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

AMBASSADOR FINDLEY BURNS, JR.

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INTERVIEW

Q: Ambassador, you were born in Maryland in 1917 and graduated from Princeton in the class of 1939. You attended Harvard and the National War College. You entered the Foreign Service in 1942, serving in Madrid, Brussels, Warsaw, Vienna, Berlin, and

London, serving also as Foreign Service inspector and as Special Assistant to the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration. Your ambassadorial tours were Jordan from 1966-68, and Ecuador from 1970-73.

What do you have that would add or subtract from that record?

BURNS: Although I was commissioned a Foreign Service officer in 1942, I actually started work for the State Department in 1941. That year they took everybody who had passed the written Foreign Service exam and put them to work in the State Department.

Q: Were you Foreign Service Reserve, staff, or Civil Service?

BURNS: Foreign Service staff.

Q: You were commissioned as an 06 in 1942.

BURNS: Actually, they called it unclassified C.

Q: You had to go through three stages of unclassified before you became an 08.

BURNS: That's correct.

Q: What was it, Findley, that interested you in a Foreign Service career?

BURNS: I had become interested at Princeton. I majored in history, was interested in history and international relations. I had to take the exams twice to get in.

Q: So you took it in 1940 and 1941?

BURNS: That's correct.

Q: The old four-day exams?

BURNS: The old four-day exams.

Q: Where did you take it, in Washington?

BURNS: Yes, in Washington.

Q: Just a little bit more on the beginning of your career. You went to Madrid first. Was that directly upon being sworn in or after training at FSI?

BURNS: I was sent over there originally as a code clerk. In the State Department, before I went, I worked in the code room. Before that I worked in the visa section of the State Department from autumn of '41 until the spring of '42. Then I went to Madrid as a code

clerk and kept on in the code room even after I was a commissioned Foreign Service officer.

Q: Did you use a one-time pad then?

BURNS: That sort of thing was already outdated.

Q: Was there any kind of mechanical or electronic coding in those days?

BURNS: Yes, there was. It was of a very primitive nature compared to what it is today.

Q: Let's jump ahead for the moment. You were appointed ambassador to Jordan April 5, 1966. How did you get to be an ambassador?

BURNS: The State Department asked me if I would accept the appointment, and I said I would be very happy to do so. I believe that undoubtedly officials for whom I had worked in the past must have been influential in my receiving the appointment.

Q: Had you an inkling that this highly gratifying appointment was coming?

BURNS: None whatsoever. It came absolutely a bolt out of the blue.

Q: You must have been very pleased.

BURNS: I was very pleased.

Q: This was the Johnson Administration. You went up to the Hill. Did you have to testify at any length?

BURNS: Yes, I testified for about an hour.

Q: About the length, maybe, of a Foreign Service oral exam.

BURNS: An oral exam of today, yes.

Q: What kind of questions were asked, if you remember?

BURNS: A great many questions as to the fact that one of my languages was not Arabic.

Q: And how did you reply?

BURNS: I made no bones about the fact that I did not speak Arabic. I pointed out, however, that nearly all educated persons in Jordan spoke fluent English, its having been a British mandate before World War II, and I didn't feel I would have any difficulty communicating. That, by the way, proved to be the case.

Q: How many languages did you have under your belt then?

BURNS: Spanish and German.

Q: Did you see any evidence of political opposition to Johnson in the lines of questioning?

BURNS: No.

Q: How was it that Jordan was chosen for you?

BURNS: I do not know. I can only assume because it was vacant.

Q: Was this before or after Dean Brown?

BURNS: This was before Dean Brown.

Q: You flew to Amman and took up your post, presented your credentials to the King, I presume.

BURNS: Actually to the Crowned Prince. The King was away.

Q: What kinds of issues were facing you there at the post at that time upon your arrival?

BURNS: Issues facing the embassy itself internally, or facing us in our bilateral relations?

Q: I would like to explore both.

BURNS: I would say that US policy toward Jordan was very clear. One, that there not be Arab-Israeli hostilities; two, that Jordan remain a moderate Arab state. With regard to the second of these issues, it was not a problem with the government of King Hussein, since he, too, had the same interest that Jordan remain a moderate Arab state. The matter of Arab-Israeli war or peace was an issue that was discussed, quite frankly, from my earliest arrival and, of course, really became very much center stage a year after my arrival, after the closure of the Straits of Tiran.

