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

# DAVID E. BROWN

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*
*Initial Interview Date: May 20, 2015*


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**INTERVIEW**

*Q: OK, I will make my announcement and we will have at it. Today is May 20, 2015 with David Brown. David, part of the thing is you get confused with another David Brown. What is your middle initial?*

BROWN: My middle initial is E for Earl.

*Q: OK, well David E. Let's have at it. By the way this is for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin with when and where were you born?*

BROWN: I was born in Washington DC in November, 1942.

*Q: OK, that was right in the middle of the war.*

BROWN: That's right. My father was an army officer. He had done ROTC at Cornell and when he graduated in 1940, he was commissioned and put in charge of training other engineers. Both my father and my mother came from the Washington area. So when my Dad shipped out to Hawaii early in 1944 we stayed behind in Washington, of course.

*Q: OK, I want to get a little bit more about the family background. What do you know about your father's side? Where did they come from? We will go to your mother's in a minute.*

BROWN: Dad was born in Sparks, Maryland and raised in Silver Spring. He attended Cornell like my grandfather and like me. He was trained as a mechanical engineer. After repairing tanks throughout the Second World War, he was hired by the Atlantic Refining Company in Philadelphia and spent the next 20 years managing their fleet of tank trucks. So I grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

*Q: What was the background of your mother?*

BROWN: My mother was also a DC girl, of an Irish family established in the Washington area at that time for about 60-80 years. She was one of four beautiful

Donovan girls and grew up in a house on 13th Street NW. She had a year of university and then had to drop out when the family finances took a turn for the worse. So she learned how to be a very skilled secretary, a profession she was able to go back to on and off both after marriage as well as before. So my Dad and Mom were married in March of 1942 and I came along soon thereafter. I have one brother. He is four years younger and was born in Philadelphia in 1946.

*Q: OK, let's talk about growing up in Philadelphia. How old were you when you started there?*

BROWN: I would have been about 3 ½ when we moved up there. My parents rented a house in the city for about a year. Housing in those days was very short, but a year later they were able to buy a brand new tract house in Abington, Pennsylvania, a few miles outside the city, which is where I spent my elementary years. Then as I was going into secondary school we moved farther out from the city and bought what was left of what had been a much larger farm. The big attraction, my father's hobby, was growing American holly trees. There were a lot of them on the property and he made sure that in time the entire property was almost totally hollies. He and a crew including me and my brother would shear the trees every December just before Christmas. That is what paid both my way and my brother's way through university.

*Q: OK, well let's talk about your childhood. Starting with your early years, what was it like?*

BROWN: You know it always looks good in retrospect. I enjoyed school most of the time. I roamed pretty much free range in those days before kids were tethered to their homes and chauffeured around to various activities by their moms. Basically my dad and mom let my brother and I have a fair amount of autonomy and so when we weren't in school, we roamed all about with a bunch of other boys in the neighborhood, particularly into the woods surrounding a nearby country club. There was one dark period when I was just eight. My mom and dad had their third child and Ricky was born severely disabled and only lived about a year. It was a very tough time for my parents. Thinking back on that and other experiences I am kind of amazed on how they were quite relaxed about letting U.S. run free in the neighborhood. They took a lot of care to shelter U.S. from shocks and nasty things like my little brother's sickness. So I wasn't really so much aware there was a problem until one day we came home from school and they had some bad news for me.

*Q: Were you much of a reader?*

BROWN: Oh yes, prolific.

*Q: Can you think of some of the early books that sort of had an influence on you and that particularly you remember?*

BROWN: Well, I was reading books without pictures from about third grade on, pretty

rapidly. I would read almost anything I could get my hands on. My mom would take U.S. down to the library every week or ten days. We were allowed to check out as many books as we wanted so I went through practically every juvenile book over the course of the next ten years or so. You ask which ones had a particular impact on me. That is hard to answer because there were so many. I just couldn't read enough. That was a habit we managed to pass on to our children as well. I think it makes a big difference in going on into the world when you grow up. I think I was early on fascinated by history and historical novels. All the C. S. Forrester stuff and Gone with the Wind for example. By the time I was in fifth or sixth grade I was not only reading the sports section of the newspaper but I could hardly wait each week for Life Magazine to arrive.

*Q: Was religion important in your family?*

BROWN: It was important in my family, yes. I wouldn't say my parents were the type that wore their religion on their sleeves. Basically church was something you were supposed to do just like you were supposed to lead a fairly ethical life and so forth.

*Q: What church was this?*

BROWN: I was raised a Presbyterian. I describe myself as a lapsed Presbyterian. I am just not particularly religious at all, although I do value the fact that I was raised with a good appreciation of western culture and the role that Christianity in particular played in it.

*Q: How did you find school, elementary school first?*

BROWN: In general quite enjoyable. Our school was a little less than a quarter mile from home so we could walk back and forth, an easy walk. I enjoyed sports. I didn't have a problem with any of the subjects although I was regularly chided for being lazy or sloppy with my homework. I remember it as a pretty good time.

*Q: Do you remember any favorite courses or less favorite course?*

BROWN: Social Studies and English almost from the time I encountered them were my favorites.

*Q: Then where did you go to high school?*

BROWN: Well I had a year still in the Abington School System in junior high, seventh grade. Then that year, 1953, we moved further out to Bucks County, which was on the suburban fringe where the housing developments stopped at the time and the farms began. I went to a combined junior-senior high school called William Tennant which was brand new. Considering that the area was growing very quickly and the school had just been put together out of the merger of three tiny rural school districts, it turned out to be a rather good school. Not top tier, but there were some very good teachers and a lot of opportunity.

*Q: What was the student population like?*

BROWN: The student population? Well my graduating class had 195 people. It was as I said we were right on the edge of the suburbs so it was a mix of people who had grown up and gone to school in small towns and others whose families were moving into the subdivisions that were sprouting all over the place. So a really mixed group. Culturally the area the school drew from was going through a pretty important change. There were only a few minority students. Just thinking probably in the whole high school which was probably 750, there couldn't have been more than half a dozen black students. Probably no more than three or four dozen Jewish kids. But by the time I was in 11th or 12th grade the group that I socialized with was about half Jewish and various Christians. This was before they had AP subjects, but we were the AP crowd, if you will.

*Q: Were you interested in the news from an early age or not?*

BROWN: Oh yes, I was reading the newspapers. The first thing I remember reading in the newspaper was the daily saga of the Flying Endeavor. Do you remember that Stu? It was a freighter that was caught in a storm off the Irish coast. The crew was evacuated but the captain refused to leave.

*Q: Yes, I remember that.*

BROWN: He hung on in that thing for weeks trying to get it towed back to port. I can't remember if he did or not, but that grabbed me. I remember also watching on TV, the first TV we got with a little tiny screen. Dad brought it home and turned it on. There was an elephant. I was quite fascinated by this elephant in the news. It turned out it was the celebration of the first or second Indian independence day. So anyway I was reading the paper early on, avidly; I was also reading about the outbreak of the Korean War and its ups and downs on the peninsula.

*Q: What paper did you go for?*

BROWN: Well the Inquirer was delivered every morning. My dad would usually bring home a copy of the Bulletin that he would read on the train.

*Q: Where did your family sort of fit politically?*

BROWN: I think my dad voted for a Democrat once in his life. I don't know whether my mother went off the reservation more often that that or not. But generally they were Eisenhower Republicans. I am sure if my dad was still around he would be having fits about the present Republican Party.

*Q: It is hard not to. The candidates are all proving they are more stupid than each other over issues. But anyway, in high school did you concentrate on any particular subjects?*

BROWN: I took college prep courses which were all pretty much prescribed in those days. Among the electives I had a couple of years of Latin and when Sputnik went up, the school administration decided it was going to enrich the curriculum by offering Russian, so I had a couple of years of Russian in high school too.

*Q: Where did they get the teacher? Did they have trouble finding a teacher to teach it?*

BROWN: Well, here is the story. They hired a fellow who had done graduate work in Heidelberg in Germany after he had come out of the U.S. Army. He was a really good German teacher. It turned out later that he had also fattened up his resume by saying he could teach Russian. That was an exaggeration. Seven of U.S. signed up for Russian. I think we realized that Karl didn't know much Russian after a few weeks. What we did basically is to go along with the scam, if you will, because he was a tremendous raconteur, and a very interesting guy. We had the best bull sessions in the course that I had in all my time in high school, plus learning a very little bit of Russian. The class wasn't very rigorous but in terms of helping me stabilize and get a grip on the world while growing up it was probably as important as any other class I had in high school.

*Q: Well did you have any particular interest in affairs in the world beyond Philadelphia? Were you following any of that?*

BROWN: Oh sure, most definitely. My high school was blessed in having a lady named Ella Rhoads who was the senior social studies teacher. She was a marvelous personality, full of energy and full of opinions. She really pushed U.S. all to think for ourselves and to read and understand. That is not just my view. She is the lady to whom my class yearbook was dedicated and she was just a very distinguished teacher then and later on.

*Q: Do you know anything about her background?*

BROWN: You know I really don't know a lot other than her own politics were strongly liberal. With students, Ms. Rhoads' ambition was to get U.S. to read, to read opinion of all kinds, to think about it, argue about it in class. Frankly, that place where we grew up was a rather conservative area and periodically there would be somebody in the community who would think well, we have got these left wing kooks brainwashing our kids, and there was also the fact that as each year passed, more and more people including her former students put down any talk like that. She was a very impressive lady. She coached the debate club, which I participated in.

I became active in extracurricular activities once I discovered that I didn't have the coordination or the size I needed to play high school or junior high sports. When I was in tenth grade, a friend and I decided the school needed a newspaper so we started one. We just did it, and later on we got permission. Going into my last year as a senior I ran for student council president. I came in a close second. As you can imagine I was running as the nerd candidate.

*Q: Did you find were either ethnic or class differences, you know nerds versus jocks or*

*something. Were they an important part of the school society?*

BROWN: No, but as time went by and you grew up you recognized there were socio-economic differences. You got sorted into college prep or home economics or shop majors. That was a socio-economic stratification too. About half of the school was college prep. I wouldn't say there was a huge disparity of wealth in our school but some of the families were white collar and some were blue collar.

*Q: How did you feel about /did the Soviet menace play much of a role or not?*

BROWN: Oh sure. I remember one bomb drill. That was in elementary school. We all went to the cafeteria and hid underneath the benches and tables. By the time I was in ninth grade, 1956, we were very conscious of the cold war, I guess me, more than many of the others, because I was avidly interested in world affairs or current affairs. How many ten year olds do you know who would sit through and watch an entire Democratic convention and then get so excited about a Republican Convention? That was 1952, when conventions were fun to watch.

*Q: Adlai Stevenson was the candidate.*

BROWN: Adlai Stevenson and Dwight David Eisenhower, and both of them had to fight hard to win their nominations. Concerning the Cold War, what I remember most then would be the Hungarian uprising and Sputnik. And as I was finishing high school, there was the Cuban revolution. The missile crisis was two years later, during my sophomore year in college. Anyway it was all there and a backdrop. We grew up knowing about the draft. You needed to go register for the draft. I remember as a kid there were young men around the community still wearing their jackets they had brought back from Korea. We were kind of aware of all of this.

*Q: So many young people were engaged in one way or another or just interested in the Kennedy-Nixon election in 1960. Did that engage you?*

BROWN: You know it did. I graduated from high school in 1960. In the primaries, I was an enthusiastic backer of Kennedy from the beginning. I was off then to freshman year in university when the elections actually took place.

*Q: You were at Cornell.*

BROWN: Right. I was the third generation from my father's side of the family to go to Cornell. My granddad was in the Ag School, my father in engineering, I was the first liberal arts major.

*Q: How did the students respond to the election in 1960?*

BROWN: As I recall, there was a lot of interest. Certainly there would be a big crowd down in my freshman dorm to watch the debates. But we couldn't vote then.

*Q: But what about, say the iron curtain and all that. Did you have any particular interest in what was happening there? I mean in the communist world.*

BROWN: That was the principal motivation of my desire to learn Russian and choosing that over something that would have made a lot more sense. I never studied Spanish or French or German, for which our high school actually had capable teachers. I was drawn to international affairs quite early on. I am one of the very few people in my high school that ended up going for a career where--you know how in your high school yearbook, you have your picture and next to is recorded your ambition in life? I wrote "Foreign Service.' It would have been sometime early in my senior year. There it was in the yearbook. I was surprised to see that when I opened it up just before my 50th high school class reunion.

*Q: I find that remarkable because so few in our business really knew about it until they got out into the world. You know how it came across your radar?*

BROWN: Well all I can say is it must have come across the radar in the course of some of my high school social studies classes. Particularly the Problems of Democracy course that Mrs. Rhoads taught. I wanted to travel. I was just so keen on seeing the world and up until then, in fact up until after college when I joined the Foreign Service I had never been out of the eastern U.S. and eastern Canada.

*Q: Did you get jobs during the summer?*

BROWN: Yes. In succession: the year I graduated from high school I worked in the snack bar at a swim club not too far from home. The next year I worked on a production line in a factory where they printed plastic bags for Nabisco products mostly. Then for two years after that, I worked away from home as a relief operator on a pipeline run by the Atlantic Refining Company, a job my father lined up for me. That was coincidentally in upstate New York not too far from Ithaca, where Cornell is located. That was very familiar country to me. Perhaps I should have mentioned earlier that my dad's family all originated from upstate New York, the Finger Lakes area, an area I had been visiting for years with the family.

*Q: What sort of professions were in your family? Were they farmers or what?*

BROWN: My cousin Anne is the one who does all the genealogy. My family goes back to England or much of it. Roger Williams, the free thinker and founder of the Rhode Island Colony, was a direct ancestor. As you trace through the generations, my ancestors moved steadily west as farmers through New York and upstate Pennsylvania. Then in the 19th century the family records get a little thicker. Many were becoming businessmen in the small cities like Elmira and Binghamton and Syracuse. One ancestor, Sylvester Ballou, wrote some wonderful letters was during the civil war. He was recruited; well he volunteered, and ended up in the Secret Service. You know your diplomatic history. You know that it was established during the Lincoln administration, basically to protect the president. Some of the most cherished family memorabilia in my cousin's possession are

letters that he wrote home.

*Q: In the time you were in Ithaca and all was the civil rights situation in the south of interest? Was it a topic or was it way far away?*

BROWN: No, I wouldn't say that every student at my university was worked up about it but there were certainly a very large number who became not only just interested but quite active. I recall how rapidly it developed into a front burner concern. The integration of the high school in Little Rock and so forth had taken place while I was still in high school. But with the Kennedy Administration and Bobby Kennedy's particular role, once he became convinced that civil rights was *the* issue, the one issue that couldn't be ignored, it became very much front burner for all Americans, certainly for many of U.S. on campus.

If I have one regret, I guess that it was during the summer of the marches in the South, I didn't take part. I only recognized in retrospect that was one of those determining events in the course of U.S. history that I largely missed out on.

*Q: I somehow have a picture of one of the leaders of the black movement as students sitting in a chair with a rifle, sort of a wicker chair on Cornell campus. Did that happen or was there much happening at Cornell at the university?*

BROWN: Not while I was there. By the time I arrived at the university, Cornell had consciously begun to try much harder to recruit black students, giving out more scholarships and other help. I did see that the minority population was going up. There was a very diverse group of graduate students; Cornell has always been a very cosmopolitan university. It drew about half the student body from New York City, I think, so there was a lot of diversity on campus even before then. The difference was a conscious effort to increase the percentage of blacks on campus. Now the photo you recall was probably taken in 1969 when the Black Student Union, for I don't recall exactly which set of grievances, seized control of one of the main buildings at the university and wouldn't leave until they came to an understanding with the administration. By then I was out of the university and no longer in the U.S. I didn't follow it all that carefully but recall that it was one of the first confrontations within the civil rights movement between the white liberal activists and the blacks who felt they didn't need white guys fronting for them. I personally wasn't involved.

*Q: Was the role of women a subject of debate or concern at Cornell while you were there?*

BROWN: There was consciousness-raising going on. It wasn't something that during my years there really impacted on the men. Cornell in those days was about 75% male. Women were concentrated in the college of home economics, which was the best in the country, and in the arts college.

This was an era when sexual experimentation was first common. You can trace that

mostly to the fact that contraceptives became generally available. However, feminism and women's lib was really a late 60s phenomenon. I was in school in the early 60s. I would always say my class, 1964, was by later standards only very slightly radical.

*Q: What was your major?*

BROWN: Government. That is what they call Political Science at Cornell.

