Nairobi or in London and other places trying to mobilize support. He felt, I think, personally threatened and, as I mentioned, developed an apparatus for personal security which went far beyond anything the Seychelles had ever seen before. There was a rumored counter-coup which occurred six or eight months later, which resulted in curfews and mobilizations of militiamen and Tanzanians. That turned out to be a false alarm, but subsequent to my departure there was the famous counter-coup attempt in support of Mancham which was organized by Mad Mike Hoare.

Q: A South African.

MATTSON: Right, exactly. Mad Mike Hoare of Congo fame actually landed at the airport with a group of South African mercenaries who were disguised as rugby players. They had already

infiltrated the island with another 40 or 50 mercenaries, and they were coming in to basically take over the government. This was a very interesting event. It was widely reported, of course, in the international press. But as Mad Mike and his associates were claiming their luggage, some of which included golf bags, a submachine gun fell. There was a firefight at the airport with the Tanzanians, and Mad Mike and his men finally had to flee the country from the airport - they never got in to perpetrate their coup - aboard a commandeered Air India flight. They all flew off to South Africa where, of course, they were arrested and tried and actually did some jail time. But Rene throughout that whole period was very afraid of a counter-coup. He realized that he had taken power - as I mentioned the Coup of 60 Rifles, really probably a dozen weapons - and that this was a very vulnerable state which could easily be taken back. There was credible speculation that Rene either organized or countenanced the assassination of at least one Mancham supporter in London.

Q: What overall was the United States' relations with Rene's government in the time that you were there?

MATTSON: During the time that I was there the relations were excellent. We renewed our tracking station agreement. He was very receptive to all requests for ship visits. Our P-3 aircraft visits proceeded as before. There was no discernible difference. His votes in international organizations, especially the UN, were beginning to tilt to the left, and that intensified to a very great extent after I left. In fact, Rene became one of the most pliant non-Soviet Bloc states in the world in supporting Soviet interests in international organizations. He was the recipient of significant aid from both China and the Soviet Union. Strangely enough, even as he drifted further to the left and was considered internationally to be a Communist sympathizer and supporter, our tracking station, which was of course handling military satellites, remained fully functional. So there was a certain disconnect between Rene and his pro-Soviet/Chinese inclinations which developed four or five years after I left and the fact that we had a major military facility still intact and functioning. Just to put a final point on that - it doesn't have to do with my experience but just the history of the Seychelles - with the fall of the Soviet Union, all of that changed. The backing of the Soviet Union disappeared, and Rene decided to hold free elections. Mr. Mancham, in exile for 15 or 20 years, whatever it was, came back from London, contested those elections which were widely regarded as free and meeting international standards. Rene won by, I think, four or five percentage points. Mancham and Rene are actually both in the Seychelles now and seem to have found some *modus vivendi* after many, many years of rivalry and animus.

Q: At the time you were there were there many American nationals present at the tracking station operating that, or was that done mostly by machines?

MATTSON: We had roughly, as I recall, about 120 Americans. About half of them were on the technical side working for one of the contractors - I think it was Ford Aerospace - and then there was a service contract which was at that time administered by Pan American. The facility was substantial in size. It had, of course, round-the-clock operation, processing all of this data and making sure that the satellite control aspects were working satisfactorily. And they had certain recreational facilities, they had a mess hall and sports facilities, and a movie every night in an open-air theater they had set up.

Q: Did they look to the embassy for advice and input into their local dealings?

MATTSON: Yes. Of course, the Air Force station commander from the period from 1952 until we established diplomatic relations in 1976, had been, let's say, the senior American on the island with just very casual oversight from Nairobi. So the base commander had become a certain personage on the island, whoever it might have been, for his two- or three-year assignment. So there were some adjustment problems when diplomatic relations were established and the embassy became the first contact. But the station commanders were, by and large, happy to be rid of those political responsibilities, especially because they disapproved of Mr. Rene and what he had been doing and saying and were just as happy not to have to deal with him and his government.

Q: Is there anything else we ought to discuss in connection with this very interesting assignment in the Seychelles, anything else about what it is like to open a post?

MATTSON: Well, maybe just to reinforce that Seychelles was only my third assignment in the Foreign Service. I had only been in the Service for five years. I took this as a tremendous opportunity and a great responsibility. I think I worked longer hours in this idyllic island paradise than I had in any previous job or any subsequent job. I was working every day. As a reporting officer I was writing on absolutely everything, was very much encouraged by the State Department, which found an interested readership for these various cables that I was sending in. I would liken it to someone who has his own small shop which is the centerpiece of their lives. They're not part of an apparatus, they realize that, however small the operation, it is theirs and they were going to be responsible for everything - good or bad - that happens. The fact that it occurred so early in my career gave me an added incentive to do the best job that I could. My wife and I also had a very nice time. There was a very interesting expatriate community there, mostly British, and so even though there were but 60,000 souls in the entire country, we had 10 or 12 very good friends with whom we would do sports and go out to dinner and basically enjoy each other's company. So it wasn't quite as isolated as it might have appeared. Our children benefited tremendously by going to school there, even though the school day was only four hours long, from eight o'clock until noon. They had a lot of homework, they did a lot of reading, and all in all, it was a very positive experience for them and for us as a family. They were aged eight, six and five when we arrived, and that was an exciting time for them, even though, as I say, it was very isolated - their school was comprised of less than a hundred pupils.

Q: Was there a U.S. aid program? You mentioned the British development workers.

MATTSON: We had a self-help program which was very useful. It usually consisted of some thousands of dollars for small projects like road works or building a school. We also had a PL-480 food program which we administered, which was beneficial. That was pretty much it. Those small programs, though, showed me that you can have a tremendous impact with just a 5,000 dollar project here and a 10,000 dollar project there.

Q: And you probably didn't have to do much in terms of commercial work, export promotion?

MATTSON: No, very little of that, although we did set up a USIS (United States Information Service) and commercial library when I was there. It became a center for Seychelles high school students.

Q: Did you have to hire local employees, or were they already somehow in place?

MATTSON: No, we hired three local employees, who were very good. Seychellois women especially are very hard workers and were very loyal and very dedicated to their work, so we were very lucky to find three very good employees, who stayed at the embassy for many years after we left.

Q: Okay. Anything else we ought to say about this assignment?

MATTSON: Again, just to put an exclamation point on that tour, it was one of those opportunities that arise very seldom. To open an embassy gives you a special sense of ownership. I was very grateful for it. It certainly won't arise again in today's Foreign Service, but in those days, with limited communications especially giving you a lot of local autonomy, it was just a marvelous opportunity. It was very far off the beaten track but with real U.S. interests to protect and advance.

Q: And, as you said a couple of times, particularly unique only five years after entering the Foreign Service to have an assignment like that.

MATTSON: Exactly. In fact, senior officers traveling through, inspectors, for example, on their way to wherever, would occasionally come and have a meal with us and sit on our balcony overlooking the small port and vast Indian Ocean and would say, "You know, Greg, I know you've only been in the Foreign Service for five or six years, but this is the best assignment you're ever going to have." In many ways, that was true.

ANTHONY D. MARSHALL
Ambassador
Kenya (1974-1977)

Ambassador Marshall, the son of Brooke Astor, New York City socialite and philanthropist, was born in New York and educated at Brown University. After service in the Marine Corps in World War II, Mr. Marshall joined the Department of State in 1950, transferring to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) the following year. In 1958 he was assigned to Istanbul, after which he left the Agency and worked in the Private Sector. Returning to the Government in 1969, Mr. Marshall served as US Ambassador to the Malagasy Republic (1969-1971); Trinidad and Tobago (1972-1973); Kenya (1973-1977) and concurrently, the Seychelles (1976-1977). Ambassador Marshall was interviewed in 1998 by Richard L. Jackson.

Q: Yes, that we should return to legations, but it's hard when the other countries are at the level of embassies, for us to walk back to legations.

MARSHALL: You can't go back and change it. It's hard to take away something you've given, whether it's a wedding ring or a dollar bill. But I think that there is a little example here which I must say I'm not totally informed on, but I'm going to jump to the Seychelles which has nothing to do with Trinidad and Tobago except that I was appointed as non-resident ambassador to the Seychelles when I was ambassador to Kenya. The issue of legations/embassies is relevant, so I'll mention it here. And that is that, after the Seychelles had its independence day, and I had presented my credentials and gone through all the formalities of agrément and all that, to the President, James Mancham – we did all that. We could have had a resident ambassador. There were resident ambassadors there, but we chose to have a non-resident ambassador, which is half a step down. We had to have an ambassador because it was still during the Cold War. Not only were the British and French there, but the Chinese were coming, the Russians were coming, and we had an Air Force Tracking Station on the Seychelles. We not only wanted to protect that for as long as it was necessary for that to operate, but we also wanted to protect ourselves in the Cold War in the Indian Ocean.

So, time went by and what has happened? After I left Nairobi, we appointed a full-time resident ambassador to the Seychelles. More time went by. Where were we now? As I understand it, and unless something changed the game, we have no ambassador in the Seychelles, and any questions or administrative or economic information or action is held through Mauritius. We do have an agent in the Seychelles. Well, when I was in Trinidad and Tobago, we had an agent in Tobago, if you want to make these comparisons. I think if a country of 50,000 people, which is what the Seychelles was when I became ambassador, even though they are scattered over 1500 miles across, in the Indian Ocean – 86 islands – that pure geography is not as important to us now as when we wanted to see oil pass through the Suez and we wanted to have access to the Persian Gulf. I got a little side-tracked there, but having served as ambassador in both countries, I think my drawing the analogy, drawing the comparison, is valid.