Q: I understand that there was further question of a fighter bomber sales to Jordan.

BURNS: Yes, there was.

Q: In the context of the substantive issue you were talking about.

BURNS: We supplied the Jordanians with fighter planes. They were not fighter bombers, but basically fighter planes for defense. I want to make that very plain. We had a policy

and not least because of Israeli sensitivities, that equipment sold to Jordan would be of a defensive nature, and the equipment was of that nature.

Q: As late as December 1966, there was another military aid arrangement made with Jordan, a sale of trucks and armored personnel carriers. Were you involved in the negotiations for that, as well?

BURNS: I recall those negotiations had pretty well been concluded by the time I arrived.

Q: What was the rationale, then, for the record, for supplying Jordan with fighters, trucks, and armored personnel carriers?

BURNS: There were basically two reasons we did so. One, we supported Hussein's government because it was a moderate Arab government. One of the ways to support a government in the Middle East is to supply it with their arms needs. Jordan had been buying arms from the British, but they came to us to switch to American arms. We did not want them going to the Soviets. The second reason is that we felt that if we were the arms supplier, then we could ensure that Jordan was not armed with offensive weapons which could make Arab-Israeli hostilities more probable.

Q: Did you have specifics on the Soviet offers of arms?

BURNS: I don't recall them today, but at the time we had the specifics. As a matter of fact, the specifics came from the Jordanians themselves, and accurate or not, were used by the Jordanians as a pressure tactic on us to supply them with weapons that we were initially reluctant to sell them.

Q: In all of these cases, they were sales, were they not?

BURNS: They were sales, as far as I recall.

Q: You had elections in Jordan in April. The Premier resigned in March. Do you remember those events before the 1967 War?

BURNS: I remember that the political situation was such that the real power in Jordan rested with the King. There would be elections, but it would be between parties which were aligned very closely together in loyalty to the throne. The prime ministers would be changed in an effort to keep the position circulating among the small group of the King's top loyal supporters.

Q: These were royal family?

BURNS: Some were royal family. As a matter of fact, when I left Jordan, the prime minister was the King's great-uncle. However, before the Arab-Israeli War, the King had one particularly able man as prime minister named Wasfi Tel. He was the prime minister

when I arrived in the summer of 1966, and he remained prime minister until shortly before the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Then he moved to the palace as chief of what they called the Diwan, which is equivalent to our White House chief of staff.

Q: We'll come back to fables of that sort, because I want to ask you how you related in your official capacity to people below the level of King. Let's move on, while we're still on substantive questions, and move to the war. Hussein went to Washington in June. Did you go with him?

BURNS: That was after the war. Yes, I went at that time.

Q: Let's talk about the war.

BURNS: All right.

Q: Where were you when it happened?

BURNS: I was in Amman. A momentous event for Jordan happened about a week before the war began. The war began on the sixth of June, and this event must have taken place the last week of May. It took all of us totally by surprise, including the CIA, which had very close relations with the Jordanians. The event was that the King got on a plane and flew to Cairo. This was after Nasser had closed the Straits of Tiran. As a result of this visit, an alliance was made between Egypt and Jordan, which required Jordan to come to the defense of Egypt if the latter were attacked by Israel, and Egypt to the aid of Jordan in the event of similar attack. Furthermore, as a result of his visit, Hussein embraced the PLO. This really shook everyone, because it was totally unexpected. We had received no inkling from any source whatsoever. I can only conclude Hussein made a sudden decision to do what he did, maybe only 24 or 48 hours beforehand.

I now understand the rationale of why he did it. He did it because he was convinced that war was coming. By the way, in that particular conviction, I totally agreed with him, and so did the officers of the embassy. It wasn't at all certain, however, as to who would begin it. Hussein was convinced that the Israelis were going to attack him.

During the week before the war began, I saw him every day, if not twice a day, sometimes even three times a day. By the way, these visits would be held either during normal office hours, or I'd be called over at 11:00 at night to his house. I say "house," because his daytime office was in the palace, but he lived in a house. Or I'd be called in to see the prime minister. Never the foreign minister. The foreign minister in Jordan at that time was a figurehead.