*Q: Did you concentrate on any particular area there?*

BROWN: I expected that I would concentrate when I got to grad school, so I wanted to have as broad a foundation as seemed possible. I did not take any further math which was probably a mistake. Up to then I was able to explore a lot of humanities outside the department as well as in it, for example, Russian literature and a semester in sociology which was quite fascinating. My science elective was botany, 12 credits worth, which reflected my dad's avocation.

*Q: The hollies.*

BROWN: Yes, the American holly business.

My government courses were pretty evenly divided between U.S. Government and international affairs, including quite strong interest in what was later on called nation building and economic development in Southeast Asia. Cornell had one of the leading Southeast Asian studies departments in the country, rivaled only by the University of Washington, Cal Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin, maybe also Yale. It was a really good department, not quite as radical as it became later. So it was by taking a course in government and politics in Southeast Asia that I was particularly interested in what was happening in Vietnam and Laos.

*Q: I have interviewed a number of people who during the 60s served in Indonesia. They had very strong opinions, not necessarily positive ones about Cornell and its outlook. It and the State Department seemed to be on opposite sides on most questions.*

BROWN: George McTurnan Kahin was the department head. He was also my undergraduate thesis advisor. That was not a very happy experience, especially because Kahin thought that the idea of undergraduates in the honors program doing dissertations was an absurdity. He pointed out that I did not have the real qualifications to do original research on Southeast Asian subjects. He was right, but I had taken on the subject basically I wanted to learn things. I saw it as a way to learn things. So the experience, I think it was a net plus though he and I didn't get on very well. It became very clear in the course of our readings that his view of U.S. policy in that part of the world were considerably more radical than my own. I was fascinated by counter insurgency doctrines which were getting a lot of discussion and study then. This was before any sharp divergence of opinion, at least outside academic circles, over for example the strong interest and disposition of the Kennedy administration to be pro-active in that part of the

world.

*Q: Were you at Cornell when the Cuban Missile Crisis came up?*

BROWN: I certainly was. Let's see, it would have been at the beginning of my sophomore year. I remember very well the night Kennedy made his speech to the American people. My fraternity brothers and I tuned in and afterward several of U.S. sophomores went upstairs and gathered in the room of one of the guys who had a car on campus. We got out a map and started looking for places to head for if the bombs started falling. I mean, it was very credible. It was a scary week.

*Q: Well, you graduated what year?*

BROWN: 1964.

*Q: What were you looking at then?*

BROWN: Well, I assumed like most of my colleagues in the government class that I would go to law school. I had been accepted at a couple of very good law schools. And I realized, as I got near graduation and afterwards, that I really did not have the vocation at that point for the law. I hadn't really known any lawyers. I didn't have much of an idea what they did. I told my dad this, I think during Easter holiday. He said, 'Why don't you go over and talk to Mr. Harris?" He was a family friend and was a lawyer. I did, and he doesn't know that he single-handedly talked me out of going on to law school. Mr. Harris went on and on about how great it was to be rich and have a good life. Of course I wanted to hear the idealistic view. I have known many fine lawyers subsequently, and always I go back and recognize that that point was a fork in the road.

The thing was that in September of 1963 I had also taken the Foreign Service exam and did rather well on it. They asked me, did I want to go on with the process? I said yes, I did. I was telling myself that the reason I enjoyed taking the exam so much was because it wasn't something I felt I had to do. There was no pressure, but my reaction to the written exam was 'Boy, what a great workout that was!' I had never seen a test that covered so much territory; it was really an interesting contrast to the Graduate Record Exams that tended to be considerably narrower in scope.

When in March or April of that year, 1964, I went down to Washington for the oral exam; again I really enjoyed the experience. I recall a three hour interrogation by a group of three men who impressed me a great deal by their erudition and their interest in me. So, after graduation, after spending quite a few weeks that last summer working as a relief milkman down at the seashore for Sealtest Dairy, I realized that I was not -- at least at that point in my life -- ready for law school. Sometime in the middle of August I got a telephone call through to the Personnel Bureau and then to somebody, I guess, in the Board of Examiners. I said “I have passed these tests and I was told that I have been accepted as a potential Foreign Service officer. Can you take me right now?” The answer, to my great pleasure, was 'Yes.'

The reason for that, I learned subsequently, if I got the details right, was that the department had just been told by the White House to recruit 300 more officers. It had been given authority to do that in anticipation of the big buildup in Vietnam. So I was hired to enter the Foreign Service in the class that began at the end of October, 1964, in other words, when I was just four months out of university. I was the youngest officer in my junior Foreign Service officer class and I think probably for a while the youngest officer in the entire department.

*Q: You would have been, yes.*

BROWN: Anyway, during most of September and October I volunteered to help out a man who was running for office, running for Congress in our constituency, which generally voted about 60/40 Republican. He had a real chance because it was 1964, and Barry Goldwater was leading the Republican ticket. So I was his driver for six or seven weeks, quite a memorable experience. I had left him before election eve to go down to Washington. The fellow got 49% of the vote. It was the closest a Democrat had come to winning a seat in Congress since the Great Depression in that part of the country.

*Q: How were your friends and family and all treating Vietnam at this time?*

BROWN: This was before Vietnam became an issue on campus. I had other friends in the same major who were quite interested. On campus, maybe one man in four or five was in ROTC. So they were following developments in Southeast Asia fairly carefully. A number of my fraternity brothers and other friends ended up serving a one year tour there. All those that I kept track of came back in good shape. I was one of a very few from my class who ended up staying in Vietnam for longer than that minimal requirement.

*Q: Well when you came into the Foreign Service, this was '64 still?*

BROWN: October, '64, yes.

*Q: Did they tell you if you come in, you may serve in Vietnam? Was that sort of a precondition?*

BROWN: No it was not. Actually, of my intake, the 44th A-100 class, I was the only one who went directly to Vietnam. At first they told me that I would learn French and go to Laos. That was changed without any consultation and I learned I was going to Vietnam when they announced the assignments late in December. I had 24 weeks in language training. They realized they had to train a lot of people so instead of teaching people Vietnamese for 50 weeks, which had been the norm at FSI, and had developed a shorter course, 24 weeks, which obviously was not as good a foundation. The rest of my Vietnamese language training cohort, 23 of them, were bound for jobs in USAID, its field operations, public safety division and so forth. So we had 24 weeks of language training. The teachers were all northerners, but did a fairly good job of teaching us; in fact I am impressed when I think back on it, teaching U.S. the southern dialect. That was it. I also had a month of consular training after language training. I arrived in Saigon on July 30,

1965.

*Q: I want to go back and talk just a bit about the A-100 course. What was the composition of it and how did you view the training you got there?*

BROWN: Well there were about 35 of us. I was impressed by most of my cohort. Everyone but me had some grad school or some work experience. Quite a few had done time in the service. We all got along pretty well I think, but I was definitely the one who was wet behind the ears. The two guys who ran the course, Garry Sohlen and Bob Barnett, were both, I thought, very level-headed people who had put together a good introduction to the Foreign Service. I was very much in a receptive mode. I wished the orientation had gone on longer, but on the other hand I was very eager to get to work. So it was a good time, a very good year. It also gave me an opportunity to know my grandmother better as an adult. My father's mother lived in Silver Spring, and I stayed at her house.

*Q: How did the family feel about the Foreign Service and all of that?*

BROWN: Well, nobody tried to talk me out of it. It was always hard to figure out what my dad was thinking. I don't recall his expressing a strong opinion one way or another about my future. It was "if that is what you want to do, then do it and do the best you can." My mother too. They were supportive. I think they were also probably a bit apprehensive.

My parents had been quite ready for me to go to law school, but that was something that bothered me. I felt really that I was more of a drag on the family finances than I ought to be. So, thinking about going into the Foreign Service rather than law school, it seemed to me that if I went into the service, I could always change my mind later on, go to law school with some money saved up. Anyway, once committed to the Foreign Service, I pretty much dropped the idea of law school.

*Q: Did you have any girl friend at that time or marriage thoughts?*

BROWN: At that time, no, I did not have a serious girlfriend. There was a girl that I met in my senior year of high school with whom I was very much in love for several years. However, afterward we were in different schools far apart and ultimately drifted apart after three years. I dated often enough but with no serious relationships after that until some years later.

*Q: When you were going to Vietnam and you were in the State Department by this time, were people commiserating with you or saying that sounds like a good deal or what? I mean within your class or other people at the State Department.*

BROWN: I was obviously pleased. People in my class knew that I was pleased. They weren't going to go around discouraging me. The most I heard was 'well, be careful, you know.' They mostly congratulated me.

*Q: Where did you go? Tell me about going to Vietnam.*

BROWN: Just generally, I think at least among young uncommitted bachelors or whatever, at that time just kind of extrapolating from people I knew in Saigon, service in Vietnam wasn't regarded as a hardship. It was interesting, exciting, and you were more likely to have something interesting to do than in most JOT assignments.

*Q: A lot better than Tijuana.*

BROWN: Exactly. After I had been in Vietnam for two years, the Department's suggestion as a reward for serving my country in Vietnam was to offer me the visa line in Santo Domingo. While I had liked consular work, the idea of an ongoing assignment being the visa line in a post like Santo Domingo wasn't too exciting. We will get back to that.

*Q: Well when you got to Saigon what did you do?*

BROWN: Well I was a COT.

*Q: Consular officer in training.*

BROWN: Right. My first assignment was in the consular section. There were no Embassy families in Saigon anymore. The wives and children had been sent home. I can't recall exactly when that happened but it was fairly recent when I arrived in the summer of 1965. The other fairly recent thing was the consular section on the first floor of the chancery on Ham Nghi Street had been blown up. The VC had filled a taxi with plastic explosive and a volunteer drove it into the building. It was the consular section that had taken the heaviest hit. A couple of local employees had been killed. Other Vietnamese and American staff had been injured badly, mostly by flying glass including the next most junior officer in the section of four American officers, Edie Smith. She had just come back to work about the time I arrived. Anyway, the consulate was now rehoused in a prefab building that had been erected in a much larger compound where they were starting work on a new embassy building. It was just up the street from the Presidential Palace.

There were four of U.S. in the consular section. The chief of section was a fellow named Hugh Douglas. He was certainly a preppy Ivy Leaguer kind of guy. I thought he was really cool. He ran a happy shop. Tom Wilson and Edie Smith were also veteran consular officers. To me fell, in particular, responsibility for deaths and estates and other special consular services including maritime affairs. Tom or Edie were always available to back me up depending on whatever problem I would get. But very quickly I had 20 or 30 deaths and estates cases on my desk. There were a lot of people arriving in Saigon who were civilians working in as contractors and so forth. As the numbers went up, the number who dropped dead or died for whatever reason or another also went up.

I also had a very memorable case where a tugboat captain came into the office one afternoon and demanded to speak to a consular officer. The local staff called me to come out and talk to this fellow. He said "I have come just arrived in Saigon after sailing halfway around the world towing a refrigerator barge. I would like a consular search of my vessel for drugs and hidden narcotics. I have a mutiny on my hands." Well, I asked him to wait for a second. I spoke with the boss and came back out and said, "Yes, I think that can be arranged." I asked him come back the next day to make more definite arrangements.

Now, as he left the office, another man who'd been sitting in the corner got up, and he said to me I am so and so, the cook [of that same vessel]. I just want you to know on behalf of the crew that the captain is raving nuts, crazy." That is actually what turned out to be the situation. But it was not until several days later that we managed to get the tugboat captain examined by a psychiatrist at the U.S. naval hospital. On the basis of that diagnosis, the consul general took the responsibility of relieving him of duty until such time as his company could make arrangements. You can imagine: this was an American company. It immediately sent out a lawyer who was out for blood, but after he talked to the Captain for a few minutes he also saw the problem. That was my first really memorable experience in the Foreign Service.

*Q: How did you find working with the military?*

BROWN: I didn't actually work much with them at first. It was only after six months I got moved into the administrative section of the embassy, specifically into the personnel unit. The minister counselor, John George Bacon, conceived a plan where the embassy could make a contribution to the build-up of U.S. field operations. It was to deploy a team to go out into the provinces to screen and recruit Vietnamese who would be capable of working in some U.S. Operations Mission provincial offices. Now this was before CORDS, before OCO. Are you familiar with those acronyms?

*Q: Well you had better spell it out because these should be transcribed.*

BROWN: OK, well USAID and U.S. Information Agency and the military were all basically running their own separate activities in rural Vietnam at that time. There was already a lot of thought on how the pacification program could be unified and made more coherent and effective. But in the spring of 1966, that was still on the drawing board. The problem the admin counselor saw was the embassy could not recruit qualified personnel to work in provincial offices. So I and a veteran personnel officer, middle grade -- well, Pat Daly seemed like a veteran to me. I guess she was on her third tour of duty. With a couple of FSNs, we formed up a recruitment team.

That was how I got to see Vietnam for the first time outside Saigon. Ultimately we got to about 30 provinces. The whole thing was really a fiasco. We were successful in recruiting very few people, mostly because anybody who had learned any English didn't stay in the provinces. They went to Saigon or some other large city where the work was. But the idea was that we wanted to get the local people with us, people with local knowledge and

connections. I think it was fairly obvious after a month or so that it wasn't a very efficient way to recruit. Nonetheless, it was great way for me to see Vietnam.

The admin chief, Mr. Bacon, was finally persuaded that we weren't accomplishing too much and agreed to fold up the operation and let me move on to another posting in the political section, but only after I had written an account of what we had been doing for State Magazine. I went through several drafts there because I tried to write objectively about it. That wasn't what Mr. Bacon had in mind. If you have access to all those files going back to sometime in the autumn of 1966 you will probably find that story which was finally written to Mr. Bacon's satisfaction and I was allowed to go to the provincial reporting unit of the political section.

In the nearly six months that I had been on the roving recruitment team, I had begun to understand the dynamics of the U.S. advisory activity. Mostly I was meeting U.S. civilian officials, of course but in most province towns, the U.S. compounds were co-located or close enough that they shared a mess with the military. It wasn't until I began to do political reporting that I began to have much of a relationship with the uniformed services.

*Q: Well, early on did you get to travel around much?*

BROWN: I have described my time in the personnel section where we spent two or three days each in perhaps 30 provincial capitals altogether, generally flying in on these little Air America planes,. I understood what was going on a little better than I had before.

Then I got a real education during my time in the political section, from the beginning of my second year in Vietnam. The political section in the embassy of those days was big of course. It was headed by a legendary fellow, Phil Habib, who was political counselor then. He had altogether 25 or 30 staff. Many were involuntary bachelors and were not real happy about it. They were ready to move on as soon as people could be found to take their jobs. But the real bachelors were quite enthusiastic and happy to be doing jobs that seemed more than usually important.

There were people who were just immediately my senior, that is to say second and third tour officers who were already legends themselves. David Engel was one. John Negroponte was another. These were guys who made a name for themselves covering the military uprising against the Diem government and generally keeping track, reporting to the State Department, on the deteriorating political and security situation. I was very much impressed by them. They were the sort that we younger people took our cue from. I say younger, because at this point, I was by far still the youngest around. The provincial reporting unit had about ten officers altogether. Eight of U.S. were first tour or second tour officers, still junior officers. We were each assigned a swath of Vietnam, a number of provinces where we were to go out to travel around extensively, and report back to the embassy what seemed to be going on, what people seemed to be talking about, to the extent that we could discern what they were thinking about. In effect, we were expected to report whether the Saigon government was an effective force. Regarding the

security situation, our job was to report what people were saying about the communists, about the Saigon government, and so forth and so on. It was a very tumultuous time. After the Diem brothers fell, South Vietnam went through changes of leadership several times before things stabilized. There was also a great deal of seething going on, religious frictions, assertions of grievances and pleas for help. The head of the Provincial Reporting Unit was Dick Teare who I think may have been an 0-6. This was when State still had 0-8s and 0-7s. It was sometime that year that I was promoted from 8 to 7. Our deputy unit head was also an 0-6. That was David Lambertson. These were guys who had already spent a few years in-country and were role models, very solid role models.

I was assigned responsibility for six provinces to the immediate north, south and east of Saigon. It was not a real hotbed of political activity. In fact it soon became really clear to me that although there was some reporting that could be done during the election of a constituent assembly, really the notion of political life in those provinces was pretty fanciful. So increasingly I found myself reporting on what I could learn or was told by people in the provinces about the contest with the communists. In other words the so-called progress of the pacification program. It wasn't easy either. My language skills were still rudimentary and almost entirely oral at that time. So while it was certainly survival grade, OK for social conversation, I had a long way to go before it became useful in my work. After three or four months, however, I had visited all the provinces I had been assigned and was beginning to get some confidence in doing this work.

That was when the USAID advisors were merged into something called the Office of Civilian Operations, or OCO. In a nominal way, the USAID people of various stripes, including police advisors and the development advisors and the information agency people, all became part of one organization, OCO, the Office of Civilian Operations.