A word about Seychelles: Seychelles was covered by the embassy until I was accredited as non-resident ambassador for reporting purposes. I think I'll just skip that for a moment and come back to it, when I did present my credentials.

Then the 27th of June till the first of July, I went to the Seychelles for their independence ceremonies and, getting off the plane with a lot of other diplomats who either were resident in Nairobi or came for the occasion, including the Italian ambassador – the British, German, French – but we all went off in some order that had been predetermined and walked down the steps of the plane, and a car was waiting for us there with our flag, and we were introduced to the driver and to our ADC. My idea of an ADC is a Brit, who has polished boots, maybe with spurs, a sword at his side, epaulet, everything spic and span. I was introduced to my ADC, whose name was Jeannine, who was a 16-year old, very buxom, Seychelloise girl! I said, "Get in the back seat

with me so you can tell me what we are doing here and what the program is." She got in and she said, "What should I call you, Mr. Marshall or Your Excellency?" I said, "Please just call me Mr. Marshall." That would do. She said, "Mr. Marshall, may I open the window, because I get car sick." Anyway, the whole thing, as I told Mancham, who became President the next day, at the party the night before, "Look, this whole thing is a debutante party." He appreciated that because he spent thousands of dollars on this party. I'd been to the Seychelles when Governor Allen was there, when we were still only on a reporting basis from Nairobi, and then come the time when Mancham was there. The important thing when Allen was there was to decide which way to pass the port. And I went when Mancham was there, and he had two blondes, one on each side of us, that he picked up at the cosmetics counter at Harrods. It was a little different atmosphere. We all had to sing during dinner. He had a guitar coming in. Anyway, the whole thing was quite amusing. Independence was about five minutes late because he had insisted on reading a poem in French, English, and Creole, which he had written. He had to turn and silence the French horn which was already beginning to boom up for independence.

WILBERT LEMELLE
Ambassador
Seychelles (1976-1980)

Mr. LeMelle was born in Louisiana and graduated from St. Augustine Seminary and the University of Denver. He was appointed ambassador to Kenya and Seychelles in 1976. He was interviewed by Richard Jackson in 1998.

Q: You had concurrent responsibility for the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. How did that play out? Did you get there often?

LEMELLE: Yes. That was interesting. At the beginning I wasn't sure how I would organize myself to do business in the Seychelles. I knew that I had to go out there as soon as was practical to present my credentials to President Francis Rene. It was a different time from today in the Seychelles. Seychelles was a leftist-led country. We were in the midst of the Cold War. Iran hadn't happened yet, but would soon occur. It was a different atmosphere altogether. I went out to Seychelles and found out that I had something very much in common with President Rene. We both had been students for the catholic priesthood. Rene was a Capuchin seminarian in Switzerland. The Capuchin were in Seychelles as missionaries. So, we had something immediately to talk about and it enabled us to quickly develop a good friendship. My wife and President Rene's wife also became close friends. My wife and I are from southwest Louisiana. We are Creoles whose antecedents were Africans, Native Americans and French. That is the people who live in southwest Louisiana. On the island of Seychelles, you had the very same thing. So, we immediately developed an easy relationship and were able to accomplish the goals of both governments, I think, satisfactorily. I renegotiated a 10-year lease to the Air Force tracking station without any difficulty, although the Russians and the Chinese had some objections to this extension. We were able to arrange for port calls by the MIDEASTFOR [Navy Command - Middle East Force] in Seychelles on a request basis. So, anytime we had ships coming in, they were able to call at Port Victoria. We arranged for replenishment of stores,

which was good for Seychelles businesses. We were also able to help the government of Seychelles, which was a target of toppling by the South Africans and mercenaries under Colonel Hoare and others. On three different occasions, I personally informed President Rene of an impending attempt to overthrow his government in the Seychelles. He was able to prepare and to foil those three attempts at the overthrow of the government. I felt very strongly that a coup in the Seychelles was not in the interest of the United States and a coup would only create instability in the Indian Ocean region. There was nothing that we wanted in terms of our interests in the Indian Ocean that we were not able to negotiate satisfactorily with the Rene government. None of what was occurring in the Seychelles interfered with our having access to port calls there, the tracking station, which were terribly important to the U.S. space program. The tracking station facility in Seychelles, after the closure of the U.S. base in South Africa, was the only tracking station we had in the Southern Hemisphere.

Q: You had the embassy branch office in Victoria?

LEMELLE: Yes. In Victoria, we had a full embassy. I had a deputy chief of mission and a small staff. We had a full program there. We had a Peace Corps of three, a dentist, and a couple of other people who did wonders in terms of their work there. I went out to Seychelles about once every five weeks. I would go out and spend a couple of days. This was the practice of a number of other embassies in Nairobi that had responsibilities in Seychelles. I had two excellent DCMs in Victoria. The first was there when I arrived. The second was one of the officers I appointed. He was my chief political officer whom I eventually selected for appointment as the deputy chief of mission there. He did an excellent job and has continued in the Foreign Service. During my tenure, I was very satisfied with the relations that we were able to cultivate and maintain with the Seychelles Government. We had a number of people I sent to the U.S. on exchange programs. A very interesting one was the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was also a linguist. She was trying to complete the first dictionary of the Seychellois patois. I arranged for her to take a trip to the United States with the assistance of the USIS and to go to Louisiana, my home state, to visit with the professors who were doing research on patois at LSU and at the University of Southwest Louisiana, and to also visit Haiti. Out of all of that, she was able to complete the first dictionary of the Seychellois language, which today is the dictionary of the Seychellois language. She was a wonderful person and was very much committed to linguistically structuring the Seychellois common language.

TIBOR PETER NAGY, JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission
Victoria (1981-1983)

Ambassador Nagy was born in Hungary and came to the United States as Political Refugee in 1957, settling in the Washington, D.C. area. After graduating from Texas Tech University, he entered the Foreign Service in 1978. During his career he served in Lusaka, Victoria (Seychelles), Addis Ababa, Lomé, Yaoundé and Lagos, as well as in the State Department in Washington.. From 1996 to 1999

he served as US Ambassador to Guinea-Conakry and to Ethiopia from 1999 to 2002. Ambassador Nagy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.

Q: Well, then when -- the Seychelles. The Seychelles I only think of as -- ones up here think the commandos kept trying to take over the place.

NAGY: That's when I was there. I was there for that.

Q: Well, in the first place explain what the Seychelles are.

NAGY: The Seychelles are a group of islands, 130 or some islands stretching several thousand miles in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The main island where they have the capital is called Mahé. It's about seven miles wide and 17 miles long, but it's very mountainous. So if you flattened it out it would be about as big as West Virginia. It rises very quickly from, from the seashore. They're granitic islands. There are not very many granitic islands in the world. Absolutely spectacular beaches. About 60,000 residents and about twice that many visitors. For a long time their visitors were exclusively high price and then they opened an airport. And as a matter fact, it's one of the largest runways in the world because the airport there serves as a backup for the space shuttle. We had a U.S. government tracking station in the Seychelles, keep track of Soviet satellites. Our embassy had a staff of about six. That was one of our smaller embassies, whereas the Soviet embassies had about 60. They were I think all together seven diplomatic missions on the Seychelles. I think of the Brits because it had been both a British and a French colony with somewhat of a mixed past because during the same period of time both Britain and France thought they were its colony. There was also a Soviet mission, a Chinese mission, a French mission, an Indian mission, a Libyan mission, and us.

Q: Well, 60 Soviets. What the hell were they doing?

NAGY: I think keeping track of each other. It was very -- it was pitiful. They all traveled everywhere together on buses. They would all go to the beach together. But the interesting arrangement was we had a cultural center. We had a chess club. The Soviet ambassador came to our chess club meeting that we hosted, as did the KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnostir (State Committee for State Security)) resident officer. He came to the chess club meeting. I served there as the second ranking officer, even though my title was administrative officer. There was no DCM. The ambassador was Bill Harrop in Nairobi. We had a resident chargé, Steve Dawkins. It was him, myself, another officer, the chargé's secretary and two communicators. And that was it. During my tour there it switched over from being a chargé to having a resident ambassador. Dave Fisher came out as a resident ambassador, and they kept me as the second ranking officer. So it was really neat because it was my second tour in the Foreign Service, I got to spend about 25% of my time as chargé.

Q: Oh! Well, what was the government, the politics of the Seychelles?

NAGY: It was a quote unquote, "Marxist dictatorship," that was totally entrepreneurial and capitalistic in everything except names. Ideologically Marxist, but otherwise free enterprise reigned. They were the same old pirates of history, just you know, wearing different hats. They

were Marxist for the Soviets and, and they would look at us and talk about yes, but there are eight international banks that have branches in the Seychelles. Mostly to launder money, but you know, they were still there, so.

Q: Well, were there any political movements on the island?

NAGY: No, because President René, who is still there, but now he's a capitalist and a free enterprise guy, he took over in a coup when the former president of the island left the country for a commonwealth meeting. During my time there was an attack by South African mercenaries, as well as an army mutiny. So it was very dicey and as a matter of fact I was almost shot to death by Tanzanian soldiers who thought that I was a South African mercenary during the mercenary invasion.

Q: Well, let's talk about the mercenary invasion. What was this all about?

NAGY: Well, the former president, who had been overthrown, organized a group of mercenaries under Bob Denard --

Q: Who is very famous as being Mr. Professional --

NAGY: Mercenary.

Q: -- Mercenary.

NAGY: He had a group come to the Seychelles Islands around Christmastime under the name "ancient order of froth blowers" and it was this made up organization that was coming to, quote unquote, "give toys to an orphanage."

Q: Good God.

NAGY: And in fact they all had false bottoms on their suitcases with automatic weapons there and when they arrived at the airport there was a group of -- I want to remember -- maybe 14 of them. Thirteen of them came to the green customs line and got in and one of the idiots came through the red line whereas a Seychelles customs officer started looking in his suitcase, found the false bottom, and first thought that it was an underwater spear gun, started filling in the form to allow him to import an underwater spear gun when the customs supervisor walked by, realized it was a weapon and raised the alarm, at which time the mercenaries assembled their weapons, took over the airport, and attacked the Seychelles military base next to the airport and almost succeeded in overcoming several 100 Seychelles soldiers. I think it was one Seychelles lieutenant who had the wherewithal to get into an armored vehicle and fight back, which caused the mercenaries to give up and hijack an Indian plane, which had just arrived, and fly it to South Africa. The mercenaries I think lost -- two killed. They got to South Africa and they left behind a couple of colleagues who'd been on the island to prepare the way for them. Their plan had been to, to burst into the Council of Governments, this was meet -- going to be meeting the next day and basically wipe out the Seychelles Government. They made it back to South Africa and of course the island went into full lockdown, full curfew. And it was at that point that I was

mistaken for a mercenary and held at gunpoint by the Tanzanians who stuck a machine gun to the back of my head and made me drive my car to the army base. Along with me was our State Department communicator who also looked like -- he was a tall white guy with a beard. Luckily I knew the minister of defense of the island and he saw us and started laughing and said, "Let these guys go because they're American diplomats."

Q: Good God.

NAGY: Yeah.

Q: Well, how -- there wasn't time, I take it, for any reaction from the other embassies or anything like that? I mean you were all --

NAGY: Oh, for that? No, not at all. I mean it was just one of those things that happened.

Q: What about -- you say there was another army takeover or try -- attempt?

NAGY: Yeah, that was about a year later when part of the army mutinied and tried to overthrow the government, but the rest of the army stayed loyal and you had one army base kind of bombing another army base. I'm going to have to leave, but I want to tell you an interesting story next time we speak about our neighbor, the French consul who had an unfortunate event happen the night of the mercenary attack.

Q: Today is September 27, 2010. Do you remember where we left off?

NAGY: Was it in the Seychelles?

Q: Yeah, I think we'd just sort of gotten to the Seychelles.

NAGY: Yeah, I think I said that -- you were asking me about the attempt against the government by Mike Hoar and his mercenaries and then we talked about the army mutiny about a year later.

Q: Well, let's talk about the Seychelles, per se. What were they? I mean, you know, from the American perspective, outside of a place where the beautiful people of Europe go to take their clothes off, what is there?

NAGY: Well, the thing for us that we were very interested at the time of attracting Soviet satellites from Earth. We didn't have satellites in space yet to track Soviets. And we had a tracking station in Sunnyvale, California, and if you stuck a pin -- assuming that the earth is an orange, if you stuck a pin into Sunnyvale the other end of it would come out right on the Seychelles Islands. So we had a tracking station in the Seychelles. It was run by the Air Force, but there were only a handful of Air Force officers there. They were mostly contractors who worked for Pan Am or somebody else. And that I think is the reason the Soviets had such a large embassy presence in the Seychelles, because they were keenly interested in what we were doing. And they also had a number of Soviet ships calling at the port. And also at the time our -- we had planes flying out of Diego Garcia overflying the Seychelles continuously. So the Soviets were

very interested about us, and we were there basic -- I think our mission there was to be there to support the tracking station and also to keep track of what the Soviets were doing.

Q: Well, had the Indian Ocean become sort of a place where the missile subs sort of prowled on both sides or?

NAGY: Yeah, and the big powers kind of rubbed up against each other because the Seychelles occupied an awful lot of territory given the number of islands in the territory, and waters. I think it was like 300,000 square miles of ocean. So the islands were like stationary aircraft carriers.

Q: Well, was there anything other than sort of an airfield, a civilian airfield there or?

NAGY: No, not really. There was a nice harbor and there was a huge airport, which we helped build as a backup landing site for these space shuttles.

Q: So you were there from when to when?

NAGY: I was in the Seychelles from '81 to '83 and we had -- first we had a permanent chargé, Steve Dawkins, because the ambassador, Bill Harrop, was resident in Kenya. When that chargé left a resident ambassador, Dave Fisher, was assigned. And after Dave I think we had several more ambassadors before the post was closed.

Q: Well, what sort of an embassy did you have there?

NAGY: We just have -- we just had a very small embassy. We had the head of mission, whether it was the chargé or the ambassador. I was the second ranking officer. We had an ambassador's secretary. We had two communicators. And then we had another officer. It was a very small embassy.

Q: Well, were you rubbing noses with the Soviets at that time?

NAGY: Yes, very much so. I think last time I mentioned that we had, out of our cultural center we had a chess club, a Seychelles Chess Club that played every Monday night. And the Russian - the Soviet ambassador showed up regularly with the KGB station chief.

Q: I mean were you approached or others approached about defecting or anything like that or?

NAGY: No, but we just -- we kept track of each other. They were worried about us and we were concerned about them, especially them trying to get into the tracking station.

Q: Other -- you say the Chinese --

NAGY: I think we had the Soviets, we had the Chinese, we had the British, we had the French, we had the Indians and the Libyans and --

Q: How about the Libyans? Were they mucking around or?

NAGY: No. No, not at all. They were -- I think if that was during the period of time when Colonel Qadhafi was trying to have Libyan "people's bureaus" strewn in every single country in Africa because, you know, he was making an effort to be an African leader.

Q: Yeah.

NAGY: -- And the Seychelles was a member of the Africa Union, or at that time the Organization of African States. They were kind of just there.

Q: Yeah. Well, what'd you all do?

NAGY: Well, we had a good time. I, in addition to serving as second ranking officer, I was the administrative officer, I was the political officer, I was the economic officer, and I was the public affairs officer, and the security officer. So we were -- I did most of the reporting and representation and I did the public diplomacy. It was a lot of fun. I maintain that our little embassy was more productive than my big embassy in Nigeria.

Q: OK, well there you are, but what's there to report on, for example?

NAGY: Well, we -- back then we still had the CRP reports, you know, the relations with Communist countries, the various demarches, etc. The Seychelles had the same vote in the United Nations as, as India. So you know, we did -- we engaged with them, tried to get American businesses to come invest, we had our share of congressional visitors, we had our consular issues with American tourists who got into trouble.

Q: Well, how about the Indians? Did they have anything there?

NAGY: Yeah, they did. They did a couple of ship visits. And you know the Indians at that -- I mean the Indians were interested in things going on in the Indian Ocean and also we had -- one of the things I did is we had a lot of nonresident diplomats come through and ask for things and figure out what was going on. And I had invariably German visitors and Australians came a lot, they were quite interested. South Africans I think came by in the guise of South African business representatives who were strangely interested in, you know, geopolitical intelligence there.

Q: Was this at the time when there was a feeling that the South African Israelis had conducted nuclear tests or not or?

NAGY: That happened I was still in Zambia, because I remember visiting South Africa when all that happened. So no, but the Seychelles were extremely -- I mean their foreign policy was extremely Marxist on the political side and extremely capitalist on the economic side.

Q: Did you have much contact with the government?

NAGY: Oh yeah, absolutely. I could get in to see anybody at any time. It was all very relaxed. I could see ministers, I could see the foreign minister-- even when I was serving as chargé and I

needed to carry on some business I could see the defense minister, the deputy prime minister at just about any time.

Q: Well, did they have -- how did -- how were they oriented regarding -- imagine UN (United Nations) votes became important for you.

NAGY: Yeah, on their UN voting they pretty well towed the Soviet line down the -- you know, down the line.

Q: Did you feel that the Soviets had a real hold there or was this just --

NAGY: No, they, they did because they helped them on the security side and that's what they were interested in. They knew that they would get the Western tourists and they'd get the Western bankers. But, but on the political side they had the Soviets for security. Right after the mutiny within two days there was a Soviet cruiser which showed up in the port, so they counted on the Soviets.

Q: Well, in a way were you -- you and we not too unhappy that the Soviets were at least keeping this government stable?

NAGY: Well, it -- at that time our -- we were ambivalent in that regard. We were not happy with the Marxist government, although we would not have minded if a previous Western oriented government had come back. We weren't there to do anything at all except make sure that our tracking station had rights, you know, to maintain itself. So that was basically our policy. We had a small Peace Corps program. We had a small USAID program. Like I said, our embassy did the public diplomacy. It was a lot of fun. it was actually one of my favorite posts.