OCO's chief in the third corps tactical area was John Paul Vann. Vann already had a huge reputation. He had gone to Vietnam first as a Lt. Colonel and had been assigned as senior advisor to the Vietnamese 7th Division. He had very strong views about the way the war was being fought, about the strategies which had been endorsed by the senior military staff and when he didn't get much of a hearing from senior officers he had gone public and talked to lots of reporters. This was in 1962-1963. He made very clear his beliefs that the war and counterinsurgency were going the wrong way. This ended up in John's being cashiered from the army. He worked for a while as a civilian for a defense contractor, one of the aerospace companies, but about a year later he was back in Vietnam as a USAID employee. He was initially the civilian senior advisor for Hau Nghia Province, not too far from Saigon. When I first met him, he had just been promoted to head the OCO operation in III Corps, eleven provinces that surrounded Saigon/Cholon like a donut.

The III Corps area was the part of southern Vietnam that's called the 'eastern region,' or Mien Dong. It's mostly a low plateau, in contrast to Mien Tay, the vast, very watery Mekong Delta. Mien Dong is an area generally characterized by red earth; it's a sort of a piedmont area; the altitude gradually rises as you go to the east and the north. Now, it had therefore a lot of rubber plantations, a lot of small towns, essentially province and district towns, and not too much further, what was essentially jungle. Along some of the

principal highways were the bulk of the refugee Catholic population, people who had fled south in 1954 when the French pulled out after signing the Geneva agreement that partitioned Vietnam pending further developments. Perhaps a million Vietnamese moved south. Many of them, fervent Catholics who had come from rural areas in the north, had been deliberately resettled by the Diem regime in the south along highways on the eastern side of what I had come to think of as my parish. So they were perhaps the most vocal political force in my area at that time. To the extent I did political reporting it was often about them. They had been huge loyalists of the Diem regime and were not happy with what they saw as his overthrow by elements encouraged by the U.S. They were quite ready to bend my ear about that. Each parish was organized around a parish priest who was particularly vocal in his opinions.

Anyhow, back to John Paul Vann. Shortly after he was appointed to lead the civilian effort in III Corps, I thought I had better go introduce myself. He said. "Oh, you are Brown. I have wanted to meet you. You are going to be my political advisor." Actually it turned out he had already been doing a fair amount of thinking about this.

Stu, have you ever interviewed Frank Scotton?

*Q: I don't think so.*

BROWN: Frank is in San Diego now. You should talk with him if you can. Frank was a USIA officer, and practically legendary. He has written a book about the pacification program which I haven't read yet, but I have been told by others that it is a must read.

*Q: Well as a matter of fact, now that you say that, I haven't interviewed him but it was suggested that I contact him. I did contact him and he said thanks, but no thanks.*

BROWN: OK, well that would not be unusual, I think.

Frank Scotton had been in Central Vietnam in the II Corps area. I guess he was ultimately the lead public affairs guy. He realized that if we were to accomplish anything at all in Vietnam, we needed much better information on how things were going on the ground. Working with U.S. Special Forces advisors, Frank recruited particularly savvy members from the so-called CIDG, or Civilian Irregular Defense Groups, who were the irregulars that our Special Forces teams worked with. Ultimately, Frank had managed a cadre of about 50 individuals who were trained as *attitude surveyors*, organized in groups of three in a cell type structure. They were trained to go into contested villages and find out quite accurately what had been happening.

Well, it turned out the fellow who had been appointed the head of OCO in II Corps didn't really see any point in having people like that as part of his operation. So Frank had gone to John Vann and said, "John, I have got these people. I think they are needed; are you interested?" Vann said, "Hell, yes." So 30 of them ended up working for OCO III Corps. I was assigned by Vann basically to supervise their deployment and serve as their backstop management. Teams of three men each were assigned to work for our advisors

in eight provinces of III Corps.
Some others of Scotton's attitude surveyors were picked up by the CORDS Evaluation office, working out of Saigon. Are you familiar with that group? These were a team of Americans who had good solid provincial work experience and who got recruited by Bob Komer to serve as an evaluation section and they had as local staff some of the attitude surveyors that Scotton had trained.

Most of Scotton's cadre ended up in III Corps, however. I was at that time, under the agreement between State and other agencies that led to the formation of OCO, the Office of Civil Operations, one of eight provincial reporters who were assigned to these OCO regional offices, one office in each of the four corps areas. So there were two of U.S. at least nominally in each corps area, one of whom had been actually detailed to OCO and the other supposedly working directly for the embassy. It was kind of messy on paper but it worked out fairly well. From that point on, I was reporting both to Vann and to the embassy in Saigon. I was provided with a house and some staff support in Bien Hoa, which was the headquarters town for the III Corps area.

*Q: Today is 21 May 2015. This is with David Brown. David, do you remember where we left off?*

BROWN: We were talking about the fertile period just before the formation of the CORDS organization.

*Q: How did you feel, people you were talking to and all, what were the prospects? Were you optimistic, pessimistic or what?*

BROWN: Stu, I want to reiterate I was a very young and inexperienced officer. By virtue of some work in college, I had become familiar with the theory of counterinsurgency, but I had very little practical experience. I was just getting my feet wet, so to speak, in doing reporting. It was at that time a very different life than what you would experience at a normal embassy. Everybody had plenty of work but the structure was so fluid. Of course we were working outside of Saigon in an environment really different from your normal capital city situation, so it was a case of learning, not so much by modeling of the older folks in the section although they were available readily to consult, but really just jumping and doing it.

Of course, we provincial reporters could read each other's work in the unit's reading file when we visited Saigon. About the time I was getting started in the III Corps area my colleague David G. Brown was up in II Corps, in the highlands area directly north. As a result, around the embassy, people who knew U.S. both, to make a distinction they'd talk about David Highlands Brown and David Lowlands Brown.

The establishment of OCO, the Office of Civilian Operations, was a waystation in the process which led to the formation of the CORDS organization. CORDS stands for Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support. OCO amalgamated all of the civilian elements: people from AID, USIA, and in AID, the police advisors and rural

development specialists and economists. CORDS then combined the civilians and the military advisors to provincial and district government, as a unit of MACV, the military assistance command, in all of South Vietnam's 53 provinces.

I heard that General Westmoreland would not agree to this unification of the civilian and military advisory organizations unless it was under MACV's command; perhaps that's true. As it turned out, CORDS had a very distinct 'personality. ' It gave civilian advisors, who often had a lot more useful experience working with the province and district administrations, a much better lever to influence U.S. military thinking, the thinking of our co-workers on the district and province teams in the first instance, and also thinking higher up the line.

For most of the people who became the CORDS organization, it was an experience in learning what had gone wrong with the pacification program so far.

Fortunately, there were a number of people like John Vann who had a very clear sense of where we needed to go and had a doctrine and a philosophy of supporting both the Vietnamese military and the Vietnamese civil structure in the effort to cope with the Communist insurgency. We had to learn which strategies worked and which did not. The reason I emphasize that is because there were now several hundred thousand American troops in country. Not advisors, but U.S. fighting units. At the same time they were trying to find and engage communist main force units, they were also providing some protection to those who were working with the population where that was possible. The U.S. Forces in the country had arrived not a moment too soon because the communist forces had definitely gotten the upper hand in 1963-1965. The government troops were demoralized and essentially on the defensive. The political situation was chaotic. If the U.S. troops hadn't intervened and helped to stabilize the situation and create some cover for the pacification, I suspect it wouldn't have been possible.

My practical engagement with the pacification program dates from late 1966, by which time it was becoming clear to some of U.S. that while American military intervention had bought time and an opportunity to truly defeat the insurgency and rebuild a viable South Vietnamese state, a lot more was going to be needed. This is where particular strategies of pacification and nation building became very important. Generally, this was very poorly understood, even in MACV, within the U.S. military command, and I think it was the same back in Washington. MACV under General Westmoreland regarded CORDS and its work as a sideshow to the 'real war.' It was going to be a period of several years where the tactics of trying to fight a main force war, which was MACV's principal concern and the requirements of pacification and the nation building program were more or less in conflict.

My job was a very small part of it. I was essentially somebody who had this remarkable mandate for a 23 of 24 year-old officer to travel a lot, talk to a lot of people, observe a lot and write down what I saw. As 1967 passed by, I felt increasingly at home and comfortable in what I was doing. My language skills, while still rather rough-hewn, had developed to the point where I could actually work fairly effectively. I had the

responsibility for this tremendous asset that I mentioned earlier, what we called the "Rural Technical Teams." These were our Vietnamese "attitude surveyors," very well-trained men who were capable of going into contested areas and finding out the truth about what was going on there. Whether they were investigating an incident or trying to understand ordinary folks' attitudes towards the war and the politics and the military dimensions, or just their thoughts on their own struggle to keep home and family together. Even now, I can't think of a job I really enjoyed more in the sense that I was totally engaged. I thought it was important work, I had a significant role, and I was doing it well. Every now and then there would be feedback either from the embassy or usually from Washington. I recall one time my boss in Saigon phoned and said, "We have just gotten a message back. Averell Harriman wrote on the margins of one of your recent reports that 'This is exactly the kind of reporting we need from Vietnam and we need lots more of it.'" You can imagine what an ego trip that was. Harriman at that point was one of the President's closest advisors.

*Q: I was wondering did you have a problem dealing with a situation where there was considerable corruption, I mean at least according to our likes. Young Americans, particularly college students, don't run across this much. Sometimes it is not apparent. Sometimes this can warp your way of looking at things. Did this affect you or not?*

BROWN: Corruption was endemic, and a fact of life. I spent a lot of time and effort trying to understand it, and wrote about it some. In Vietnam, corruption of a sort is just deeply ingrained in the culture, the idea that in order to get something, shall we say if you ask a favor, somebody needs to be compensated. But it had gotten out of control for two reasons. Maybe they are the same thing. There was runaway inflation at the time. Lots of money was being pumped into the economy which was driving up prices. You had a lot of free-spending Americans. At the same time the salaries of government officials, whether you were a teacher or an administrator or a military officer, your official pay was increasingly inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living. So there was a lot of incentive for people to not only take bribes but take more bribes and take bigger bribes. It all became clear to me as I was beginning to understand how the South Vietnamese government administration was organized in the area that I worked. Much of this had been institutionalized. People who were on the take in small ways were kicking back fairly large sums, in fact they were expected to, as a condition of getting the jobs they had. Kicking back a lot of money which went ultimately to people at the top, the generals and so forth. So it wasn't pretty and I wrestled with it a lot.

Finally I made a distinction in my own mind which I think is the correct one. There were two kinds of corruption. "White corruption" is when you get what you pay for. If you bribe an official, he needs to stay bribed. He will deliver whatever he promised. "Black corruption" was just ripping off anybody who was in a position to be ripped off. It could be ordinary folks, small businessmen and so forth. Do you follow my meaning here?

*Q: Yes. You are raising a very interesting point. I think it behooves training of any future Foreign Service people, and they are the ones who deal overseas to understand the distinction between the two. I think all of U.S. who served in difficult countries can*

*understand the difference between the corruptions. Anyway, go on.*

BROWN: I think we have pretty well exhausted that one for now. But it does point out another thing. When you send large numbers of Americans to a country like South Vietnam where they had 20 million people altogether, so there was one American for every 40 Vietnamese, you are going to have all kinds of random impacts on the society. It really didn't matter how culturally sophisticated some people were, how much training, how much effort to try to understand Vietnam and work with the culture, in fact our overall impact on Vietnamese society tended to disintegrate it.

In one way or another, we generated lots of refugees, people who had been uprooted from where they had been and moved in closer to cities where they could be protected. But they in many cases lost their livelihood, the integrity of their family life. That was one thing. Then in the cities themselves or anywhere near there was a large American base, an underground economy developed around the opportunities that came from providing services that individual Americans wanted, and redirecting the stuff that came out of the PX. So we had, as sort of an unintended consequence of the way the U.S. presence built up in Vietnam, a really unfortunate distorting effect on Vietnamese culture. This was one of the things that really did gnaw on thoughtful anti-Communist Vietnamese even as they realized that without American assistance, their country probably would have collapsed and been overrun quite a bit earlier than it ultimately was.

I found myself thinking a lot, trying to understand what it was that the South Vietnamese were fighting for. In other words, why an individual chose to support the idea of the southern government, non-communist. I found it difficult to repress in my own mind the notion that the southern regime and system was so flawed that it was not really a very attractive ally for the U.S. This was I suspect an intellectual problem that a lot of my colleagues also dealt with. OK, I have said all that, and now you can ask me some more questions.

*Q: Let's continue what you were up to then. You moved to where and doing what?*

BROWN: I was living in Bien Hoa in housing provided by CORDS and working in the office building that housed the CORDS III Corps headquarters there. Bien Hoa is about 20 miles up the road from Saigon, north and east. It was a good-sized town. I guess its normal population prewar had been 50 to 100 thousand depending on where you drew the city boundary. It had swollen to three times that by 1967 as people moved in from more contested areas. There were a lot of military bases in the area. The air base was used by both Vietnamese and Americans. And to the east a little bit was Long Binh Post, which was the U.S. logistics center for the southern part of South Vietnam. So I had an office. I had both clerical and operational support from CORDS, and a deputy, a fellow named Ollie Davidson who had been a USAID district rep. I got along very well with him and was delighted to have his support and friendship. Mr. Vann agreed that Ollie could work with me and help with deploying the attitude survey teams. That enabled me to stay on the move. Now I was responsible for reporting in 11 provinces. I traveled to one province or another every week, usually spending a couple of nights in that province town or in

one of the districts.

*Q: At that time, was there a sort of province evaluation system? Could you spend a night in a town and that sort of thing?*

BROWN: Well the formal evaluation system didn't exist yet. But yes, I could spend the night. You learn pretty quickly to be very mindful of the security situation which could be very different up and down the same road a mile or two in either direction. So usually when traveling the first thing I would do was to check in with the province senior advisor or his intelligence officer or whoever and find out what might be feasible and what might not be feasible in terms of my own plans. As time went by. I developed some friendships with Vietnamese in many of these places, so I could drop in on them and have a useful conversation. But I have to confess that my best sources of information were usually members of the American province and district teams. They were very often happy to talk and talk about things that couldn't be easily sent up through formal channels. So I was traveling into the provinces a few nights a week, putting in an average 60-70 hour work week. But I enjoyed it, so it didn't feel much like work. It was exciting and again excitement came from the belief that what we were sending up through channels was making a substantial difference, an important difference. I would also go to Saigon usually towards the weekend to drop off some drafts for my bosses to scrub and then send forward, and for me to get a little bit of R&R.

*Q: You were saying that sometimes you had conversations that you couldn't report. Does this mean there was a reason you couldn't report it or because nobody was interested or what?*

BROWN: Oh no, I wasn't speaking so much about myself. Having nothing to lose, I was really fearless. Let's say you're a captain assigned as a district advisor and you think things are going to hell but your boss, the province senior advisor just doesn't agree with you. Or somebody further up in the chain of command doesn't want to know. Often, I found that people, both civilians and military advisors, would talk more freely with me. It was impossible for them to actually write down some things and send them through channels. Of course I had to be careful not to betray those confidences, to rewrite them in a way that I guess my sources anticipated I would.

*Q: Well when you got back to Saigon and all, would you explain some of the nuances of what you were reporting?*

BROWN: I had great respect for people in the political section, both their wisdom and their dedication up to and including the counselor, Phil Habib. Up to and just after the Tet attacks at the beginning of February, 1968, there was a fairly liberal reporting machine in the sense that, I think, everybody on the embassy side and in CORDS, people accepted that we were trying to solve a problem. We didn't have the answers yet but we probably could find them if we honestly assessed the situation and experimented. But that stopped very dramatically when Washington reacted to the events of February, 1968.

*Q: You said something that I think we are all familiar with. That is the problem of layering of a military system where if an officer had responsibility for a village or area what have you, if things weren't going well, he was considered responsible for it so it was almost a career view the military system he had to report very optimistically. Was this true?*

BROWN: Well there was a bias in that direction definitely. It was exacerbated by the fact most of the military officers -- I am talking now about advisors to the Vietnamese government, of course the ones I met most of the time -- tended to serve much shorter tours than the civilians in the CORT system. Typically a guy who was trained as an advisor by the Army or the Marines would be six months in one job and then six months in another job and then go home. Maybe he would come back for another tour later on but the conventional wisdom was that it took six months in such a post just to find your way around

*Q: I found after I had been in Vietnam about six months I was on some committees, and there were military officers there, all of a sudden after six months I had better historical perspective than the other people on the committee because they were changing so often.*

BROWN: This is when you were working there as consul general?

*Q: Yes.*

BROWN: Probably with a lot of interaction with the military police and so forth?

*Q: That sort of thing, yes. The personnel system in the military in some respects is designed for training or career enhancement as opposed to effectiveness.*

BROWN: Yes, and within the system there was a bias or systemic distortion. There were also many very impressive guys in uniform and out who were in some cases working in jobs they sought and in other cases they were doing what they assigned to do but were extremely conscientious. They cared very much to do those jobs well.

*Q: I agree with you completely. The problem being many of them by their system weren't given a chance to really understand the system in dealing with it.*

BROWN: It is possible, and some did extend their tours of duty. But that wasn't all that common particularly in cases where people had families, wives and children and so forth that they were eager to get home to. Now speaking of extending tours of duty, we touched on this the other day. As soon as I got towards the end of my second year in Vietnam, towards the summer of 1967. Somebody back in the junior officer development program thought I should be moving on.

I thought about that, and the political section agreed to send back a message saying David E. Brown wants to spend another year here in Vietnam and we propose he be assigned as a regular political section officer. Of course that was approved. That brought me through

my third full year in Vietnam. Now, I ended up serving a fourth year. I will talk about that a little bit later. So I had effectively two years as a member of the reporting unit in the embassy political section and was at the same time responsible to reporting to John Vann, the deputy for CORDS in the III Corps area, which was a very big operation. Considering all the potential that a situation like that has for argument over what I was supposed to be doing and how I was supposed to be doing it, it worked better than you might expect.

But by the end of my second year as a political officer I was getting some feedback from the embassy that I was perhaps a little overcommitted to Vann. Nobody came right out and said it, but it seems they felt I was going off the reservation. I mention that only to say it is a fairly tough thing to have two sets of bosses, one of them being sort of the exceedingly charismatic leader that Vann was. He would not ask anybody to do anything he was not ready to do himself. He had enormous self-confidence based on his own conviction that he at least understood the nature of the problem and had some answers to it. We got along real well. I was definitely working for a larger than life sort of person. Neal Sheehan captured him pretty well in his book, "A Bright and Shining Lie." When Sheehan wrote that book, he captured John, warts and all. It is a damn good book.

*Q: Excellent book, yes.*

BROWN: So what else do you want to know here? Should we talk about the Tet attacks?

*Q: Yes.*

BROWN: OK. I had been on home leave for about a month, and I got back to Vietnam after Christmas, 1967. So actually I was just plugging back in, catching up to what had been going on, when South Vietnam shut down for the Tet holiday. A lot of people were on leave, reuniting with their families. Many Americans took the opportunity of an extended holiday to fly over to Thailand or someplace on R&R. A lot of the Vietnamese army units had given half their men a furlough. It was 'understood' that neither our side nor the Communists would desecrate the New Year. They never had.

So, they caught U.S. with our socks down. I woke up quite early in the morning of the first day of the New Year and heard shooting, a lot of small arms fire not far away from an army advisory compound up the road. We didn't have a phone at the place where I lived, so there was no way to check in to find what was going on. There were three or four other Americans that lived there. We huddled together and tried to figure out what was happening. After the sun was well up, we could still hear sporadic small arms fire in several directions. We finally decided to get in my vehicle and go down to the headquarters building and see if anybody could tell U.S. what was happening.

That was where I learned there was fighting going on all over the place. Near Bien Hoa City there were no major attacks but there were small units, squad-sized or maybe platoon-sized guerilla units that had infiltrated and were harassing police stations and various outposts. That was pretty much brought under control in the morning hours. There was a company-sized unit going to ground in a very heavily populated area across

the main gate of the air base. Upwards of a battalion of VC attacked the II Field Force headquarters over on the main highway. They did not achieve any great success and in fact were decimated.

While I was waiting to see what would happen next, I was talking to anybody who seemed to know anything. I decided also to make myself useful and spent much of that day interpreting for an Australian surgical team which had been assigned to the local hospital. They were dealing with an awful lot of civilian and military casualties. All of their interpreters had been given holiday, and the hospital staff had also mostly gone home to greet the New Year, so they were having difficulty.

Late in the afternoon, somebody tipped me off that something was about to happen out at the airbase. I went up the road that way and got as close as I could. I discovered all the armored vehicles that were available had been lined up along the highway with their barrels trained on the heavily populated area across from the main gate to the air base, where, it was said, the VC company had gone to ground. The tanks and armored cars proceeded to shoot off their 50 caliber weapons, firing into that area for 15-20 minutes, an awful fusillade. I understood later that the civilians that live in that area, which was mostly lean-to shacks, refugee housing, had evacuated before all that went on, but to me it was a hard example of the wrong way to deal with an insurgency. Somebody, perhaps the base commander, obviously felt he had to do something. I don't recall that anybody was blamed even though no dead VC were found in the wreckage of the village. That was a long time ago and my memory is not clear on that point.

The next day it was possible to talk by radio with the advisors in the other provinces and we began to assemble a coherent picture of what had happened throughout the entire III Corps area. As you'll recall, I described III Corps as a donut surrounding the capital city, Saigon proper. I didn't have any reporting about what was going on in the capital, but we were hearing there was some heavy fighting going on there. My job was to talk to people in all the provincial capitals and come up with an overview of what had happened, what the Tet attacks were about in the area I was responsible for.

To summarize very quickly, the Tet Offensive in III CTZ was a 24 hour phenomenon. In practically all cases, province and district towns were attacked by local VC guerilla units. As I recall nowhere in our part of Vietnam did they have any great success. These VC units took heavy casualties and had been driven out of wherever they were within a day and a half at most. With unfortunately, a lot of collateral damage too, people's houses, and what we would call, you know, friendly lives.

It wasn't until the third day after the Tet attacks began that it was possible for me to get in my vehicle and drive down the highway to Saigon with my report. I was greeted with some enthusiasm at the embassy because I had the first hard information they'd received on the situation in the countryside. My report was hurriedly retyped and edited and sent off to Washington, which apparently had been getting nothing but bad news up until that point. The Tet Offensive was a huge shock; media reports had amplified and magnified the impact of that shock.

Already, before the Tet attacks, there had been enough doubt building up in the government and within the general American population that whether or not the communists actually intended the attacks that way, they became the catalyst for a profound rethinking of whether we should be in Vietnam. As far as my own work was concerned the only real drawback was shall we say, a certain change of emphasis in the kind of reporting that was desired. Some have maintained that in embassy reporting, just like in the military reports, there was a systemic bias in favor of good news. From the perspective I have now, I can say, well, that is the way things worked, but I was at the time too demoralized to realize that we no longer could be quite as candid, now were we as credible, as we had been up until then.

That was particularly tragic because the truth was that the Viet Cong military forces had been decimated and in many cases all but destroyed in our area. And the infrastructure without any protective cover was pretty much exposed. In fact one of the things my attitude survey guys picked up very soon as the dust settled was a widespread belief among the Vietnamese that the Americans had been really clever in luring the VC into attacking and thereby suffering a crushing defeat. It was said that the Viet Cong units, that is, the indigenous southern insurgents, had been cynically sacrificed by Hanoi. So you had a fundamental change in the situation on the ground, but nobody would believe it. I know I certainly filed many reports on this.

*Q: What were you getting from the embassy at the time?*

BROWN: It became more difficult to talk about the things that weren't going so well. It was, I guess, the same thing a reporting officer would encounter anywhere -- the stuff that was troublesome would stay in the in basket longer than the stuff that was not troublesome. It was not that somebody came out and said "hey, cool it," rather it was more like "Oh, we really liked that other reporting, you know."

*Q: Oh yes. Well what did you feel about, did you have much to do with the media, because in many cases the pessimistic view of the Tet Offensive was generated by the media.*

BROWN: That is true, and no, I did not have much to do with them. I met one or two casually. In only one case did I ever agree to be interviewed. This was toward summer of 1968 when I was going on to different work. The fellow was a New York Times reporter and I invited him to come out to Bien Hoa. I wanted to tell him basically that things were going pretty well in my parish. I was really disillusioned because he wrote the story and basically it dwelt on all the negative parts and put a spin on them. I didn't entirely recognize this as what I had told him. So generally this may be why, though I have many reporter friends, I know that at least in one case I got well and truly burned and that is all it takes, one time, before you become a lot more cautious about your contacts with the press.

But the simple answer to your question is no, I had very little real contact with reporters.

There was one memorable event: Joe Alsop came to Vietnam. Somebody in Saigon thought he should get a little flavor of the countryside, so he was sent up to Bien Hoa to visit Vann. John said, “Come on, I think you should be part of this.” He had me over to his house for dinner with Joe Alsop. I pretty much kept my mouth shut except when John would ask me a question. We sat and talked with Alsop for two or three hours. He was in very good form and was eating it up. So I got my view of the great man and frankly I was underwhelmed. He had a tremendous ego.

*Q: OK, the Tet offensive has happened. How were things back in your area of responsibility after that? Had they changed?*

BROWN: It was really quiet. The VC units, or what were left of them, had pulled back to the border areas. They had left the infrastructure uncovered and these also headed for the hills or were fairly rapidly weeded out. I know the Phoenix program is the subject of considerable debate. I didn't have too much direct contact with it, but I think clearly in the year or so after the Tet attacks they, with other counterinsurgency intelligence assets, achieved a great deal because local people were now willing to talk. They felt secure. They identified the VC cadre and very many of them were rounded up. By the end of 1968, the populated parts of the III Corps area were effectively under government control. Prosperity was coming back. It was very good. Good enough that I personally concluded that the "pacification program" did work.

My fourth -- and last -- year in Vietnam was not spent on the embassy staff but on detail to CORDS. That came about largely because I was 25 ½ years old and hoped to go back to school to do some graduate work and sort out my experience and so forth. I had been offered a fellowship at the Kennedy School at Harvard as a result of a chance meeting with Dr. Sam Huntington; I was his control officer for a couple of days when he visited Vietnam, his escort officer really. Of course I was anxious to take advantage of the fellowship. But the problem was the draft. In those days, if you were a single man under 26 you stood a very strong chance of being drafted.

*Q: It just seems incredible that somebody who was serving in Vietnam as long as you have would be draft able.*

BROWN: Well that was the way it worked. The Department wouldn't go to bat for you. They would write a letter and say so and so has this job, but they wouldn’t ask for a deferment. That was a consequence of the trauma the Department had been put through during the McCarthy days. They didn't want to give anybody the impression that we diplomats were reluctant to do our military service.

Anyway, after an exchange of messages with my draft board, which told me, in essence, that "as long as you are in Vietnam we are giving you a pass," I thought it prudent to stay for another year. I also investigated whether I could do a lateral transfer into military intelligence, but I didn't pursue that because Ambassador Bob Komer, who was setting up the CORDS operation, was quite happy that I would stay on for another year as a district advisor. That was something I quite wanted to do. I guess after several years of giving

gratuitous advice to various advisors, I wanted to see if I could walk the walk and talk the talk myself. It was a challenge. I took command of a detachment of 13 U.S. Army guys. My deputy was a major, and in practice he was in charge of the real military side of things. He would go out and spend half a day, eight hours tromping around in the jungle with the ranger force company we had attached to district headquarters. Things like that. I tried to do my best to understand and support him.

Now I am going to tell a story on myself here. My first month in my new job as Duc Tu district senior advisor was tough. My Vietnamese counterpart, the district chief, was a rather sour army captain. It rapidly became clear that he was detested by his staff and notable people in the district. This was a district in Bien Hoa province, a largely urbanized area. Everybody was very happy when Captain Hai was reassigned, transferred back to headquarters. His successor was fresh out of training as a district administrator, a very realistic guy. We clicked pretty well and I was delighted to be able to work for the next six or seven months with Captain Di. I was finding out there was a lot of difference I was in a position to make. I was able to give him pretty good backup.

The biggest problem we had was that there were some very large U.S. bases in our district, including Long Binh Post. There were incidents constantly, the sort of things that happen when you have 20 or 30 thousand bored GIs who every now and then would get R&R and go out and look for fun, or be out on a convoy or a patrol and there would be an accident or somebody who would deliberately cause something to happen. Of course, immediately there would be a complaint. My job was to see if I could track down and figure out what happened and then find the commanding officer of the unit in question and get some kind of restitution. My batting average on that was quite low. In one case an American armored regiment was sent into our area. I can't imagine why. They decided they were going to do a search and destroy mission heading north from Highway 1. This was a very densely populated area populated by those northern refugees, strongly anti-communist, the ones I told you about earlier. The regiment lined up its tanks and armored personnel carriers along the highway and headed north. Essentially they ripped up dirt roads and tracked across paddies that were just about ready for harvest, until they went into the jungle a few miles distant. You can imagine the fuss that all of that kicked up.

As soon as I heard about it I went to find Colonel Patton, the regimental commander and the son of the famous WWII general. He was out to make himself an equal reputation in Vietnam. I got intercepted by some of his headquarters staff who told me in no uncertain terms that I was nobody, and to get the hell out of there. I could take my protests and go back where I came from. I mention this because it was the only really seriously nasty incident I can recall on my beat. But it did happen a lot in other parts of the country and in other districts. I would hear about those from colleagues, people who were in other CORDS jobs. There was only so far that you could really influence the U.S. Forces on their concept of what their mission was. That was the way things were, at least while General Westmoreland was commander in chief in Vietnam.

Once Westmoreland was recalled and Creighton Abrams was the new MACV commander, with Fritz Weyand (who I had briefed a few times during his tenure as

commander of II Field Force) as his deputy, the kind of incident I just mentioned became far less frequent.

I was senior advisor for Duc Tu district of Bien Hoa province from the beginning of August until the end of January, 1969, just six months. Toward the end of that period, my personal life became a bit complicated. In June of the previous year, 1968, I had proposed to a young Vietnamese woman and she accepted my proposal with the caveat that her parents had to agree too, which proved to be a considerable challenge because her father did not take to the idea. He had heard lots of stories, some true, some exaggerated, about the difficulties with Vietnamese-American liaisons. It took several months of me learning to talk to my fiancée's father for a few hours every weekend, while she and her mom worked on the inside to convince her father that it might not be a disaster, or altogether a disaster, to allow U.S. to marry. At last, he laid down the conditions for his assent.

Tuyet's family was Catholic; her father was very strongly Catholic. I had to agree not to interfere, and though a protestant Christian I had to respect the fact that Tuyet would be in charge of our children's' moral education. Furthermore, he said, as Vietnamese custom views marriage not as between two individuals but between two families, someone from my family must be present at the wedding. That was a fairly tall order because only a year earlier a sudden heart attack had carried off my father.

I had been vacationing in Laos then, and by the time word reached me of his death, I hadn't made it home in time for my father's funeral. Now I wrote, and I said, "Mom, do you think you could come to Vietnam for my wedding?" Her only foreign travel before that was a couple of weeks in Europe. She thought about it for a bit, she said, and wrote back "Yes, I am coming."

My mother was there for the wedding. She went all the way around the world and visited with friends in other places as well. She had a pretty good trip.

Tuyet and I were formally engaged at the end of October in 1967 while I was still working as a district advisor. By the beginning of the next year, it became clear that there would be an awful lot of arranging and paper work that needed to be done, both to get my bride properly credentialed and also to make sure the marriage came off okay. So I asked to be transferred to Saigon. I was assigned to CORDS headquarters and was put to work writing a manual on the Vietnamese village for the use of people assigned to advisory jobs in the CORDS organization. It was printed and distributed widely, part of a revised rural development approach that built on a tradition of autonomy at the village level. "The emperor's edict bows at the village gate," as the saying goes.

The manual was published some months after I left Vietnam. I finally saw a copy of it years later. About 2/3 was content I'd researched and written. I was pleased when I finally saw the result.

Tuyet and I were married on the ninth of March, 1969, with a lot of friends from the embassy and CORDS as well as family friends on Tuyet's side, in attendance, and of

course my mom. We were married in a small Catholic Church in Saigon's District 3. Then followed a very festive dinner for about 150 friends and family, before a short honeymoon in Dalat.

*Q: That is a highland Swiss Village practically. It is a beautiful place.*

BROWN: Well mainly it was an R&R place in the French days, I guess by mutual consent virtually untouched by the war. By 1969 there were an awful lot of cobwebs in the Dalat Palace Hotel. There were not many other customers. We had a good time.

In those days if an FSO proposed to marry a foreigner, he submitted his resignation. It was then at the discretion of the department either to accept that resignation or refuse it. Well, the embassy admin counselor first counseled me. He said "Are you sure about this. This isn't just a whim, "I said, "I know this lady pretty well. We have been dating for 18 months." "Well she is awfully young," was his answer. I agreed that she was only 18 years old. On the other hand, I pointed out, I was only 24.