Q: Well, what about the Peace Corps? What were they up to?

NAGY: Well, they had about a dozen volunteers doing really fun stuff. They were what I call highly professional core volunteers. They were not the kids with the bachelor's degree, you know, who were contemplating their, their navel. They were actually premed students who were helping with dentistry or people with civil engineering degrees who worked on rural roads, and things like that.

Q: They had no particular problem.

NAGY: No. Oh no, no, no. As a matter -- I mean they show up, these people are phenomenal. They're very friendly, they're very laid back, they're open to everybody. So on a people to people basis we had phenomenal relations. It was only this quirky, quirky Marxist government that gave us difficulties.

Q: Well, was there any element within that Marxist government that was trying to install East German type secur -- you know, police and all that or?

NAGY: No. Not at all. Not at all. No, the Seychelles law wouldn't have passed that. They're probably most laid back people on earth.

Q: Well, it sounds sort of -- the whole thing sounds -- might have been Marxist, but it's pretty benign.

NAGY: Oh, absolutely. It was extremely benign. Very, very benign. The joke was that 12 men with baseball bats could overthrow the government.

Q: There was no sort of spy versus spy operation going on there or?

NAGY: Well, there was to a certain extent, but it was all kind of fine.

Q: Well, after being there did you have a feeling that people were beginning to breathe down your neck about -- other Foreign Service types who wanted to get out and suffer the hardships of the Seychelles?

NAGY: No, it was a -- it was an undiscovered paradise. Very few people in our service knew about it. The Africa Bureau was fairly was fairly close hold on parceling out the few positions here. My ambassador was career foreign service, but I think -- well, he was followed by another career person and then after that I think they went through a couple of political appointees and they closed it down once our satellites ended the need for a tracking station and the Soviet Union collapsed.

DAVID J. FISCHER
Ambassador
Seychelles (1982-1985)

Born in Connecticut and raised in Minnesota, Ambassador Fisher was educated at Brown University, the University of Vienna, Austria and Harvard Law School. He joined the Foreign Service in 1961. His various assignments abroad took him to Germany, Poland, Sofia, Kathmandu, Dar es Salaam as well as to the Seychelles, where he served as US ambassador from 1982 to 1985. Assignments at the Department of State in Washington include those dealing with US relations with China, with Public Affairs and with Arms Control issues. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Robert Pasturing in 1998.

Q: Before we really go on to the whole confirmation process and your being in the Seychelles, you mentioned at the beginning that we no longer have an Embassy at the Seychelles. Would you say why, given it's still an independent country?

FISCHER: I was the first resident Ambassador in the Seychelles. Seychelles had for years been covered out of Kenya. It was one of the few countries in the world where we didn't have a resident Ambassador, and the only reason that we had an Embassy in the Seychelles at all, was

the fact that we had a U.S. air force tracking station, satellite receiving station which was ostensibly secret. In other words, the purposes of the station were secret. In fact, there was no way to hide this because it had three huge geodesic domes on top of the largest mountain in the Seychelles, and you could see it from forty miles away. But, it had two hundred and twelve Americans working there from Ford Aerospace, private contractor. And the Commander of the base was an Air Force Colonel. The reason why this station was so critical during the Cold War was that it was the easiest location on the face of the earth where we could receive satellite information from stationary satellites poised over the Soviet Union. There was one particular satellite that allowed us to read the plumes, the infrared signals of missiles coming out of the silos. The only place on the earth where that signal could be relayed down in real-time was somewhere within a sixty or hundred mile band of the equator. The Seychelles was there.

The history of our relations with the Seychelles is rather interesting and, frankly, a lot of this is no longer secret, but it has never been widely publicized. The Seychelles was a British colony. But, it existed within an area called the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). The BIOT were a bunch of rocks in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and one of the rocks was called Diego Garcia. We negotiated with the British in which to obtain access to some islands in the BIOT, in return for certain other favors. In those days; in fact, the Navy was unalterably opposed. They did not want to put any bases in the Indian Ocean To make a long story short; we had a trade off with the British. The British basically gave us access to Diego Garcia, in return for which we agreed, among other things to build an airport on the Seychelles. A little rock, little country. There are ninety islands in the Seychelles, population of sixty thousand people. We would build an airport there which would open up that country for tourism. It would also make access to the tracking station for supplies easier because heretofore, that tracking station had been supplied by a ship that went in once a month. When I arrived in the Seychelles I soon learned that I wasn't briefed about everything. I think I wasn't briefed, not because they were hiding something, simply historical memory had lapsed. People didn't know. And when I arrived on a Sunday in the Seychelles, I remember landing on this air strip, with a runway that was twelve thousand four hundred feet long. One of the longest runways in the world. I couldn't figure out, it didn't register. I presented my credentials the following day on a Monday. In a private conversation with the President of the Seychelles, he turned to me and said, "I want you to know, Mr. Ambassador, that I will honor all our commitments." I figured he was talking about the arrangement we had for this secret air force tracking station. I said, "Yes Mr. President, we understand you're commitment to the tracking station, etc." He said, "No, no. Of course I'll honor that, but I'm going to honor all our commitments including the secret one." So, as Ambassador, you have to think on your feet. I said, Mr. President, that's the best news I've heard, thank you very much. We went onto other subjects. I went back to the Embassy and sent a telegram to ask what the hell is the President talking about. What secret commitments? It turns out we had built the runway in the Seychelles as a recovery base for B-52 bombers which were going to take off from somewhere in Northern Canada, fly across the Soviet Union and bomb it and then glide thousands of miles into the Seychelles. This was a recovery base which we thought would be safe from radiation and fallout. But again, nobody in the State Department had told me about this.

Q: But that agreement had been made with the President?

FISCHER: With the President maybe ten years earlier.

Q: But not with the same President. Not with the man whom you'd made your presentation credentials.

FISCHER: No. We'd made the agreement with one president who'd immediately been overthrown coup d'etat by the existing president with whom I was talking.

Q: Whose name is?

FISCHER: France Albert Rene. Until the early 1990s when we developed new technology, we still had a need for a satellite to read missile plumes. But, it was now technologically possible to download signals directly to another receiver. So with the closing of the tracking station coupled, with a cutback in U.S. Embassy/U.S. State Department abroad, obviously one of the Embassies on the list to be closed was the Seychelles. A decision which I support entirely. Having lived in that country for three years, I saw very little reason for us to have a resident Ambassador. There was a lot of controversy in the State Department about whether its necessary to have resident Ambassadors, particularly in Africa, now fifty-six or fifty-seven independent countries. This policy was begun under President Kennedy. In the 1960s when Kennedy came to power, there was decolonization. The French, British and Portuguese and others were leaving their colonies and creating independent countries in Africa. And Kennedy felt strongly that it was important that we had visible American presence. Well, whether or not that required a resident Ambassador is an issue that I have some doubts about. But it existed. Up until the early '90s this was a fundamental policy. Every country in the world, just as they want to have a national airline, they also want to have a resident American Ambassador. Of course throughout the Cold War, as I witnessed in places like Tanzania, Somalia and Ethiopia, these became important pawns in a Cold War conflict, Cold War competition. And frankly, the level of some American Embassies was in direct proportion to Soviet Embassies.

In 1969, Bill Macomber, the Assistant Secretary of State for Administration, was asked to undertake a series of reviews looking at, among other things, American presence overseas. I was assigned by Bill to be on a task force to look at this question of whether or not we should, as the British do, the French, many, many major counties, adopt the idea of multiple accreditation. You have an Embassy in a country, but it's headed by a Charge d'Affaires. You've got a resident Ambassador in a neighboring country who covers five or six countries in the region. Among other people that we interviewed as part of this task force was a guy named Thomas Karamessines. Karamessines is a rather famous man. He was the Director of Plans, head of the covert side of the CIA. I can remember going out to see him. I asked him, how important is it to you that we have embassies and I named three or four countries in Africa where we had absolutely no political interests, and he said, "It's absolutely vital. We have to have an Embassy there because it's the only way in which we can have CIA presence. The KGB is there, and it's competition." Jokingly, I proposed something along the lines of the strategic spook reduction treaty whereby we should have gone to the Russians and said, "Look you guys don't want to be in this rinky-dink country. It's hotter than hell, there's no air conditioning, the electricity doesn't work, the brewery's broken down, why don't both agree to get out." That never happened until 1991-1992 when resources began to shrink, we had no crisis situations, we had thirteen new

countries in the former Soviet Union. These were important places. So tradeoffs were made. The Seychelles, the Comoros was another country that I had at one time had overseen and that was closed.

Q: You oversaw the Comoros from the Seychelles?

FISCHER: No that was when I was back in the Washington as Director for East Africa. But, I think this is a valid question. One of the things that the Foreign Service, because it is a hierarchical institution, a lot of us toil in the vineyards for twenty years and you finally get named to be a fairly important title. If you look what goes on in private business, and I'm struck by this after I'm out. Private sector does a wonderful thing. They identify their fast trackers very early on, and they spend an enormous of time, any major corporation, on making sure they pick out the best and the brightest, and they move them along quickly. One of the things that I think the Foreign Service ought to consider is that they do that process regardless of grade. You take you best, and your brightest and you take them out to run a mission. They may not have title of Ambassador, they don't have to have all the perks, they don't have to have a flag pole; they may not have to have a car and a driver. But, it gives them a sense of responsibility, it gives them management experience. And maybe that's one of the things we should be doing as an institution.