So he had the personnel officer send off a recommendation to the Department saying "Mr. Brown proposes to marry a very young Vietnamese woman. We talked to her and she seemed nice enough." Then we waited, and we waited some more, for the reply. Finally on about the 5th of March, no answer having come, and all the preparations for the wedding on the 9th being ready, I went over to Personnel. I said, "Look, I have been waiting now for months. I have just come to say that whether I get permission or not, I am going to get married on Saturday."

That apparently prompted a phone call back to Washington, and the next day permission was received by telegram. So I spent three months of married life in Saigon. Then in June we were reassigned back to the U.S. on a year's leave without pay so I could take advantage of that graduate school fellowship I told you about, which the folks at the Kennedy School had agreed to postpone for a year. Tuyet and I honeymooned for a few weeks in Greece, and then in the U.S. we saw my mom for a time in the summer. I did some work coaching FSOs who were training in Vietnamese prior to CORDS postings. I had tested S4-R4, which I must say was generous of the staff at FSI.

At the beginning of the school year, we moved up to Boston and got ourselves a flat. Tuyet was enrolled in a local Catholic prep school, concentrating on ESL, while I spent a year sort of integrating all my experience in Vietnam and getting ready to do something new. I no longer thought law school was an option. The year went by very rapidly. In May of 1970 I got a phone call from Lou Sarris, who was the head of the Indochina shop of INR, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, who said, "We would really like to have you come down here and work for U.S. for a while." No one else had taken the trouble to call me up and since I didn't know much about how much one marketed oneself for a job, I was delighted to accept the invitation.

That brought me back to the Department in July of 1970. By then Tuyet and I had spent all of our savings paying for the things that the fellowship didn't pay for. I was delighted

to be getting a paycheck again. I worked in INR for two years, first as the Cambodia analyst, and then after six months, Steve Lyne, the fellow who had been supervisor of the Vietnam reporting unit, recommended I take his position. What that meant was I was the lead analyst for South Vietnam, but not North Vietnam. I was doing my own work and coordinating the work of two other junior officers. Again, that seemed a great responsibility and was very challenging in most respects, but again I bumped into the syndrome that we talked about earlier, that is, if an officer tried to report something disagreeable, it tended to rest for a long time in Lou Sarris' in-box.

I will tell you a story about that. In 1971, President Thieu of South Vietnam was finishing his first term and was going to stand for re-election. There was a lot of pressure on the U.S. side that this election ought to be truly democratic and impress and win hearts and minds back in Vietnam and up on Capitol Hill. But come the dawn, it became apparent that Thieu had systematically sabotaged all of his potential opposition. Even though he was probably going to win in a landslide anyway, he wasn't going to take that chance. I had tracked the evolution of the contest closely. There was a lot of reporting coming in from the embassy. I had drafted an INR brief of about ten pages documenting how President Thieu had fixed the election. This was complete, a complete draft, two weeks before the elections were to be held. Lou Sarris just sat on the thing, refusing to approve it for circulation until after the election and he knew what the outcome was going to be. Lou probably had his own reasons, maybe just worry about a leak or what have you. He didn't share them with me, and I found that very frustrating.

But it was some months after that, in the pouch from Saigon, a copy of that report came back personally endorsed by Ambassador Bunker, who said, “This is probably the best and only candid account of what happened that there ever will be.” So I took some pride in that. I very much respected Ellsworth Bunker. He was a great gentleman and a very honest man in an extraordinarily difficult assignment.

*Q: Well how did you find the atmosphere regarding Vietnam when you got there?*

BROWN: In INR or in the department?

*Q: Both.*

BROWN: There was I think appreciation that the military situation and the economy had stabilized and things in Vietnam were going in the right direction generally. There was revival in the countryside. There was an expectation that with U.S. support there was also evolving a stable political structure. The general elections I mentioned were intended to demonstrate that--which is one reason why I was so frustrated when they didn't.

We were experienced officers, and reading the reports coming back from Vietnam including between the lines, I think it fair to say there was reason for optimism except for one thing, and that was the fairly obvious steady erosion of support for the efforts in Vietnam. It was clear that the Congress was losing patience, and the informed public was losing patience.

The Pentagon Papers burst like a bombshell; they were probably as important as the Tet attacks in terms of their impact on public understanding and perception. Honestly or not, the impression was reinforced that somehow that the U.S. Government had been covering up stuff all along. I and many others of my rank and station were each given chapters of the Pentagon Papers and instructed to read through them in order to identify intelligence breaches and other things. All of that was a futile and fatuous exercise because the damage, such as it was, had already been done. The way the government was responding was in fact not helping. The Nixon administration was fanning the flames for those who suspected the worst all along.

It was about that time that I had a conversation with Bill Gleysteen, who was Assistant Director of INR for East Asia and Pacific. It was 1972, I was up for reassignment, and Bill was a guy I admired. I said, "Sir, I have been on the department rolls now for almost seven years. It will be seven when I check out of INR next summer. I think probably it is time for me to get engaged with a country that is likely to be around for a while." I had become a fatalist at that point. "I would like to put in for long term Chinese or Japanese training. Which do you recommend?"

Bill replied "you know, we have got so many Chinese experts that are being trained. They're linguists with a good academic background, and we can't find work for them. They are occupying a lot of manufactured positions all over East Asia and Southeast Asia. So I would say, relatively speaking, the opportunities are in Japanese training. Why don't you do that?" I said, "Yes, sir, that sounds like a good idea," and I put in for Japanese language training as an onward assignment. Then a few months later, Henry Kissinger went to Beijing and that completely undid the logic of choosing Japanese instead of Chinese language training. But I never regretted my choice. It is just one of those things that happens to you. Taking one fork in the road or another determines a lot of things afterward.

*Q: What was the impact of INR do you think? I mean its influence just from your colleagues and from your own experience.*

BROWN: My two years in INR gave me a much broader and, I think, a generally healthy appreciation of the intelligence community and its proper role in determining and executing policy. Of course we were all working on the analytic end, not the operational projects. I was in touch with analysts in both CIA and DIA on a regular basis, usually by phone, or in the case of National Intelligence Estimates, face to face. I gained a lot of respect for their expertise and professionalism, but also an appreciation of the limits of intelligence. Many times after that, I was appalled to see some senior person taking a report selectively and running with it to improve his position without paying attention to the rest of the arguments or the counter-arguments. Or, in some cases, you could see where the intelligence community was under an awful lot of pressure again to produce "useful reports," that is to say those that served the short term needs of senior people.

*Today is 5 June 2015 with David G. Brown. David, we have just...*

BROWN: Let me just interrupt. It is David E. Brown, E as in Earl.

*Q: Oh that's right, David E. Brown. Yes. And we have just finished where you left the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and you are going to take Japanese language training.*

BROWN: This is a digression, Stu. I woke up this morning realizing I hadn't told you just how closely associated I have been with David G. Brown. When he arrived in Vietnam about nine months after I did, he came down from Taipei where he had been a Chinese language officer trainee. God with his cosmic sense of humor arranged to have him share quarters with me. So we lived in the same house in Saigon for about six months until we were sent off to work in different regional CORDS headquarters. We've stayed very good friends for the next 45 years. So it was particularly amusing to me that when I gave a talk on Vietnamese politics at the University of Wisconsin's Southeast Asia department a few weeks ago, the guy who was introducing me had decided to embroider the bio I had sent him by doing some research. He looked online and found your interview with David G. He decided that must be me and quoted liberally from it. I was trying my very best not to collapse in surprise and amusement.

Afterward, I read the fine interview you did with my friend, and that was what sparked my reaching out to your office to do the interview with you now.

*Q: OK, well, I think we will pick this up when you started Japanese language training.*

BROWN: Yes.

*Q: OK, what year was that?*

BROWN: That would have been summer of 1972. I had ten months of training together with my wife in a class at FSI, the old FSI at Arlington Towers. I was posted to Japan as the senior consular officer in Osaka- Kobe for about a year, and then we went to a second ten months of advanced language training at the FSI language school in Yokohama.

*Q: OK, well let's go back to the FSI time. How did you find studying Japanese?*

BROWN: Well I enjoyed it a great deal. It is a very challenging language. From a distance, I guess all Asian languages look alike, but the structure of Japanese is totally different from Vietnamese so it was a big new challenge for me. FSI started one group every year. We were altogether maybe a dozen people, including several spouses.

This was not long after the Department had agreed to teach spouses hard languages as well as the easier, European ones. So that was still a bit controversial. I found it to be particularly controversial when the wife of Bob Dorr, who was Korean, and my wife, Vietnamese, were among the three wives assigned to study Japanese. That did not sit very well with a senior Japanese instructor, a woman who had been there for 20 years or so,

who stated with utter conviction that it would be impossible for either Mrs. Dorr or my wife to succeed because the FSI Japanese course was geared to westerners. In the end that was all settled and both my wife and Mrs. Dorr went on to be very competent Japanese linguists.

It was a lot of hard slogging. We began about Labor Day and were finished in May. I was given in addition one month of consular training at FSI. Then we packed up and went to Japan.

*Q: Well you were in Japan, in Osaka, is that right?*

BROWN: First at Osaka-Kobe. Not too long before our arrival, the U.S. consulates in Kobe and Osaka, cities about 25 miles apart in western Japan, had been merged. The consular and admin sections were in a nice building we had in Kobe and the commercial offices in an apartment tower in Osaka. It was some years later that the Department finally closed up the office in Kobe and concentrated everything in Osaka, which is to Tokyo as Chicago is to New York. But in 1974, we still were housed in the compound in Kobe, and the consular and admin sections were there. The trade promotion officers were all working out of Osaka. Consul General Jerry Holloway spit his time between the two offices.

Japan had just liberalized its controls on foreign exchange enough to start a travel boom. It was already 18 years after the end of WWII and Japan was in a period of very rapid recovery and growth on its way to becoming the number two economy in the world. One consequence of that was the liberation of a great deal of pent-up desire to travel abroad. For the U.S., that meant many, many tour groups visiting Hawaii and Guam, especially. The consulate went from issuing something like 20,000 travel visas in 1972, the year before I got there, to over 200,000 in 1974, the year I worked in Kobe as senior consular officer.

Had it not been for my immediate predecessor, John Malott, I doubt we would have coped at all. John saw the tourism tsunami coming and managed to reorganize and streamline consular operations in a way that the consular section stayed above the rising tide. I made a few constructive changes myself, but it was John Malott who did the heavy lifting. He later went on to serve as ambassador to Malaysia, the capstone of a very fine career.

*Q: Were the Japanese considered a risk to give visas to? I think the Japanese would be very likely to come home.*

BROWN: Up until the early 70s there was a strong bias against issuing visas to Japanese travelers. During the occupation years and just after, there was a really strong communist movement in Japan, which was viewed with considerable suspicion. So were radical socialists and others. Our files were full of Japanese police reports on political affiliations. Our consular assistants were instinctively suspicious of anyone, especially a student, who declared that he just wanted to travel around the U.S. to get to know our

country and improve his English.
My predecessor and Consul General Holloway realized that the kinds of people who were coming in and seeking visas to go on group tours to Hawaii or to Guam did not cause a considerable security risk to the United States. They saw also that the Japanese travel agencies could be persuaded to accept responsibility for their clients' returning to Japan as promised. This was in fact a very good opportunity for the development of the tourism business in Hawaii and in Guam. By the time I arrived the attitude shift had already taken place. Of course we still screened out applicants who had no visible means and seemed intent on going to the U.S. for a long time. Our Japanese consular assistants were very quick to flag such cases and make sure that I or my vice consul interviewed them carefully.

*Q: You would be talking to people, how did you find your relations and your wife's relations with the Japanese at that time?*

BROWN: Pleasant, we really did enjoy our time in Japan. Altogether we lived there for seven years, four years for our first posting, and three more ten years later. Tuyet and I formed great respect and admiration for the people and their culture.

One of the things you learn in language training, which in the case of Japanese is really language and culture training, is that it didn't matter how fluent or culturally adept you were, you would never be regarded by Japanese as one of the tribe.. In fact history is littered with the sad stories of foreigners who believed their passion for things Japanese would be rewarded by acceptance. The 'we' and 'they' dynamic are built into Japanese culture. Not 'we' versus 'they,' just 'we' and 'they'; you are either Japanese by blood and culture or you are not.

As time went by, Tuyet and I made some very strong and durable friendships. But we always understood that we were outside of the Japanese culture and to a large extent looking in.

*Q: This first time you were in Japan, were there any crises in our relationship with Japan?*

BROWN: There was a dramatic adjustment of the dollar-yen exchange rates. In 1972, the Bretton Woods system had finally come apart. The U.S. had to let the dollar float. As a result the effective exchange rate fell from 360 yen to the dollar, which enabled Americans in Japan to live like rich people, to about 210 to the dollar when we were first in Japan. It continued to float down during the rest of those four years. All of which meant that instead of having a princely salary we had an ordinary salary. Japan was still fun for us. Other than the few months of our second winter in Japan, when we were living in a Japanese house and the gas heating bill arrived, I don't think we suffered.

The 1970s were a period where Japan was still recovering in many ways from the war. The occupation of Japan itself did not end until about 1960. So Japan was still rebuilding its foreign relations capability. And of course was very engaged in building up a modern

industrial base. All of these things made life there very interesting for any officer. It certainly was for us.

In April, 1974, during the end of my year in Kobe, our first child was born. That changed our lives a lot too. So there were the three of us, my wife, baby Cristina and I, who moved in July '74, to Yokohama, where FSI's advanced language school has been located for a very long time. Of course it was closed during the war years, but it's originated there long before the war. Yokohama is a port city, the gateway to the Tokyo area. It had long been the site of the most considerable foreign settlement. Most of the foreigners lived up on the hill, above the town proper, the port itself. And that was where the language school was located. We were all encouraged to go out and use our rudimentary Japanese.

Tuyet and I had already had a year of language training but for all practical purposes it was the second year which brought up to a level which could be of real use professionally. We were encouraged to go out and find ourselves a place to live. We found a little Japanese house, rented it, and resumed serious language training. On the ground floor it had a good sized tatami room as well as a western room and a kitchen. Upstairs there was a larger bedroom with tatami mats and one smaller room. It was just about the right size for us. What wasn't so obvious in the middle of a very hot summer was that the walls were rather insubstantial. Not paper, as the joke goes, but insubstantial. When winter came we were absolutely freezing in the place in spite of the best efforts of a propane stove we kept burning downstairs. We ended up with a very high fuel bill until we learned to wear more clothes and burn less gas.

There were, that year at the FSI School in Yokohama, perhaps a dozen people who had already taken their first year of Japanese language training at Yokohama. These were our classmates, all from friendly embassies, Canadians, New Zealanders, and Aussies. In addition there was a contingent of American students who like U.S. had, as a cost saving measure, done the first year of language training in Washington. It was evident almost from the beginning that those who had begun their language training in Japan had accomplished a lot more in the first year than we had been able to in Washington.

I am not saying that FSI in Washington taught U.S. badly, it is just that the results were not as good. We went to class for six hours a day. We were expected to study for a couple more hours on our own time and also not fail to watch the evening news on NHK, the Japanese public TV network for half an hour every evening. We were quizzed the next morning.

In 1974 and going into 1975, the news from Vietnam became ominous and turned absolutely black when in early March the North Vietnamese launched an offensive which ultimately brought them all the way to Saigon and to the capitulation of the southern government.

It is still a topic of debate as to why the collapse of the Southern army was so sudden. For U.S. it was a matter of real anguish because we'd left many friends behind in Vietnam,

and of course my wife's family. We were very concerned because they were, in consequence of our marriage, connected to the U.S. Government. In the event that Saigon was to fall to the revolutionaries, their livelihood if not their lives would be in danger.

When it became apparent that it was soon going to be all over in South Vietnam, I wrote to friends at the embassy in Saigon. Don Ellson was serving as a consul there. We had been colleagues in the INR bureau.

Don wrote back, and said "we will put your wife's family on our list and make sure that if we have to evacuate that they get out." That reassured U.S. for a while, but the military situation continued to deteriorate rapidly. By the beginning of April, it was quite evident that Saigon was going to fall.

Ambassador Graham Martin put a very brave face on it, insisting that with enough targeted assistance, by which he meant the return of U.S. air power and a lot of emergency aid which Congress had refused to grant, that possibly the southern part of South Vietnam could be preserved.

I didn't believe that. My wife didn't believe that. We watched the NHK News every night and, comparing that to the letters we got from Tuyet's family in Vietnam, it was pretty clear that we had a much more accurate understanding of the strategic situation than my wife's parents did. So we were very concerned. They were sending notes back saying "oh, we have seen trouble before. We will survive it" and so forth.