Q: But not necessarily in a full Embassy.

FISCHER: Exactly. I think you could justify having a reduced presence in the Seychelles. We owned a house, we had a residence, you had an office building that didn't cost anything. So you'd maybe take two or three people and send them out there and give them some sense of responsibility

Q: Before we go on, why don't you give us the background of the Seychelles, the economic situation, the political, any other interests that the U.S. might have had there?

FISCHER: Again this is the stuff of a novel. The Seychelles was a rinky-dink little country. A capital city in Mahé that had twenty-thousand people. On the other hand it had eight international banks, which is another story I'll get into. Credit Suisse, Credit Lyonnaise, Barclays' Bank, BCCI, I mean there were all these international banks for reasons that were unclear to me when I first arrived. I went there in 1982 and again, unbeknownst to me, six weeks before I arrived, the South African government attempted a coup d'état by sending in 50 armed mercenaries in a botched operation. I had asked specifically if were we behind it. Was this CIA operation? I was told up and down no. But, as it turned out, we had provided some logistical support to the South Africans. We were certainly aware of the planning of the operation. The President of the country knew damn well what we had done. He had captured seven of these kids, and he had interrogated them.

Seychelles was an incredibly interesting country. The Seychelles in a way was the jewel in the crown of the British Colonial Empire in East Africa. It was a beautiful country, but it was an island country that had no airport until the mid-1970s. The old PNO, Pacific and Orient steam ship company which was the steam ship company that put all the British colonials into India, stopped there three or four times a year. It used to ply back and forth through the Suez canal,

where the word "posh" comes from, Port Out, Starboard Home, those are the initials for posh. Anyway the dregs of the British empire washed up in the Seychelles. They were alcoholics, they were people who got off the ship to or from India. The Seychelles was an island of free love. It was a most unusual culture. It was a mixture of French, African, Indian, Chinese, and British. The islands had been French until the war of 1812. So you have French planter stock. The British were the colonial power, so you had Brits there as well. The British freed slaves. There was a great anti-slave movement in England in the 1820s-1830s. When slavers were captured, the slaves were released in the Seychelles. So you had a very strong African stock. The Chinese came to the Seychelles in the early part of the twentieth century to work as construction workers. And then, you had the Indian population. It was a melange. It was truly a multiethnic culture and a very interesting one.

The President of the country at independence in 1976 was a playboy, a rather famous guy by the name of Jimmy Mancham. Jimmy Mancham was overthrown in a coup d'état when he was off in England at a Commonwealth meeting by his arch-rival, a man by the name of France Albert Rene. Rene was the bastard son of a French planter and of a local woman. He was extraordinarily bright. He had been educated in England as a lawyer. Among other things in the early 1960s, when as a member of a colony he could live in England, he worked for Midland Bank. He developed for Midland Bank the concept of offshore banking in the islands of Guernsey and Jersey. However, Rene came to power ostensibly as a Socialist. So he had all sorts of crazy Marxist rhetoric. I remember asking him one day, "What the hell are you? On the one hand you're an English trained lawyer and a banker, and on the other hand, you claim to be a Marxist." He looked at me, and said, "To understand me, you have to understand I'm red on the outside and green on the inside." He is an extraordinarily venal man with a horrible human rights record who basically was an opportunist. In the wake for example, of this South African coup attempt, he got terrified. He was convinced, probably with cause, because the United States was knocking off little tin pot Marxist dictators around the world, and some day the search light would fall on the Seychelles and we'd send out some guys to overthrow him. Which is another story. But, he decided to bring in some mercenaries of his own. So he had one hundred twenty North Korean troops on the island, the only place the North Koreans were outside North Korea, I think. Absolutely wacko people. His bodyguards and his intelligence were East German and Cuban. That was the kind of atmosphere.

The diplomatic corps, such as it was, again the stuff of a Somerset Maugham novel. Somerset Maugham, by the way, had lived in the Seychelles at one point. The diplomatic corps consisted of: on one side of the room, the British the American and the French Ambassadors. On the other side of the room, the Russian, the Cuban and the Libyan Ambassador. I guess between were the Indians and the Chinese. We had an Embassy, as I say, of seven people. We had a CIA station. We had a Peace Corps program. We had sixteen Peace Corps volunteers on the islands in the years I was there. We gave the President basically two million dollars a year through an aid program. That was the quid pro quo for maintaining the tracking station. And of course, the tracking station with two hundred some Americans was the largest economic entity on the island and produced enormous revenue for the country. The Russian Embassy, on the other hand, had fifty-five people in it. And their fundamental task was to find ways to recruit any American who worked at the tracking station as an espionage agent. And at the same time, they set up technological ways to intercept or prevent the signal from being received. Indeed, one of the

things that arose, we discovered in the Seychelles, was that the Soviet navy had free and ready access to the port, the American navy did not until I arrived because of our policy of our unwillingness to declare whether there were nuclear weapons on ships. The Soviets dealt with this issue by simply saying we don't nuclear weapons. Of course, we were able to track precisely how many nuclear weapons they had on their ships in the harbor. The Soviets I guess at one point in 1984-1985 experimented with using laser beams as ways to blind the American satellite that beamed down to the Seychelles. This was a violation of all sorts of treaties, and ultimately they did end it.

But, we had very little interest there. Our sole interest in that country was to maintain the tracking station. But, the President understood that if he in any way threatened the tracking station, he'd be cutting his own throat, the largest economic source of foreign exchange, and at the same time he'd bring down the wrath of the United States on his head.

Now when Reagan was President, Jean Kirkpatrick was at the UN, known as being a very tough lady. However, she had a bit of soft spot in her heart for the Seychelles because the only other female Ambassador at the United Nations in those days was a woman by the name of Giavanela Gontier, who was the Ambassador from the Seychelles. Jean Kirkpatrick, at some point, shortly after the invasion of Grenada, decided that the Grenadian operation had been so successful and had given the Americans such great press, wasn't it time that we took care of little countries like the Seychelles that voted against us consistently in the United Nations that spouted all sorts of Marxists rhetoric. So I was host for example to a very senior member of the Defense Department accompanied by a group of people who were ostensibly there for scuba diving. There was going to be a vacation. In fact, they were six navy seals who spent a week scouting out the island if for some reason we ever needed to use force in that par of the world.

Q: What's the size of this island?

FISCHER: The main island physically was seven miles long and three miles wide with a mountain range of thirty-five hundred feet right down the middle of it. One town, twenty thousand people, and then villages scattered around. But with a very high standard of living. Ironically, the Seychelles had the second highest standard living in Africa outside of South Africa because when you got a GNP of \$220 million dollars divided among sixty thousand people that's a very high standard of living. The average per capita income was over three thousand dollars when I was there. We were shocked having come out of Tanzania which was truly a country of economic disaster. I can remember the first day my wife and I walked into a supermarket; they actually had a French supermarket. They had bread from Paris, caviar from Moscow, lobster locally caught. It was really quite posh.

Q: The GNP came from the tracking station and tourism? No other economic endeavor to speak of.

FISCHER: Not that we knew of.

Q: Except the offshore banking. Did that make money?

FISCHER: We were not aware of the fact that there was off shore banking. One of the questions I asked myself and the CIA chief, was to figure out what the government was up to. Well, we had a two-hour lunch period and one day, my CIA guy had gone off on one side of the island to a beach for lunch, and I had gone out on the Embassy boat to the other side of the island for lunch, and we came back and met in the Embassy at 2:30 p.m. I should give you idea of the Embassy. When I arrived it had wall to wall carpeting which I immediately ripped up because our wet bathing suits after lunch dripped all over the place, and the carpet was mildewing. We put in a linoleum floor. This is a pretty relaxed place.

But, the Agency guy said I had the damnest experience. I saw a guy who looked an awful lot like Michael Papa. Papa was wanted by Interpol, and the CIA had instructions to report him to Washington if he washed up somewhere. The most enigmatic figure in the country was an Italian with murky business interests. His name was G. Mario Ricci. Ricci was a tea plantation owner; an Italian with an enormous beard, very close to the government. We didn't quite understand what his relationship was, we didn't know what he was doing. He claimed to be a member of the diplomatic corps. He claimed to be the honorary Ambassador for the Knights of Malta.

Michael Papa was a guy whose was known to Americans because he had tried to arrange for Billy Carter to invest in Libya during the Carter administration. Papa was an international arms smuggler. He was thought to be widely connected to an operation in Italy called the P2 which was a chapter of very conservative neo-fascists who'd been involved in a number of anti-government activities in Italy. As a result of that chance circumstance, we began to investigate what was going on with this mystical figure, G. Mario Ricci. Like an Eric Ambler novel, where an innocent character suddenly stumbles on something, and he becomes involved in a huge conspiracy, that's precisely what happened to us in the Seychelles. By that chance encounter, we soon discovered all sorts of stuff, ranging from money laundering by the Gambino family in New York to gun running to Libya. We reported all this stuff to Washington via State Department and CIA channels, but no one seemed to care. Foreign policy in the early 1980s didn't dirty its hands with issues like money laundering or drug smuggling.

Q: As it is today.

FISCHER: As it is today. However, at one point in, I guess 1983, I received a telegram asking me to return to Washington for urgent consultations. Now that's highly unusual for an Ambassador in a rinky-dink country. But, U.S. Customs wanted to talk to me. I can remember going into a meeting in the State Department in which I was braced by two Customs Agents, both of whom were wearing not only shoulder holsters, but also ankle holsters. They had file upon file regarding a very large Mafia heroin scheme which involved shipping heroin as fish, canned fish, into New York and also laundering money out of the Seychelles. Now what I'm about to say sounds so ridiculous, that I hesitate to put it down on a piece of paper, even an oral history because; frankly, I don't have the answer to this question.

When I was in Washington on that trip, I went out to see a man whose name was George Hazelrigg. George had been my Chief of Station of the CIA in Tanzania and then had gone on to become the Chief of CIA in Rome, Italy. George was on home leave. I don't know how we knew about each other's visits. I went out and had lunch with him at the agency headquarters. After

lunch, Hazelrigg pulled me aside. I can remember walking with him to the parking lot. He looked around and said, "I just want to tell you that everything you send out of the Seychelles is blue streaked." Blue streaked in CIA terminology meaning a report was marked for the attention of the Director, then William Casey. "Why? I don't know. I only know that your stuff out of the Seychelles has highest top priority."

To this day I speculate as to why that was the case. I don't know. In any event, I went back to the Seychelles. As we began to dig more and more in to operations, a bank appeared on our radar scope called BCCI, Bank of Credit and Commerce International. We had access to some bank records. I don't know to what degree that helped or precipitated the ultimate investigation of what was clearly a major fraudulent banking operation. But, I know it played some role. But, we began to get more and more out of this Mafia stuff. Then one day, my CIA Chief came to me and said, "I've just gotten the strangest message in operational traffic." He threw it down on my desk. It was personal, to the Chief of Station, from the Director, eyes only, William Casey. "You are hereby instructed never to report, never to use any assets or any resources to pursue anything regarding international fraudulent banking operations in the Seychelles." It was an injunction that they could do nothing. Why? I have one idea. People can draw their own conclusions.

We had a source in the Seychelles, a CIA source, who alerted us that Interpol's most wanted criminal, a man by the name of Michael Pacienza, was in the Seychelles. He reported that Pacienza was living secretly in the Seychelles in a beach house owned by the President of the country. He wanted us, because he couldn't do so, to send a message to Interpol to say that Pacienza was there. Interpol in the form of the Italian police acted open our tip, flew into the Seychelles on a Tuesday and arrested Pacienza. He was taken to the local police station. The problem was that the Alitalia flight didn't return to Rome until Friday so he had to be held locally. We were cognizant of what was going on. Pacienza was in jail so far as we knew. The Chief of Police was cooperating with us. On Wednesday morning I realized that something was up because the Italian Ambassador who was resident in Kenya arrived in my office, having chartered an airplane to come out to the island. He was not aware of what was going on, and he wanted to be briefed. He was the Italian Ambassador, I figured what the hell, this is Interpol business, he should know, so I briefed him.

At about five o'clock in the afternoon the Chief of Police came running into my office, screaming, "What have you done?" I just had the President of the country come down to the jail and said he wanted this man released. He said if you don't release him, I'll shoot you. He was accompanied by the Italian Ambassador." The Interpol agents were in my office twenty minutes later saying we understand he's been released from jail, etc. Mr. Pacienza disappeared. We subsequently learned he was taken by the President of the country to an outlying island where he was kept in one of Rene's guest houses. The Italian Ambassador denied any intervention in this. He said he was never in the jail. Pacienza was apparently taken off by a boat and was subsequently arrested in Chicago two years later traveling on a Seychelles diplomatic passport. He was held in a number of crimes in New York involving the Gambino family. That was the kind of crazy place it was. There were things going on in that island. Most of it was just out of some second rate spy novel. You'd see the tip of an iceberg, and you'd have no idea why people were using this little island to do this kind of stuff.

One last story. In New York this must have been 1984, there were a series of murders called the Pizza Murders because they involved drugs that were run out of pizza parlors in northern New Jersey. Somebody found a body. The way in which the Mafia took care of these guys, killed them in a gang wars, was to shoot them in a place called Secaucus, New Jersey in the swamps, put them in the trunk of a car and that would be it. Well, I got a telegram one morning that said we would like you to inform the President of the Seychelles that we have just picked up the body of Johnny whatever and in his address book on his body, we found the private telephone number of the President of the Seychelles. So I went up to see France Albert. " I just want to tell you something, you're over your head with this Mafia business. You're in with Ricci.: Rene used to smoke big Cuban cigars. He never said anything, he was a very cool negotiator. I just laid it out. "You know when they're finished with you, they're going to kill you." I said I just want you to know that we found a guy in the trunk of a car, and he's got your private telephone number. It was the only time I saw France Albert Rene flinch. But, his answer was don't worry about it, I can take care of it. Well, I guess he was right. We're doing this interview in 1998, and he's still President of the country. He's managed to pull it off.

Q: Going back to Pacienza, you got this message from Interpol how?

FISCHER: Through the American Embassy in Rome.

Q: So you were responding to another U.S. government official, not Interpol?

FISCHER: It was sent by the FBI in Rome.

Q: Did the Department have any interest in this stuff?

FISCHER: Initially, no. But the investigations by Customs, the DEAD and Justice began to focus peoples' attention on the Seychelles. It was clear that all the banks, including British and French banks, were moving a lot of hot money in and out of the country. Everybody had a little piece of the puzzle. All the threads pointed to this man G. Mario Ricco and his relationship to the President. Beyond that we didn't quite understand and we didn't know all the details of what was happening. People were killed. This is jumping a head a bit. The head of the CIA and I were invited for dinner at Mr. Ricco's house one night. It was very clear that without our wives, stag evening and whatever. 1984. We had a very pleasant dinner. He was married to an Ethiopian woman who was a good cook, very attractive. She served the dinner. After dinner we went onto the patio, he had a beautiful house. His English was very limited. He said, "Just a minute I want to show my CIA friend something." He went back to his office and came back with a file folder about an inch thick and handed it to the CIA Chief. He looked at it, read it, going through pages and closed it. I didn't look at it. "I only hope that you didn't pay more than a thousand buck for this because this is all bogus information," he replied. Mario Ricco said, "I paid a lot more than a thousand dollars for it and you and I know this is not bogus information." My COS said, "Ridiculous, You get forgeries like this all the time." We finished our cognac, and we got back into the car. I was driving. As we left the driveway I asked, "What the hell was in the file folder? He said, "Every CIA operational telegram I have sent of this Embassy over the last two years. Every single one." Well, it was a leak through the CIA station in Rome. We were copying anything to do with this financial fraud thing which was sent to the CIA station in Rome because

it was an Italian who was running the operation. They had a liaison with the Italian Intelligence Service which had been penetrated, so it was all coming back to Ricco.

RICHARD W. CARLSON
Ambassador
Seychelles (1991-1992)

Ambassador Richard W. Carlson was born in Boston in 1941. His father died when he was 11 years old. After twice being kicked out of high school, he joined the navy at the age of 17. The last year of his enlistment was spent at the University of Mississippi. He then became a reporter in California. In the fall of 1985, President Reagan appointed him to be head of the Public Liaison Office for USIA, and subsequently as Director of the Voice of America. In 1991 he was appointed ambassador to the Seychelles. Ambassador Carlson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 2, 1993.

CARLSON: Well, I am so glad that I went to the Seychelles. I went to this little tiny group of islands, these 112 paradisiacal islands in the southwest Indian Ocean. My first response when I was told this...I had come from what I thought was an important job and was kind of stunned when they said to go to the Seychelles. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that here is a wonderful opportunity for me. It was interesting and different and beats a number of other countries they could have sent me too in Africa. As it was I had a wonderful time.

I thought it was politically interesting and it is like being sent into Warwick, Rhode Island. You are brought in as the representative of a considerable power and you are attached to the city council and you are given access to information that tells you everything you want to know about every member of that city council. How they behave, what they have done in the past, what the political intrigues are that surround their lives. You are not only made privy to all of the things that go on in the body politic of the city council and its effects on the population of Warwick, Rhode Island, but you get to play a role in it as well on the highest level. It is so small that you can understand it in reasonably short order. In my case I was only there for a year. If it had been a large country, I would have been still learning. But since the population of the Seychelles is about 70,000 people and because the number of people who make up the decision makers and opinion leaders is small, you meet them all in a fairly short period of time. Then you learn one level of truth and then a second level of truth and then the real truth maybe, as to what is really going on. But you can do that in a small place like the Seychelles.

Because the American Ambassador there is as important as the president of the country in many ways...certainly treated that way by those around the president...that is kind of appealing. I don't mean that simply from being saluted or referred to as Your Excellency, but because you end up being privy to information that you wouldn't get if they didn't think you were so important and feel that they have to give it to you. I just loved it from the day I arrived.

Q: Could you give a little idea how you prepared to be an ambassador and talk a bit about what kind of briefing you had about American interests, etc.?