At Embassy Saigon, Ambassador Martin was dead set against running any kind of evacuation that he felt would erode the confidence of the South Vietnamese regime and hasten its collapse. Finally by the middle of April, we understood that quietly a semi-official evacuation operation was kicking into high gear. This operation was run by staff of the military advisory office, USAID, CIA and State Department officers who hadn't been evacuated. They had volunteered to stay on to the end and move as many of America's friends to the U.S. as might be possible.

In fact, some weeks before, I had volunteered to TDY to the embassy in Saigon to assist with the evacuation. The answer was 'no,' an emphatic 'no.' The object, the Department told me, was to get Americans out of Vietnam, not the other way around. Bottom line: There were no circumstances that would see me returning to Saigon.

That put U.S. in an impossible situation, my wife and I. After much anguished talk, we decided that I did need to go back to Vietnam to persuade her father and mother to leave or if they wouldn't leave, to make sure that my wife's eight siblings were able to evacuate. That is what happened.

I wrote a letter which a close friend in the Embassy Political Section, Don Westmore, delivered to Ambassador Jim Hodgson as soon as I was airborne from Haneda Airport. In Taipei, I connected to an Air Vietnam plane to Saigon. I managed just before the curfew set in at dusk to make contact with a junior officer in the embassy's political section, who

was helping manage the semi-clandestine evacuation. He gave me a bed for the night, and the next morning took me to a house where half a dozen embassy Americans and at least as many embassy Vietnamese staff were working through long lists of people who'd been cleared, or maybe just vouched for, for evacuation. They would go to the family's home to tell them to be at such and such a place at such and such a time. These favored few would be picked up, given a laissez passer with an embassy stamp, and taken out to the airport in an official vehicle with darkened windows.

This was done under the radar. The official stance of the Saigon government was that it was not happening, but in fact some effective arrangements had been made with various people at the airport and in the police services. Things were working fairly smoothly.

A Vietnamese friend delivered the letter my wife had written to her family's home. A few hours later my sister-in-law showed up, saying yes, they had agreed to evacuate, all of them. In addition, she asked, would it be possible for me to arrange the evacuation of her husband's family, another eight people. My sister-in-law's husband was a Vietnamese air force captain whose unit had been cut off in central Vietnam. He had been captured a month earlier. My sister-in-law had lost touch with him. She had thought very hard and at last decided that he would want her to leave Vietnam with their two small children, two other members of the family were also Vietnamese soldiers. They were stationed in the Mekong Delta. Not knowing whether they would be able to go or not, I spoke to Lacy Wright, the FSO who was running the embassy's evacuation office. He said, “Yes, of course we can handle that.” Ultimately I was the guarantor for 20 people, my wife's family and her older sister's in-laws.

Early the next day they were picked up and we were all transferred out to the airport. Everybody had one small suitcase, which was all they were allowed to take. I had said, “Leave the clothes behind. We can replace those in America. Bring out stuff that you can't do without,” which meant lots of family photographs and other mementos.

We were delivered to the MACV headquarters compound at the airport. It was jammed with people who had been processed for evacuation. What had happened was that the airlift had slowed down. President Marcos of the Philippines had realized that a large number of Vietnamese refugees were piling up at Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay, and he was worried that a lot of Vietnamese might end up in the Philippines on a permanent basis.

The Air Force had to find other safe-haven destinations. That caused a log jam. It wasn't until the next night, 18-20 hours later, that we were finally bussed out to the flight line and put on a big cargo plane, a C-141, I think. The plane was large enough; they had taken everything out of the belly of this big transport plane and from side to side there were fastened woven shock cords. 220 people were arranged in the plane in about 20 rows of 10 or 12 people holding on to dear life to these straps. Everybody facing backwards. Legs tucked under them. The doors of the plane were open and a couple of loading sergeants each with machine guns looking out. The plane got out on the runway and took off at the steepest angle possible. There I was with a seven year-old boy and a

14 year-old girl, my wife's brother and sister, clinging for dear life to each arm. We took off in pitch darkness because by then the NVA artillery had moved in close enough to bring the field under fire whenever they cared to. Six hours later we reached Guam.

My relatives and I spent some time waiting until we could get on a bus to go down to Orote Point, where Seabees were erecting a tent city as rapidly as they could. Someone at the air base managed to patch through to my wife on the telephone so I could tell her we were all OK. That was the first she had heard from me in five days. She told me in return that she had a message for me from the embassy: "All is forgiven, come home soon, congratulations, job well done."

Just three days after that, the folks in the refugee camp received the tragic news that Saigon had fallen. Meanwhile, things were being arranged so that I was able to fly from Guam up to Tokyo with my wife's parents and her brothers and sisters who were under 21, while the rest of the family, my wife's two adult sisters and two small children and all the in-laws went on to Camp Pendleton, the big Marine base in California. It was three months later, after I had returned to my Japanese language training and had done my best to concentrate and get up to reasonable proficiency, that we were able during home leave to reassemble the family in San Francisco, buy a house in Haight Asbury with all of our savings as down payment, and get the family re-settled.

They never looked back. Within a year or so everyone was largely self-sufficient. But it was a fairly difficult period for U.S. as well as them. Certainly the events of the last four or five months were an impediment to getting my Japanese fluency to the level I had hoped to reach. Nonetheless I tested out with a 3+ in Japanese, and went on to an assignment in the political section in the embassy in Tokyo.

*Q: How did you see, do you feel a growing self confidence in the Japanese at the time or are they sort of hanging on to American coat tails in international affairs?*

BROWN: Well they were feeling their way and were beginning to recognize that U.S. interests and Japanese interests were not entirely congruent in all respects. I think while this was true, there remained an unusually close degree of cooperation in the international relations sector. In Embassy Tokyo, I was in the external relations unit. The three of us, Nick Platt, the unit chief, Desaix Anderson and I all evolved very close relationships with Japanese officers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, friendships that have continued to this day. As the junior officer, I had what you might call the third world beat. The core issues our unit covered tended to revolve around both nations' evolving relations with Korea, China, Russia and so forth. My work, however, centered on telling the Japanese our foreign aid priorities and asking them to chip in. It was good service, but I think the only thing I produced that turned out to be memorable was a long and detailed air gram on the organization, the operation and the culture of the Japanese foreign service.

The two years we were in Tokyo went very quickly. I was impressed by how many of the issues which I worked on with Japanese counterparts were ostensibly political matters, but in fact were very difficult to make sense of unless you understood the economic

drivers and how underlying economic interests were shaping these political outcomes. That caused me to tell the personnel people in the department that I thought it would be really great if I could go on to the Department's economic training after this posting in Japan and be cross trained in economics.

I was asked “You want to change your cone?”

“No, I don't want to change my cone," I answered. "I like being a political officer but I think as a political officer I should understand economics a lot better than I do. And as I get more substantial positions in the department that could turn out to be very useful." Anyway, PER agreed, and told me that I had been assigned to an economic training class that was beginning at FSI on July 1, 1977.

It was a very intensive, 10 month course. The problem was that my wife was pregnant again and the baby was due in sometime late June, which made a smooth removal from Tokyo to the U.S. sort of problematic. Ultimately, our second daughter, Katherine, was born on 14 June and when I left for Washington ten days later, Tuyet was still convalescing and supervising the packing up.

She caught up with me in Washington about two weeks after I arrived there. We settled in to a little house in Arlington which we got by persuading the bank to stretch its credit requirements. I argued that within a year we would be going back overseas and would have adequate funds to manage the mortgage. Our finances were pretty tight because my wife's family was still needing support in San Francisco. Be that as it may, we got along; we did OK. I loved economic training. I did quite well at it. It was proposed that if I would agree to re-cone as an economic officer, the department would fund me to a year of graduate school. That was tempting, it was flattering, but for the economic reasons I just explained, I said we could not afford to do that.

So instead I was posted to Paris. At first it had seemed that we were going to Bogota or Rio de Janeiro. That didn't happen. Instead I was assigned to the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, in Paris. When I arrived there, the portfolio I was given was energy affairs, which did seem fairly sleepy at first. But then the war broke out between Iran and Iraq. The price of crude oil went through the ceiling; it was the so-called second energy crisis.

The first crisis had been in '73-'74, the time of the Arab Israeli war and the boycott. After that experience, one of the smarter things Henry Kissinger did was to get together with some visionary European counterparts to establish the International Energy Agency. It was charged with developing a coherent demand side response to further shocks in the energy markets. The IEA in 1978 was a fledgling organization. The French, I think mainly because they were French, had decided they would continue to play a lone hand. So the IEA was an outfit dominated by Americans and British and Germans, with English as its working language. That was not a good thing for my fledgling French language skills.

Once we were in crisis mode dealing with the second energy shock, designing a consumer country response to that in terms of conservation and bringing alternative supplies into the market, it was exciting, a very heady job for somebody who was still a young officer. In 1977, I was 34 years old. I had my own secretary for the first time, and developed a lot of good working relationships with the IEA staff and with my counterparts from other missions to the OECD, people who also had energy policy briefs. What I remember best at this juncture was backstopping U.S. participation in the monthly meetings of the IEA executive council. Usually the U.S. delegation would be led by the assistant secretary for economic affairs and his counterpart at the Department of Energy (DOE), the assistant secretary for international energy policy. They would arrive for three or four days of meetings. It was up to me to coordinate preparations, scribble furiously during the meetings, and then as quickly as possible write a cable account, clear it with the principals and file it for transmission.

In between, there would be frequent working group meetings where I might be the State representative, often in tandem with a specialist from DOE who dealt with more technical stuff. It was very much a learning process, and also very enjoyable. During the summer, the OECD pretty much shut down for six weeks. There was opportunity for me and my family to see a good deal of Western Europe. We transformed the back of our Peugeot sedan into a play pen and stoked the trunk with disposable diapers. We would set off for three and four weeks at a time.

*Q: How did you feel things were going with the French?*

BROWN: I didn't have very much to do with the U.S. Embassy itself or with the people whose job it was to conduct our diplomacy with France. So I really have no special insight to share there. What impressed me about my work at the OECD, and particularly in the IEA orbit, was how close and collegial everything was. The objective was to form up, work out a common policy, a common response to the shocks to the world oil markets, and develop a long range strategy. Everybody was on the same team. By virtue of my recent service in Japan, I had particularly good working relations with the Japanese mission officers who had similar responsibilities. But again, because the French had opted out of the IEA in order to play their own lone hand, I didn't have much to do with French counterparts.

*Q: How was Japan viewed? Was this the sort of challenging economy that was coming up at the time?*

BROWN: In the late SC Japan had not become a threat to the smooth working of international trade. That particular bogeyman had not yet become apparent. It was clear that Japan was growing rapidly, very successfully developing its economy and becoming very competitive in a lot of industrial sectors. They were at the OECD generally a welcome face. Certainly then the Japanese were the only non-Occidentals in what had been very much a white men's club. They were well respected for their professionalism, but were still feeling their way and tended to weigh into an issue only when a direct Japanese interest was engaged.

*Q: Would you say in this post war period that many other countries were reaching maturity and they were beginning to show their potential. China is now the problem, we always felt under threat almost.*

BROWN: We are talking about 1977-1980. There was a general perception that American competitiveness was under threat. In the energy area, there was certainly a realization that the U.S. had been the most profligate energy consumer of all, and that we need to make some very draconian structural reforms in the way we used energy in order to remain healthy in that area. But the notion that we faced a general threat from up and coming economies that were leaner and meaner and more competitive than the U.S. had not sunk in as yet. By the time I got back to Japan in 1987, America's relative economic decline was a high profile international problem, but in 1977 to 1980, the problem of U.S. competitiveness was just a cloud on the horizon.

*Q: OK, well, you left that job when?*

BROWN: In the summer of 1981, I was reassigned to be the special assistant to the assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs.

*Q: Who was that?*

BROWN: At that time, the Assistant Secretary was a China hand, Ambassador John Holdridge.

*Q: Oh yes.*

BROWN: Subsequently, my boss in that job was Paul Wolfowitz.

*Q: Well how did you find your job? I mean …*

BROWN: How did I find it? I think I was ready for it, possibly even overconfident. But I was well aware that it would mean very long hours, including a couple of hours every night after the building closed up, and Saturday mornings as well. My wife and I decided that it was just too good an opportunity to resist.

I found that I still had lots to learn about the nuts and bolts of American diplomatic relations, specifically our political and economic strategic relations with East Asia. The learning curve was steep. The job of special assistant is basically to do whatever the boss wants you to do. That included taking notes and doing follow up every week after a Wednesday afternoon meeting that brought all the key people for Asia policy together, from defense, the NSC, and the agency, to talk about where things were going. For me that was a fascinating learning experience. I also learned more there than anywhere else the importance of building and maintaining relationships. I was a mid- level officer, not on the same footing as the dozen office directors, let alone the four deputy assistant secretaries in the bureau. I had to be judicious in deciding when I could speak, to explain

that "this is what the assistant secretary thinks about this," or "this is what he wants to see done." I had to do it in a way that didn't ruffle a lot of feathers. I also served as a conduit for useful information from the factory floor back to Ambassador Holdridge and subsequently to Assistant Secretary Wolfowitz. So I felt when I finished up that job that I had done OK but I also wished that I had known at the beginning even a small part of what I learned in the course of those two years.

There was a lot of liaison work to be done with the folks on the seventh floor, particularly in the Executive Secretariat, in trying to move important messages out of the department to our embassies and so forth. Ambassador Holdridge's attention was riveted on a very difficult period in U.S. relations with China. We had normalized relations just a few years earlier, in 1977. We had an ambassador and a large embassy in Beijing in place of the former liaison office. Embassy Beijing was headed by Ambassador Art Hummel, who led a very competent staff.

The Chinese got really upset when it came to take care of Taiwan. Which is to say that the United States and the People's Republic had in normalization talks come to an understanding about U.S. military support for Taiwan. As we understood it, weapons systems which the Taiwan authorities had could be replaced as they wore out with similar or equivalent equipment. It turned out to be that Beijing's interpretation of that was we ought not to transfer weapons embodying a higher level of military technology to Taiwan. I think the U.S. position on "equivalent weapons" could be characterized as meaning equivalently effective in defending the island, taking into account the general progress of weapons technology.

The key question was whether or not we were going to sell F-16's, high-performance fighter jets, to Taiwan. The Chinese were adamant that we should not. It led to nearly a year of very strained relations between Beijing and Washington, which preoccupied Ambassador Holdridge. Ultimately a lot of my time was spent running messages between the front office and the China Desk. I did have an opportunity to go on missions twice to negotiate these issues in Beijing. I went there in support of Vice President Bush's ice-breaking visit, and another trip for intensive talks at the assistant secretary level, negotiations which opened the way to a diplomatic resolution to the imbroglio.

It wasn't too long after the China crisis had settled that for reasons best known on the seventh floor, it was decided that the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific affairs needed new leadership. Paul Wolfowitz, who had been head of the Department's Policy Planning Staff, was not a professional diplomat but an academic who was fairly well known as what subsequently came to be called a "neocon." Paul was installed as the new assistant secretary. We got on well. He had a much broader view of what constituted Asian affairs and was intent on tightening things up across the bureau with particular regard to our relations with Japan and South Korea.

We had an opportunity then to do some rebuilding. The Bureau of Personnel had sent around a circular stating that the next year's budget would provide funding to add reporting and analysis slots. In fact the bureau was at fairly short strength considering the

rate at which our engagement across the Pacific was growing. After Vietnam collapsed a large number of positions had been reassigned from EAP into other bureaus.

That was understandable. Vietnam had eaten up a very large part of the department's resources for many years. But the reallocation had gone farther than it should have, and when I saw that circular I pointed it out to Secretary Wolfowitz. He said "yes, go for it." So we organized a survey, polling posts throughout the region to identify where additional political and economic reporting officers could be most effectively used. We did the staff work and apparently the other bureaus didn't, because at the end of the day the East Asia bureau had an additional 20 staff slots. I mention this because that was my principal project during the last six months that I was in the EAP front office. I managed it and was very pleased by the outcome.

It meant that in a number of embassies, it was no longer a situation of just being able to do just the bare necessities. These posts now had the luxury of doing some real digging and analytical work on fast evolving political relationships. So something that I worked very hard on for three or four months proved to be an investment that paid dividends for years.

*Q: Were you keeping an eye on where you wanted to go after that?*

BROWN: Yes, I was intent on getting back to Southeast Asia one day. I am quite sure having the assistant secretary in my corner helped. I was posted to be the chief of the political section in Kuala Lumpur via about six months of language training. Tuyet and I and our daughters, now ten and seven, arrived in KL in the summer of 1974 and stayed there until 1977.