CARLSON: I did think when I arrived in the Seychelles and had been there for a short time how lucky I was that I had been involved in government as a political appointee. I knew how to write cables, and had had some experience with the Foreign Service. My deputy was a Foreign Service Officer. Because of the Voice and its interests I was in regular communication with posts abroad and had an understanding of the acronyms and the language used. If I hadn't had that I think I would have been somewhat at a lost. In fact, I can't imagine being just dropped into a country as ambassador with no experience at all in simply how to conduct a dialogue. Because of the Voice I had been on a number of diplomatic missions to China and to the Soviet Union. I had led talks of one kind or another. I had some experience with protocols...a lot of it is common sense, but it made you more comfortable. Consequently I didn't feel really uncomfortable meeting with the Foreign Minister on a regular basis and engaging in conversations.

I also felt given all of that background the preparation that I received was pretty good. My relations with the State Department had been good when I was at the Voice. As their treatment of me as a new ambassador, it was just excellent. I was in a class of about a dozen or more new ambassadors. They ranged from the Seychelles to good size countries. There were political appointees and career ambassadors. There was one ambassador who had had three post already but who felt that it was useful for him to go through the couple of weeks training session again. It was, I thought because I had been around this a little bit, that it was easily understood. I learned a lot of new things and felt very comfortable. I was pleased by the fact that every ambassador was treated equitably. It didn't make any difference...since there is considerable responsibility difference between my little country and a post in a big country...but there was a concerted effort on the part of State to treat everyone exactly the same. I felt pretty prepared when I went over. A lot of that, as I say, was attributable to the prior 6 years at the Voice.

I had very specific briefings on the Seychelles as well. It is small enough that it is not complicated to understand or explain. I had briefings from various appropriate government agencies and felt I had a handle on US foreign policy interests there, which were very limited. They have to do with the fact that they have one vote in the United Nations. The Seychelles are spread over about 400,000 square kilometers of southwest Indian Ocean. They are close to the sea lanes that go to the Gulf and involve oil shipping. So there is an interest in the place because of its geographical location. Actually in the southwest Indian Ocean, the British, the Indians and the French all historically had interest there and there is considerable subtle jockeying for position in the area. And the US wants to make sure it maintains a seat at that table. There is a US government tracking station in the Seychelles which is of primary interest to the ambassador.

Q: The tracking station is what?

CARLSON: It is a highly classified US government tracking station which is run by the Air Force in conjunction with other government agencies. There are four Air Force personnel and about a 120 American citizens who are employed there, and probably another 100 Seychellois who are employed there. It has been there since the early '60s. It is used to position US satellites. It is five degrees above the equator and apparently in an excellent geographical spot to control

satellites in that part of the world, and it does. It actually is run out of Sunnyville, California and then in turn out of Space Command in Colorado. The US is very interested in protecting it because they consider it quite vital to US defense. And it was important in the Gulf War. The ambassador has no role in the running of the station and neither does the commander, for that matter. It is really basically run out of the United States, but there are technical things that have to be done there. But the US ambassador's role is to protect the station. There have been no threats against the station, but they are always concerned that the government of the Seychelles be reminded that the presence of that station is important to the US.

The government there has been a consistently left wing government since the present president overthrew the democratically elected president in 1972. President France Albert Rene is the former Foreign Minister and has been President for all these years--21 years. He was a great friend of Julius Nyerere's in Tanzania. Nyerere was sort of his mentor and assisted him in the overthrow of the sitting President, whose name was James Mancham. Mancham is still alive and while I was ambassador returned to the Seychelles after an absence of 20 some years. When France Albert Rene took over there had only been one year of democracy. The country had previously been a British possession from 1814 until 1971. Prior to that it was a French colony. French influence, culturally, remains to this day. The people speak French, also Creole and English. Prior to 1971 there was no airport and the mail plane came from Mombasa, a thousand miles away once a week, landed in the bay, and that was it. It was a place that was extremely remote, incredibly beautiful.

Its touch with the West was mostly through British civil servants who would retire from India because you could live on \$25 a month there in the '30s and forties. It has a racially harmonious population and a pretty good standard of living. No grinding poverty, no malaria, white sand beaches and azure water.

When France Albert Rene took over he became very friendly with Cuba, the Eastern Bloc, the Soviet Union, etc. The US for many years had a concern that the Seychelles would give a deep water port to the Soviet Union and might allow one of the islands to be used as a launching pad for long range bombers. So it has been a center of intrigue. And it is a place of enormous intrigue for some reason. Maybe having to do with island living, I don't know. It is known as the islands of spies. Part of that is press mythology and "60 Minutes" did a piece on it called "Island of Spies" about three years ago. If you listen to them you would think that everybody is spying on everybody else, but it wasn't quite that way. But there is, for whatever reason, this constant gossiping and talking. It is quite a remarkable place.

It has the mix that any isolated island might be expected to have of kind of interesting characters. The President's security forces is run by a former Congo mercenary named Bob Nodine. A very interesting fellow who was in the French Foreign Legion and made quite a name for himself when he worked for Mobutu as head of security. He now runs a 3,000 armed force in a country of 70,000 people. I knew Bob Nodine quite well. He is a terribly interesting person there is no doubt about it. He denies that he is the security chief. He actually pretends that he runs a little restaurant called La Serend on the beach. He sort of admits privately that he runs the security force, and he does.

He was a friend and cohort of Mike Hoare the famous Congo Belgian mercenary who invaded the Seychelles in 1982 and tried to over throw it. Bob Nodine was the head of security at the same time it happened. You may remember there was a shootup that happened at the airport, quite by accident, and Mike Hoare commandeered an Air India flight to escape from the islands and did, after negotiating with his old friend Nodine. They are cut from the same bolt of camouflage cloth, there is no two ways about it. Then Julius Nyerere sent in a bomber about three hours too late and bombed the airport after everybody left and did practically irreparable damage to the runway.

It is an amazing place. The doctors are Bulgarians, the teachers are from Great Britain, etc. The reason being is that what passes as the hard left in the islands came from President Rene over years the middle class left or was driven out, about 12,000 of them. They happened to be the two doctors, the six lawyers, etc. so there was no middle class to run the country. So they had to bring them in from abroad. So they brought them in from the Eastern Bloc and from China, etc.

It is a place with the embassies are very large. The Soviet embassy at one point had 28 Soviet staff. This is a little tiny country. That is a very, very big embassy. They actually had 12 intelligence officers at one time. They were targeting the US tracking station in part ...targeting employees at the station. I think it was the kind of intelligence efforts to turn country nationals into long range workers for your intelligence effort. Its probably a way for the Soviets to get a hold of a Chinese and use him in the future when he is posted somewhere else. The place was so little that you can't avoid contact with other people, but if you wanted to be isolated and have that contact alone, it is very easy as well...just get in a boat and go around the corner. So without question there is a lot of that going on there. That made it a little more interesting too.

This was the kind of place where the US Embassy...you are not going to believe this, but the US Embassy is in a building along with the British High Commissioner's office. In that building we had a floor. It was right downtown across from the Pirates Arms, which is the headquarters for all of the intrigue on the islands. The US Embassy is on one floor. The British High Commissioner is on the floor below. On the main floor is a fairly well known fugitive British private detective who is wanted in the murder of one of the chief dissidents to the President, who was shot to death in London a couple of years ago. He has been wanted by Scotland Yard. I would see him every day. So would the British High Commissioner.

The building it turns out...I was irritated by the rent we were paying which was in the neighborhood of about \$900,000 per year and I thought it was a little high. We paid it to an offshore company. We undertook to figure out exactly where this money was going. It turned out that our building was owned by the Gokol brothers who were prime movers in BCCI.

Q: BCCI is Abu Dhabi bank which is right now and has been for the last ten years involved in money kiting schemes...a very disreputable outfit.

CARLSON: Yes. Their office was in our building as well. They just closed about the time I got there. I actually let the State Department know about this because if nothing else this was a possible Jack Anderson column that we were paying \$900,000 a year to BCCI owned building. It was actually owned by the Shell Corporations, one in Amsterdam and one in St. Lucia or

something. But it was owned by the Gokols who were Pakistanis. I had never heard of them but they were quite famous. They owned a shipping companies and about a third of BCCI and quite mysterious guys. That was typical of the way things operated in the Seychelles.

Q: The fact that you were the American Ambassador there in a place where everybody was spying on everybody else they must have wondered why you were there and who you were?

CARLSON: I think this is basically true. The State Department was quite supportive of the idea of my pushing President Rene towards a multi-party democracy. The timing was perfect in the fall of 1992. All the changes that were taking place in Africa were of great interest to the Seychelles government. Their friends in the Eastern bloc had all fallen. The Soviet Union was in disarray. The former USSR ambassador had become the Russian ambassador. When I got there he was totally confused. I got to know him quite well. He was a protégé of Shevardnadze's, the Foreign Minister.

Q: He left to become the President of Georgia at the present time.

CARLSON: Yes, and the ambassador, whose name was Kilselov, had followed a very aggressive intelligence officer named Orlov who had been disliked and who had run a very aggressive, anti-US campaign. He did all kinds of provocative things behind the scenes to screw up relationship between the US and the Seychelles. Kilselov was a professional diplomat and this was his first ambassadorship. He had the rug pulled out from under him. He couldn't even get a return cable. There was no foreign policy. I used to go fishing with him a lot.