*Q: What was the situation in Kuala Lumpur or Malaysia when you arrived?*

BROWN: Well it was absolutely fascinating. Malaysia had been a British colony, actually four British colonies: peninsular Malaya, Singapore, and Sabah and Sarawak in north Borneo. These colonies had been amalgamated through general agreement of the leaders of those places as part of the independence arrangements with the UK in 1963. The federation came apart within two years with Singapore's secession, which had the result of cementing Singapore as a Chinese dominated city state, and the rest of what had become Malaysia as a state dominated by Malays and other indigenous peoples but with, however a substantial Chinese and Indian minority, roughly 1/3 Chinese and 10-11% Indian. There was inevitably a lot of ethnic tension.

Chinese and Indian immigration had been encouraged by the British to provide a source of reliable labor for the tin mines and rubber plantations and so forth that were developed in the colonial era. Certainly the Chinese still were the most dynamic part of Malaysia's economy. Further, by 1974 the first generation of political leaders, Tunku Abdul Rahman and his successor, Hussein Onn, had been replaced by a rather more polemical bunch of people who had as their cardinal policy the elevation of the Bumiputra. Bumiputra means 'sons of the soil' and of course this is a term meaning the Malays and other indigenous

folks. Mahathir Mohammed was then the prime minister. He had been in office a couple of years, and had launched a draconian affirmative action program favoring the Malays.

I should mention that only four years earlier there had been very bloody race riots, particularly in the capital, Kuala Lumpur between Chinese and Malays, after which the Chinese did not presume any longer to share political power. They were intent, however, on maintaining their economic position and their status, at least behind the scenes, as an important part of the Malaysian community. There were a couple of other officers and subsequently also a junior officer also in my section and they kept a close watch on domestic affairs, particularly this new brand of federal ethnic politics. We were also concerned by the systematic conversion of Malaysia's judiciary into a docile instrument of the regime.

I took the foreign relations brief as my principal substantive task. Malaysia was one of the founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, and put considerable effort into making it a going and meaningful concern. U.S. interest in working with Malaysia had a couple of components. One was the very low key, underneath the radar development of a military to military relationship, which chiefly was effected by selecting and sending Malaysian officers to the U.S. for training and by very small joint training projects with Malaysian naval and army units and U.S. counterpart forces. It was then, in the mid-1980s, still in the getting-to-know-you-better stage. This led, after my time, to some transfers of sophisticated electronics equipment and weaponry.

The other substantial U.S. objective was working with the ASEAN countries to limit Vietnamese influence. In 1979, the Vietnamese communists had ousted the Khmer Rouge from all but some jungle regions on the frontier with Thailand. The Vietnamese had established a puppet regime in Phnom Penh, and the Thai in particular were unnerved. Politics makes strange bedfellows. We ended up working via the Thai in particular but also with Malaysia to support chiefly the Pol Pot remnants but also Khmer Republicans who had fled to the Thai border enclaves. An awful lot of time was spent trying to hold together a diplomatic and military coalition that would at least cause the Vietnamese overlords of Cambodia to wish they had not gotten so deeply engaged there. That took a long time to play out. It was not until 1979, two years after I left Malaysia, that the Vietnamese finally cut a deal and left Cambodia. Their puppet regime there was merged together with elements of both the Khmer Rouge and the so called neutralists and heavily propped up by the United Nations.

Another important object of U.S. interest in Malaysia was assistance to political refugees from Vietnam, the so-called boat people who had been arriving on Malaysia's northeastern seacoast in great numbers. Those who survived the perilous journey across the Gulf of Siam to Malaysia were not really welcome. The Malaysian government worried that it might be saddled with another hard-to-digest minority. Under pressure from the UN and western countries, K.L. had agreed to give these Vietnamese temporary refuge in very tightly supervised camps and facilitate their selection for resettlement in countries that were willing to take them.

For me, refugee resettlement was a backup brief. My good friend, David Walker, was posted to Kuala Lumpur as the refugee attaché. He managed most of the operational contact with Malaysian officials and also the hard work of screening refugees for possible resettlement in the U.S. We had our standards; not everyone could qualify. Basically they had to demonstrate some reason why they should be accepted. Generally, they already had a real connection with the U.S. We were not much interested in accepting folks who were simply opportunistic, those who fell into the category of what we generally called economic migrants. Those people generally tended to be Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry. We weren't too sure that many were in fact bona fide political refugees. It became evident as time passed that the new communist regime made life for the so called entrepreneur class in Vietnam virtually impossible. In retrospect, most were just as worthy political refugees as those of pure Vietnamese stock.

Our basic objective in the mid-70s was identifying those who had worked for the U.S. or for the Saigon government in positions of trust and responsibility, and their families. David Walker was in charge of that winnowing process. My wife, now that our girls were well-started at the International School of Kuala Lumpur, was able to go back to work as David's assistant and interpreter in interviews. Mainly the screening took place at Pulau Bidong, an island off the northeast coast of Malaysia where twelve to twenty thousand, I don't recall the number, boat people were detained awaiting screening and, they hoped and prayed, resettlement.

We look back on our three years in Kuala Lumpur as really a splendid place for our family to be. K.L. was not yet a big city. It was a medium sized city, fairly easy to get around in, with two substantial international schools, one British style, one American style. Of course, our kids went to the American school. Through the school and other people’s children who were there, we ended up with a lot of friends from other embassies and the expat business community. So it was a great experience and ISKL was a wonderful school.

*Q: At that time was there much migration, legal or illegal, between Sumatra and Malaysia?*

BROWN: There was a problem. It was all almost undocumented. Many cases were seasonal. Poor people would cross over to work on the oil palm plantations and in other jobs. They'd cross by night in pirogues, small boats, and be the subject of considerable argument and some friction between Malaysia and Indonesia. There were other things that were equally irritating. That included the beginnings of substantial cross Malacca Straits environmental pollution from the burning of fields for land preparation practices in Sumatra. It is still a problem today. And at that time, there was an alarming rise in piracy in the Malacca Straits, which is one of the chief reasons that the U.S. targeted Malaysia as an object of naval cooperation and some Coast Guard cooperation as well. Obviously, we had a real interest in seeing their forces get out of port and become increasingly more effective in what is now called "maritime awareness and interdiction capability."

So yes, there was plenty to do in Kuala Lumpur at that time. It was socially or politically a strange time because while there were a lot of friendly relationships between the U.S. and Malaysia's traditional elites, the new bunch, the Malay firebrands who were out to remake the political structure, viewed American diplomats with considerable suspicion. They certainly kept U.S. at arm's length.

I guess you couldn't work in Malaysia without being conscious that while there was an elaborate and very substantial and sincere effort made by members of all three major ethnic communities to maintain a tolerable social peace, that there was an awful lot of angst and, smoldering beneath the surface, a lot of tension. The question which we asked ourselves in order to move the reporting along was "whither Malaysia?" Was it going to end up some day like Singapore, or instead go the way of Lebanon or other multi-ethnic countries which were simply could not make a go of it?

*Q: Well today is 18 June 2015. This is the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. OK, with David Brown.*

*David before you leave Malaysia I have a number of questions to ask. I may be repeating myself, but how was Malaysia when you left. They made quite a turnaround from being a not very motivated world force into one of the little dragons. How did that come about?*

BROWN: While I was in Malaysia, it was taking off as an assembler of increasingly high tech devices. Intel was the biggest American firm there, but there were lots of others particularly in the area around Penang City. It was really thriving. As I mentioned earlier, there was a new Malay government which was aggressively pursuing a pro-Malay affirmative action program. Which was not regressive at all in the sense that rather than penalize everybody else, the objective was to bring Malays, who were largely country people into the modern, urban work force to participate in the hi tech foreign investment driven surge. As you said, Stu, that brought Malaysia in the course of ten or twelve years into the ranks of the so-called "little dragons." I was there at the beginning and sensed that it was likely to be a permanent thing. If my friends who tell me about Malaysia these days are correct, the country now has a problem with crony capitalism. A lot of the newly enfranchised bumiputra, that is, the champions of affirmative action for the Malay majority, have become very rich people based on close links to the government. That is a problem these days for the economy that wasn't that obvious in the time I was there.

*Q: Were you looking at China as being an aggressive power particularly in the South China Sea?*

BROWN: Not at all in 1984-1985. One thing we did follow carefully was the slow dance between Beijing and KL aiming at establishing a closer relationship. This is really before China had emerged as a big player. China still had quite a way to go to become the predominant economy in East Asia. Japan was the big economic engine at the time. Between Malaysia and China there were a lot of lingering issues. Of particular salience, the People's Republic had been a covert enabler and supplier of a communist, largely

Chinese, guerrilla revolt that persisted in Malaysia from the end of WWII well into the 1960s. By the mid-1970s it was pretty well extinguished, but there was lingering distrust of China because of its support for that rebellion and also for its support for the PRC's deep involvement with the ghastly Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. The Malaysian government perennially suspected that China was likely to intervene as a forceful advocate of a better deal for Malaysia's Chinese population, about 30% of the total.

At that time, Beijing had just begun to push the notion of "China's peaceful rise," that is, that China was destined to become an important player in the region but no one should worry about that. It also had not been very long, about a decade, since the upheavals in Indonesia where the beginnings of a communist uprising were very quickly suppressed. In Malaysia as well as Indonesia, there remained considerable concern as to what the Chinese might try next.

BROWN: In the summer of 1977, I was posted directly from Kuala Lumpur to Tokyo as the embassy's economic counselor. That was a bit of a wrench for my family. I have mentioned that KL was then, as a place to live for a family including girls who were just 14 and 11, just a wonderful place. Tokyo is a huge city. The kids had to commute by train and subway for well over an hour each way to get to the American school out in the western suburbs. The commute was well worth it, in that ASIJ, the American School in Japan, was a really first class institution, but it was a big change for Tina and Katherine. Of course the embassy in Tokyo was also huge. It was my second posting to Japan. More than a decade earlier, I had trained in Japanese. I had done a year managing the consular section in Osaka Kobe. Then after my second year I went on to a job in the political section in Tokyo. By the time I left Japan in 1977, I had been convinced that inside of every political problem I dealt with there, there was an economic kernel. That induced me to put in for the department's advanced economic training.

I felt as though coming back to Japan in a senior economic job vindicated that career strategy. It was a great job at a very difficult time in U.S.-Japan economic relations. For almost the entire time I was in Tokyo from 1987 through 1990 there was what could only be called a trade war.

Washington coordinated a concerted and continuous effort to negotiate the reorientation of a Japanese economy that had developed essentially as an export machine. The domestic economy was protected. The Japanese had emerged as formidable competitors in electronics and automobile making and lots of other things. However, they had not recognized the need to throttle back and adjust to the behavior of not only a good competitor but also of a maturing economy.

Some thoughtful Japanese were moving in that direction but still Japanese politics remained highly supportive of an almost closed economy in many respects, a highly protectionist economy. In particular there was a great wall keeping out agricultural imports, and there were in addition high tariffs on a lot of other things.

U.S. manufacturers had chips on their shoulders because in a lot of cases, they had set up

joint ventures in Japan. They had exported technology and then as time went by the Japanese partners had taken that technology, improved on it and then re-emerged as some other company that was very able to compete with and eat the lunch of their original American partners. There was a very sour mood in the U.S., in Washington, about Japanese trade tactics. It was the principal task of the economic section as well as of the commercial section of the embassy to follow the Japanese trade policy debate, to negotiate particular instances of unfair competition, and essentially to back up U.S. negotiators. USTR, the office of the Special Trade Representative had the lead in these negotiations with a mandate to negotiate structural reform of Japan's economy. That was what kept the economic section especially busy for three years. I had, counting myself, 24 people in my section. I reported to Rea Brazeal, who was the Economic Minister and she in turn to Ambassador Mike Mansfield.

Toward the end of 1979, Mike Armacost was sent to Tokyo as the new American ambassador. He had already been ambassador to the Philippines at that point. Of particular importance, Ambassador Armacost was attuned in to the Washington policy environment in a way that Ambassador Mansfield had not been.

*Q: Were you feeling much heat from Washington about what shall we do?*

BROWN: Yes, a lot of heat. By the time I began my new posting in Tokyo in the summer of 1987 the State Department was a particular target of the so-called trade hawks. The rap was that by prioritizing political and security interests, the State Department had in effect defended Japanese protectionism. That was said by many to be a large reason why we were running a huge bilateral imbalance in trade with Japan.
The smarter people in Washington realized that was a considerable exaggeration, but certainly something had to be done to bring Japan around. The answer was not to shut our markets to Japan but to persuade the Japanese to do a better job of opening their markets to the U.S. The negotiation I mentioned was called the Structural Impediments Initiative, or SII. Agreement to this negotiation had been reached bilaterally just as I returned to Tokyo in 1987.

It was a big move for the Japanese to agree that they needed to talk to U.S. about the economic structure of the Japanese economy. Japan has always been a rather different place. There is a long tradition of government intervention or management of the economy. It goes back to before the Meiji Reformation but certainly afterward, from the beginning of Japan's modern era (1868) up until more than 100 years later, the government had pretty much set the rules and refereed economic growth. There was a historically tight relationship between big business and governments in Japan. The Liberal Democrats had run the government from the end of Japan's postwar occupation, after Japanese conservatives, with General MacArthur's support, rallied to face down the communists and socialists. So the LDP had dominated Japanese politics ever since, up to this time. Their voter base was in rural areas and rural constituencies were heavily over-represented in the Diet (the Japanese national legislature), and consequently there was arrogant resistance on the part of our LDP friends to the idea of opening up Japan to a much larger degree to agricultural imports. This was the time when rice in Japan,

heavily subsidized, cost about five times the world price. We could produce the equivalent rice in California, as well as pork, beef, and a lot of other things which Japan did produce very well but not very efficiently.

These foods and citrus fruits were hot buttons. The Japanese government considered import barriers as a way, together with public works, to keep the rural economy vibrant and to provide a sort of social security for older Japanese. Typically they would retire from industrial jobs and concentrate on producing crops intensively on small plots.

In industry, there was also a semi-medieval structure, the keiretsu. The largest corporations, supported by their associated banks, organized middle sized and smaller companies to produce and supply the parts they needed exactly when they were needed. The keiretsu system worked well, but it also effectively shut out foreign competitors which couldn't get into the family. So that was another object of discussion. The structural dialogue went on for several years, as an evolving discussion of how Japan's social structure made it very difficult for Japan to become more like the rest of the developed economies.

There was never great hope in Washington that Japan would make a sharp turn this way or that way, in any sector of the economy. But I think it became rather obvious to the Japanese that the economy had to adjust. It was overheated in many respects and structurally unsound. So tacitly, without a formal over-arching agreement, the Japanese negotiators agreed that they needed to take their economy in new directions.

Now, fate has a way of stepping in. About a year after I left Japan for a new assignment in Washington, the so-called "Japanese bubble" burst. The Tokyo stock market lost about 2/3 of its value and Japan went through a very severe economic contraction.

That rendered moot a lot of what we had been talking about for several years. Now Japan, or the Japanese government, had both the opportunity and, I think, a better understanding of not just the need to reform but also that it was past time to rebuild the economy in new ways. The challenge was finding the political will to do so. That is still a work in progress.

My wife and I returned for a visit to Japan in 2015, 25 years after the end of our second posting. We had a delightful time. It is still a wonderful country. We have always loved Japan precisely because they do things differently. I mean if you are intent on imagining a really attractive, cultured and artistic civilization built on an entirely different foundation from the West in its social makeup, economic integration and aesthetic sensibilities, you couldn't find any place more interesting than Japan.

I said we didn't try to become Japanese -- that was never going to happen -- but we certainly made a lot of good friends and enjoyed tasting all the delights that Japan had to offer. Tasting in the sense that we loved their food, we loved their culture.

We were going to talk a little bit about Ambassador Mansfield. Would that be all right?

*Q: Yes, absolutely.*

BROWN: Mike Mansfield is one of the really great men that have come into my life. He was posted as ambassador to Japan following his decision to retire as a five term senator from Montana and as majority leader of the senate. Japan's importance to the U.S. had reached a point that Washington, let's say a succession of presidents, had come to feel more comfortable with political ambassadors in that job. The ambassador during my first posting in Japan was Jim Hodgson, previously a corporate executive and then Secretary of Labor before Gerald Ford sent him to Tokyo.

Mike Mansfield had been ambassador to Japan already for over five years when I arrived there in 1987. He was revered by the Japanese. They felt honored to have somebody so obviously of stature in the U.S. and plugged into political circles there, at least people of his generation. He was regarded as a very true, longstanding friend of Japan. He had been a champion of the U.S.-Japan relationship during his time in the Senate, seeing it as the cornerstone of his larger vision for the reconstruction of East Asia. The Japanese knew that. But naturally, as trade relations soured, Mike also became the target for a lot of sniping from the U.S. business establishment. That was gradually wearing down embassy morale and effectiveness.

Our DCM was Desaix Anderson, a good friend since our mutual service in Vietnam in the late 60s. Desaix's role was, in an important sense, to intercept incoming missiles aimed at Ambassador Mansfield. It reached the point where he was accused of being the guy who had led the ambassador astray, the evil power behind the throne.

It was a difficult time for the mission and particularly for the State Department component of it. At last it was evident that something needed to be done. Mike Mansfield was eased out and he was succeeded by Mike Armacost, a man a generation younger, very well plugged in to Washington, particularly with the political and security side of things. He had been deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asian security affairs, for example, in the early 70s, which is when I first got to know Mike and work with him. He had an ambassadorial posting to the Philippines and also spent a lot of time at the NSC.

Though he had never been an economic policy heavyweight, Ambassador Armacost arrived with a very urgent understanding that the embassy staff needed on the PR side to reposition ourselves as no less focused than the rest of the U.S. Government on doing something about this rather lopsided economic relationship and the very lopsided bilateral balance of payments that signified it. Mike Armacost was very successful in this difficult course correction, pacifying the trade hawks without damage to key security and political objectives. He gave a great many speeches to Japanese audiences, speaking much more directly than Ambassador Mansfield about the problems that were fraying the ties that bound U.S. to Japan.

Mike Armacost got into the habit of having me draft his speeches for him. Even today, I wonder what he saw in my drafts. I would turn them over to him and a day or so later

he'd give them back to me and they were completely recast and far better. I'd just provide the building blocks. In the end, the speeches were very much his own. It was very educational to work with him on them. I learned to see and articulate the U.S. relationship with Japan in a much more sophisticated way.

*Q: You were also managing the Economic Section. . . .*

Yes, and that was a management challenge considering that there were 24-25 people in the section. Fortunately, it was a very strong group of officers, self-starters by and large. I rarely had to worry about their understanding or spend time rewriting cable drafts. I focused mainly on ensuring good communication within the section and with our leadership upstairs. Many of the section's staff went on to quite senior jobs in the years that followed.

*Q: Well, did you find yourself an expert on rice and the Japanese stomach?*

BROWN: Yes, and we engaged in a bit of psychological warfare. One Christmas, my wife and I bought 40 pounds of Kokuho Rose brand rice at the commissary. It is grown in California but is exactly the medium grain rice that the Japanese prefer. Of course there was at that time a flat prohibition on importing any rice. We bagged two pounds each in Ziploc bags and gave it away as Christmas presents to our Japanese friends.

*Q: How was the outcome of the Vietnamese war viewed by your Japanese acquaintances?*

BROWN: That was a much bigger issue when I worked there in the mid-1970s in Tokyo. After the war ended in April, 1975, we had no diplomatic presence or any presence of any kind in Vietnam, so I spent a lot of time interviewing Japanese diplomats, who did keep a slimmed down mission going in Saigon. They were able to help U.S. understand the drift of things in Vietnam. That was one of my major briefs while in the Political Section.

By the late 80s the Vietnamese were finally coming out of a postwar Stalinist phase. They had tried to rebuild the economy according to Marxist precepts: pure state socialism. It had been a disaster. By 1987 to 1990, the years I was in Japan, Vietnam was just turning a corner, following Beijing's lead, trying to mix an authoritarian political order with a somewhat more creative, market-oriented economic order. The U.S. in low-profile contacts was starting to talk to the Vietnamese about maybe establishing a relationship. The Japanese and most of the European countries had all established full diplomatic relations with Vietnam in the early 80s after Hanoi pulled its army out of Cambodia. For my colleagues in the political section, tracking this evolution was an important brief, but it didn't really have much to do with my work as economic counselor.

*Q: Well what did you do next?*

BROWN: Well I was aiming for a posting in Washington. I believed that probably would

be my best career move. At that point I had one child finishing 10th grade and another finishing 8th grade at the American School in Japan. Tuyet and I figured it would be a good thing for them to have a couple of years in the U.S. system before they headed to college.

We had bought a house in Maryland, just off Seven Locks Road on the border between Rockville and Potomac. That put the kids into a very good school district so we had high hopes for that. I had been reassigned to serve as the director of the Office of International Energy Policy in the Economic Bureau. This was also a very logical continuation of previous work.

Iraq invaded Kuwait in the beginning of August, 1990, which meant that I had a much shorter home leave than I was hoping to have.

You'll recall that when I had been at the U.S. Mission to the OECD, I was the energy wallah there, the guy who did our day to day liaison with the staff of the International Energy Agency and who supported visitors from State's Economic Affairs Bureau and from the Department of Energy's International Bureau in our work to build effective and timely cooperation among the developed countries in dealing with upheavals in the energy markets.

That was the milieu that I moved back into as director of an office of about a dozen people. Of course, this was the Office of International Energy Policy, which meant that we also kept a close watch on in the oil producing nations. In my first year there, we were preoccupied by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein saw a chance to annex Kuwait. As you will recall, the U.S. managed to rally quite a substantial coalition of friends and allies to reverse that.

The Gulf War of course created an upheaval in world oil markets. The success of U.S. policy and coordination through the IEA during that period was probably the best argument you could make for the value of our fifteen year investment in the International Energy Agency. By 1990 the West had built up a substantial stockpile of oil, crude oil which could be released to the market whenever energy prices or speculation seemed to be getting out of hand. As it turned out in the six months that things were touch and go, during the buildup to wrest Kuwait back from Iraq and to get its oilfields producing again, the strategy of having that stockpile turned out to be hugely effective. Speculators knew that if they got too aggressive, they could immediately be caught short by a decision by the developed nations to release stockpiled oil to the market.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Bill Ramsay, my staff and I logged a lot of time going to IEA meetings and talking about the development of the situation, particularly the market situation, and forging agreement on a lot of minor adjustments.

The IEA by this time included Australia, New Zealand and Japan as well as our European allies and friends. France had rethought its earlier refusal to join the IEA. We had a formidable coalition and this very effective weapon, so effective that we needed only to

seem ready to use it.

Once things settled down in the Gulf, much of our attention shifted to dealing with some of the consequences of the implosion of the Soviet empire. Already the countries of Eastern Europe had broken free. Now it was the Soviet Union itself that was coming apart. This aroused concerns on the part of the Europeans in particular that there could be seriously adverse consequences for what had been a very stable energy market in Europe, stable in the sense that not only was Russia a major oil producer but it was far and away the dominant producer of natural gas. Much of Western Europe was dependent for electricity production on reliable supplies of gas from the Soviet Union.

Well, suddenly instead of one evil empire, you had not only the former European satellites plus the Baltic States but also another dozen or so Soviet republics almost all of which had some kind of role in the world oil and gas market. So, what could be done?

Led by the Dutch and the British, the European Community conceived that what was needed was a "European Energy Charter" which would stabilize the post-USSR structure of east-west energy relations. That sounded like a fairly good idea, but the EC left out one important thing. They didn't invite U.S. to sit in, and that caused a bit of a ripple in Washington. Our concern was that the Europeans might freelance and create some new realities that were not in keeping with the U.S. view of how things should be.

Recall, there was still a Republican administration in Washington under the first President Bush. There was a kind of triumphalism following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet empire. Many were pleased by the idea that the U.S. was going to be able to call all the shots in the post-Cold War world, the so-called "end of history." It would have been wiser to consider that we had inherited a new set of weighty responsibilities and that we'd have to rely, as usual, on our friends.

That was always evident to me as we got into the negotiation of this European Energy Charter. The first task was to get ourselves invited to the party, a matter that was coordinated by my boss, Deputy Assistant Secretary Bill Ramsay. Bill was responsible for energy policy and commodities, agricultural commodities in particular. With his network of colleagues in key capitals, he was very good at this.

It was decided that I should travel to Europe to make the pitch to the EC for U.S. participation in the nascent initiative. So I did, starting in London. I went from there to Bonn, to Paris, to Copenhagen because the Danes were in the chair of the EU at that point, and then I conferred with Italians on the margins of an IEA meeting. We persuaded the Europeans that we could bring something of value to their discussion and were invited in, together with the Japanese, Australians and Canadians. That was the prologue to my next year and a half, when I commuted almost monthly from Washington to Brussels for a week at a time as the Energy Charter negotiations morphed into a very long and very detailed discussion of the principles and rules that ought to govern east-west trade in oil and gas.

Within the U.S. Government, State, the Department of Energy and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) had a particular interest in the evolving Energy Charter Treaty. The Europeans were intent on establishing legally binding rules that would support unimpeded energy trade across the Eurasian continent. Later on, there was also considerable effort to get the Russians, et al., to agree to a set of rules that would protect Western investment in the energy sectors of the post-Soviet states.

I led the U.S. delegation for the first two years of what became a marathon negotiation. My principal colleagues throughout were Don Eiss of USTR and George Ziegler of DOE's International Bureau. We were ably backed by specialists from State's Office of Legal Affairs.

In principle, the U.S. was supportive of efforts to build institutions that would stitch Eurasia back together after four-plus decades of cold war. In practice, we wanted to be sure that our Western European friends, in their enthusiasm for the project, didn't compromise fundamental principles. In retrospect, I'd say our participation was mainly positive. It ensured that Moscow also would take the Energy Charter talks seriously. Early on, we persuaded the EC participants that the Charter should encompass protection of cross-border investments as well as trade matters.

USTR was cool to the idea of negotiating trade policy in a sectoral setting, and from the start, it seemed worried that State might "give way" on points of policy that it was seeking to embed in a concurrent negotiation aimed at modernizing the GATT and expanding coverage, which led to formation of the World Trade Organization. Maintaining tolerable coherence between State's broader objectives and USTR's principles was for me a constant challenge, particularly after the incumbent Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs, Gene McAllister, concluded that U.S. participation in the Energy Charter was "a waste of time and bureau resources."

Ultimately, 53 nations signed the Energy Charter Treaty in December 1994; the US, though it played a high-profile role throughout the three year negotiation, did not. I had moved on by then. I was relieved to pass the baton in mid-1993 to Clark Ellis, my successor as Director of the Office of Energy Policy.

As I returned to my "home bureau," East Asian and Pacific Affairs, North Korea's ambition to build nuclear weapons had kindled a first-order crisis. I was Country Director for Korea for two years, up to mid-1995. My new fief, the Korea Desk, was responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the spectrum of U.S. interests in and around the Korean Peninsula -- already a full-time job for a dozen officers -- but in those two years, we were also deeply engaged in support of efforts to engage the Pyongyang regime and walk them back to a safe place.

The first Korean nuclear crisis has been well documented. A particularly good PBS Frontline retrospective aired in, I think, 2003. (https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim/)

When I checked in, the crisis management team had already formed up. It was led by Bob Galluchi, the Assistant Secretary for Political/Military Affairs. Bob was ably seconded by DAS Tom Hubbard, my immediate boss, and backed up by Dan Poneman at the NSC and various folks at DOD, etc.

I conceived my role to be keeping the Korea Desk relevant, bringing our expertise into play to support strategy and its execution at the highest level. Here there was a problem: I knew the region; I knew the bureau, but I was not a Korea expert. My solution was to recruit two deputies who had the experience I lacked, Lynn Turk and Dick Christenson. Both were gifted linguists, both were eager to establish themselves as players at senior levels.

After 16 years at the helm of Emory University, Jim Laney had accepted President Clinton's invitation to return to South Korea as ambassador. He knew the country well from early service there as a Methodist missionary. I made it a priority to stay in close touch with Ambassador Laney and his DCM, my predecessor at the Korea Desk, Chuck Kartman.

Looking back, I remain impressed by the quality of the team that walked North Korea back from the brink of war. Not permanently, as we've seen later on. But Galluci, Hubbard, *et al.* managed to kick the ball down the road some considerable distance. It was another eight years before it became evident that Pyongyang was cheating again.

We dangled a lot of carrots, aiming to persuade the North Koreans that their real interest lied in putting aside their fears and integrating with the rest of the world. We had solid backing from Japan and -- notwithstanding recurrent fidgeting -- from the ROK.

Things had sorted out to the point that U.S. and North Korean teams were, quite literally, on the eve of meeting in Geneva to negotiate an end to Pyongyang's nuclear adventure. And then, half an hour after I'd gone to bed one Saturday night, the Department's Operations Center phoned. Radio Pyongyang had just announced the death of North Korea's "Great Leader," Kim Il-Sung.

It was a memorable night. Forty minutes later, I was at the Ops Center, being introduced by staff to its communications capabilities, helping officers in Beijing dissuade a U.S. senator from proceeding to Pyongyang, and then waking up Hubbard, Poneman and Gallucci to coordinate a statement of condolence from President Bill Clinton to the people of North Korea. The President was in Rome at the annual G-7 meeting. Gallucci spoke to him by phone at dawn, and Clinton authorized a statement that was issued at about 3 am in Washington. It was 9 am in Rome, 4 pm in Seoul. We had no doubt that saying something sympathetic was imperative, least we lose this long-sought opportunity to engage directly and substantively with the DPRK.

BROWN: Afterward, of course, there was a lot of second-guessing. Our ROK counterparts were not a bit happy and regarded our failure to give them a heads up about the U.S. statement as a breach of faith on our part. I concluded after the fact that I should

have argued harder for just that. That is to say, I should at least have gotten authorization to phone Minister Moon an hour or so beforehand to advise him that we were going to express American sympathy to the people of North Korea.

It's not that it would have made any huge difference in the outcome. Moon, his ambassador, and his colleagues in Seoul would have said, no, No, No! And I would have said "I am very sorry, but the decision has been made. I am just informing you." In the event, there was hardly time once things had been put together and had been run past every U.S. agency with skin in the game.

*Q: Well you know obviously to anybody if we are carrying on discussions with somebody and their father dies, or whatever you want to call him, Great Leader, you don't say hurrah.*

BROWN: Nor could we pretend that nothing happened.

OK. We are getting pretty close to the end of my State Department career. After the Great Leader's death, my 2nd year leading the Korea Desk passed with all of the usual difficulties keeping the South Koreans amenable and also long hours engaging the Japanese, another part of my work. And bringing in the Chinese; keeping the Chinese briefed and to a lesser extent the Russians, with the intention of setting up, as one outcome of our negotiations with the DPRK, a six nation group that would monitor the emerging situation on the Korean peninsula. Our objective was to extract a sincere, verifiable promise by Pyongyang that it would give up to trying to build a nuclear bomb and delivery vehicles. They would shut down their facility on Yongbyon and put it under an IAEA inspection regime. In return, we, that is to say the West, chiefly Japan and the U.S., would ensure that North Korea received a regular supply of a certain amount of crude oil every month.

In the mid-1990s, North Korea was experiencing a huge famine. Its economy was on the ropes. Pyongyang was not getting from the Russians the kind of support it had enjoyed from the Soviet Union. The DPRK did get some economic support from China but not nearly enough to cope with the famine and a very serious energy shortage. They needed this aid very much.

Like all agreements, the "Agreed Framework" didn't satisfy everybody. Certainly it did not satisfy a lot of people in Washington, political people, neocons and so forth, but it was the best deal available to get North Korea out of the nuclear business. It did that for several years, until everything came undone again during the George W. Bush administration. So now, two decades later, the U.S. and North Korea are again at loggerheads over Pyongyang's dogged pursuit of bombs and now also over the means they might be able to use to deliver them. But that is way after my time.

By the summer of 1994, as my two years as the Director for Korean Affairs were coming to an end, I was looking forward to a respite. It had been a very busy five years in Washington. Looking back, I wish I had found ways to spend more time with my two

daughters, who were now in college. That was a price that Foreign Service people paid, particularly those who were ambitious, and I was ambitious. But as chance would have it, I was not promoted to minister-counselor rank, the so-called FEMC, so I timed out at senior officer counselor rank, or FEOC.

It came quite clear that when the promotion lists were published in August of 1995 that my career as a diplomat was ending, so I had to start planning for retirement. In the normal course of things, that would have been about a year later. I did accept an invitation to join the Department's Policy Planning Staff with general responsibilities for Korea and Southeast Asia. About six months later, I was offered a job in the private sector by a small firm which specialized in putting together ambitious and imaginative energy projects. It had pretty much focused its attention on Eastern Europe and in finding ways to make new energy sector links between the former Soviet Union and Western Europe. A lot of my experience in the negotiations we talked about earlier seemed quite valuable. So I informed the Department that I wished to retire at the end of January, 1996. Anyway, there was sadness, some regrets, but also a tiny sense of liberation.

*Q: How do you feel about that? It sounds like you had the language and all this stuff going on, and yet why didn't they keep you on?*

BROWN: I could speculate but it would just sound self-serving. I felt that I was a good candidate for promotion. There weren't a lot of numbers that year, and the Department was under court order to do some affirmative action for other groups. As always there was an element of chance here, of timing.

*End of interview*