The State Department very much liked the idea of our pushing, in a little place like this, for a free press which they didn't have. They had no opposition press at all. It wasn't allowed. There was a law that prevented anyone from criticizing the President. Now the President, this is a London School of Economics graduate who used to speak kind of First Amendment talk until he got to be the President, then it all went out the window.

So when I went over I stopped in Great Britain and met with the State Department counterparts at White Hall and then had a meeting with people from the Quai d'Orsay on the subject. The French, British and Americans, and ultimately the Germans...there is no German ambassador accredited to the Seychelles is resident in Nairobi...formed a combined effort to push the President and the administration of the Seychelles into a liberalized press policy and a multi-party election. And we succeeded.

Q: These are easy terms, "we pushed," what do you mean?

CARLSON: I took the lead in this, but the British High Commissioner and the French Ambassador were very important to this...we all had conversations about it and some of it was probably reported to the President given the security apparatus of the Seychellois government and the fact that we had meetings at unsecured places. We took a fairly aggressive verbal position in representing our respective governments, that the time had arrived where the President must seriously consider the events in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Africa and the changes that were taking place and accommodate himself to those changes. And that the US

government which supplies aid to...well it rents the tracking station and there is always an interest in increasing the rent of the tracking station and always an interest on the part of the US government to keep the rent down. There were AID funds in a limited fashion and really quite small funds considering. There is a high standard of living in the Seychelles much which is contributable to foreign aid, although they don't like to say that. It's a \$5000 per capita income there. So \$20,000 for a family of four is quite a high standard of living. Most of that is out of foreign aid; some from tourism, but most from foreign aid.

The President was sensitive to this and in a series of sessions with him about the political realities of life and the resolve of the US government not to tell people how to run their own government, not to tell them what form of government they ought to have. There was no interest in the part of the US government in telling the President of Seychelles what form the government of the Seychelles should take in a finite way. That is not our role. But the idea that the people of the Seychelles ought to play a role in how the government is determined was something we strongly believe in. So do the British, and so do the French. It was the first time that this kind of pressure had been brought to bare in a concerted way where four strong countries were telling the President in effect that now was the time to do this.

Q: With the Soviet Union no longer in existence and all, this pretty well stopped any sort of counter offers.

CARLSON: Yes, that is right. We were appealing to the President's pragmatism, if nothing else. The President said he was a very strong socialist, but like most people he was really interested in power, and like most people in power he was interested in the perpetuation of the power. This is what I believe. It was probably more attractive to him to talk about doing good through power because you can get away with a lot if you do that. If you talk socialism you can somehow skip over a few human rights violations here and there if they are not too egregious. Human rights violations were serious in my opinion. Of course, judged against actions in Africa they were nothing. Realistically people were not being strung up by their armpits on hooks. There were people killed in the Seychelles. Some were killed because of the government. But there were a small handful of them. That doesn't excuse it in the slightest, but there was no wholesale terror. But there was oppression of people.

Q: Well, a 3000 body guard...

CARLSON: That was terrible. Let me amend that. There were 3000 under arms. Part of them were militia. Nobody is allowed even to have a spear gun. Any weapon is outlawed. So the army and the navy were about 1800 and then there were another 1000 party members who were armed and had uniforms and were trained. They weren't full time military.

The President was mostly interested...I think his socialism was more of a public relations device. He would have been more interested in the welfare of the people if he had truly believed in it. He was much more interested in personal power.

We approved him in September, October, November and on December 5 he held a news conference announcing freedom of the press in the country. He didn't say that certain diplomats

had been bugging him so he was going to do this. He, in fact, made it seem like this was something he had had under independent consideration for some time. In point of fact, the previous July he had stated in his July 6, a big holiday there, speech that he had no intention of going to a multi-party system, that one party was all that was required and that that was perfect for the Seychelles. They didn't need a conflicting newspaper. All it did was to cause chaos. The government controlled press was perfectly satisfactory.

There had always been an underground paper, but if you were caught with it you ran the risk of going to prison. I think the President was finally smart enough to realize that the underground paper savaged the President regularly. In the most unbelievable ways. They would print lists of his girlfriends and their addresses, and when he was there, etc.

As soon as the President allowed an opposition press, the opposition papers became immediately very responsible. They stopped doing that to the President. They realized their responsibilities. In effect he got a better...they became much less...everybody read the "Black Tortoise," which was the name of the underground paper, because it was so scandalous. But as soon as they got legitimized they became like the New York Times of the Seychelles.

They have had a constitutional convention, the President was nominated...this was after I left. They still have had not total electoral freedom, but they have moved a long way from where they were last fall.

Q: How did you find the American Embassy and your staff?

CARLSON: I thought it was very good. It was very small. We had 21 people all together including about 7 Americans. The DCM, Steve Malott, is still there. He is a Foreign Service Officer with probably about ten years of experience. He is an admin officer. He was very good I thought. He was in his late '40s. He had wide academic experience which was useful. He had been a dean of a number of schools...Dean for Administration at the University of Alaska, at Georgetown in a senior position. He was a very smart guy and very capable. He and I got along awful well.

One of the things that was useful to me was that I had had a lot of experience working with the Foreign Service and I think that helped. He also had, I found out later from him, awaited making judgments about me. He immediately called people who I knew or didn't know but people who knew me, at the Voice to get a subjective rundown. That is what everybody always does. He did that and told me later that he was much relieved to find out that I was a reasonable person. He had, what I have come to believe is a perfectly realistic fear, that he would be getting someone God knows what he would be like.

Q: Like Bruce Gelb.

CARLSON: Exactly. He told me that he was relieved to learn that I had a reasonable reputation. I would not be breathing down the senior officers' necks. My management style at the Voice was what I always described as an ensemble management; that I was an ultimate arbitrator of things but on the other hand I wasn't interested in telling the senior officers how to do their jobs. I

shouldn't have to do that and I wasn't going to do that. I wasn't going to go around second guessing them or leaping in and getting upset with them if they made a mistake. I would treat them with respect until they proved to me that they didn't deserve it and I wouldn't expect that to happen. I went into this anticipating good results. I just assumed they were superior people and that was why they rose to a superior position. When I held meetings they shouldn't feel obligated to say anything. If they didn't have anything they felt worth saying, don't say anything.

I was very interested in very good clear communications in writing in my work environment and expected it at the Embassy. I knew how to write cables, which was helpful, and I had been a reporter. So I was interested in politics in a sentence. I had the ability to write cables to Washington without sending too many. I was very interested in having a good relationship with the Desk, and I did. I thought the best way to have a good relationship was don't communicate with them too much, and I didn't. I made a point of sending what I thought were well written, not too colorful but just colorful enough, reporting cables, but not too many of them. Otherwise I figures they would stay out of my hair and I would stay out of theirs and I could do my job, which in the Seychelles probably requires about four or five hours a day of concerted effort. I could do it pretty well by myself with their guidance and counsel occasionally. And I think it made them happy. They don't want to hear from somebody all the time. It is unnecessary. So I thought I had a good relationship with them.

Q: Were you sort of downsizing the Embassy? With the Cold War over, I am sure if the Soviet had 12 KGB people, we had to cover them.

CARLSON: Half of them were GRU. They had six and six at one time.

Q: Were we knocking down our influence?

CARLSON: Yes, considerably. They had wound a lot of that stuff down. They still had a very sophisticated KGB officer there, actually, Boris, I used to see him all the time. He actually had quite a reputation in the KGB at one time as a big time operator. I think he was there because it was a pleasant place to be more than anything else. That area of interest had considerably declined on the part of the United States.

Q: What about tourism. Did you have problems with Americans getting into trouble?

CARLSON: Nope. That was the other thing we didn't have in the Seychelles. I hadn't had any other ambassadorial experience and I probably never will have any other, but I didn't have the consular problems that I think are very common in big posts. I didn't have any Americans coming through, that's why. The Americans who lived there were almost all natives in effect. Some had been there for 20 years, so they weren't a problem...very occasionally. I didn't have lost passports, or people dying, or anything like that. I didn't have any special delegations. I had not one CODEL while I was there.

So my obligations from a representational point view, I felt, were put on maybe one lunch, maybe one breakfast, maybe two dinners during the week. Meeting with local government representatives or people from local industry, etc. That was it. That was my obligation.

The Ambassador has a boat in the Seychelles and a captain, to get between the islands, there are a lot of islands. So you are free to use that boat for that purpose. That is terribly appealing, actually, because the weather is always nice and the water is always clear and blue. If you want to throw a fishing line over the side when going from one island to another, that is okay too. I actually caught six sailfish while I was there. And you can use the boat to take out other diplomats, which I did.

The Russian Ambassador was so bereft of information and I was probably his prime source of information above board about the Soviet Union. I would give him information from the Wireless File, from the New York Times, the Washington Post, whatever, on the Soviet Union. He would read it to the Embassy. The KGB chief told me that. I used to get these mailings from Brookings, from the Heritage Foundation, on sovietology. I would send them over to the Russian Ambassador. He would read them, photocopy and distribute them because they didn't know what was going on. It was terribly interesting to them, I guess.

It was a great post. Of course it was an island and out in nowhere. It isn't a place you would want to stay three or four years in my opinion.

End of reader