Hussein was convinced that the Israelis were going to attack him. I argued with him at length that he was wrong. I always took the chief of our political section with me to these meetings, and both of us argued that in the event of war the Israelis would have their hands full. We didn't argue with Hussein in his thesis that it was quite conceivable Israel

would attack Egypt and even possibly Syria, but we flatly disagreed Israel would attack Jordan. Israel was interested in keeping a moderate government in Jordan, and an attack on Jordan could undoubtedly end up unseating the King. And furthermore, Jordan's relationship with the U.S.A. should certainly give Israel much pause to attack.

Hussein replied: "They want the West Bank. They've been waiting for a chance to get it, and they're going to take advantage of us and they're going to attack." I might say that this difference of opinion between Hussein and me existed right up until the time the war started.

Q: When he called you over twice a day, or the prime minister called you over, what, typically, would they want you for?

BURNS: To find out what we know, and to press for an assurance that if Israel attacked, we would defend them.

Q: And your response?

BURNS: I replied that we don't give hypothetical answers to hypothetical questions.

Q: That was what you responded?

BURNS: That's correct. I informed the State Department, and they never suggested a different response.

Q: Who was office director?

BURNS: Harry Symmes. He later became my successor.

Q: Who was assistant secretary?

BURNS: Lucius Battle.

Q: So you knew who you were dealing with and reporting to.

BURNS: I knew what was possible for the United States Government. We could not make a formal alliance. We had refused the request from Israel for a formal alliance. We hardly could turn around and give one to Jordan. Our failure to do so later caused Hussein to say, "If you'd done it, I wouldn't have attacked Israel." But I still believe to this day, that if Hussein had sat tight, he'd have gotten through without being attacked.

He had another reason for his pact with Nasser, he said, and that was because he was so convinced that the Israelis were going to attack him, and he knew he'd never get a defense pact from the United States, he wanted to bind Egypt to come to his defense. He thought it not at all unlikely Israel would not attack Egypt but only Jordan. By the way, he did not

make a similar arrangement with the Syrians, with whom he had extremely bad relations right up until the day the war started.

As you know, the Israelis attacked the Egyptians, Egypt then cashed in its chips with Hussein, and said, "Now honor your pledge. You attack." And he did. It was a disaster.

Q: It wasn't too smart an arrangement on Hussein's part.

BURNS: One of the problems was that, remember, the Jordanians only had defensive military equipment. All their training under Glubb Pasha and his successor was for a defensive war, retracting slowly and making the Israelis pay dearly--but never, never an offense. When they in fact went on the offensive, for which they were utterly untrained, utterly unprepared, utterly ill-equipped, it was a catastrophe. Tanks ran out of gas, to give you one example, because fuel reserves were positioned to the rear, not forward.

Q: They were, however, well trained.

BURNS: They were extremely well-trained soldiers, but basically trained for defensive operations, not offensive ones.

Q: On the other hand, the Egyptians were not very well trained. Was that your impression?

BURNS: The Israelis said afterwards the best trained soldiers they encountered were the Syrians, with the Jordanians next, and the Egyptians last.

Q: Also for the record, you were called by Washington at 11:00 at night, the first night of the war?

BURNS: Yes. Telephone lines, as a matter of fact, were open all during the Six-Day War, and Washington would call me frequently. What preoccupied Washington was the safety of the Embassy staff and American residents and tourists.

When the mutual assistance pact between Hussein and Nasser was signed in May, we were absolutely convinced not only that there were going to be hostilities, but that quite possibly Jordan was going to be involved. Your concern is that, in case law and order does break down in Amman, which, by the way, it nearly did, what can you do to ensure that the Embassy survives?

One of the things we did was to get in work crews to shore up everything so you couldn't break into the Embassy; and to ensure we had a large supply of gasoline, food, bedding, etc. We didn't know how long we might be in a siege situation.

It was not possible to reduce the American staff of the Embassy (about 100) before hostilities started. We only had a week between the time Hussein signed the pact with

Nasser and the start of the war. To move staff out publicly at that time would have been misread all the way around by everybody. Washington certainly was not in favor of it, and neither was I.
Q: All embassies had an evacuation plan, and I assume you had an elaborate one.

BURNS: Yes, but it proved to be utterly useless, as so often happens with plans you make up that far in advance for hypothetical situations. Since we had a fairly accurate idea of exactly what the situation could be, we made up our plan from scratch. The plan basically was to get all but key Embassy Americans and all other Americans (tourists, etc.) out of Jordan.

But the third day of the war, the night before Jordan's total collapse, I got a telephone call at about 8:00 in the evening from the Minister of the Interior. He said, "Mr. Ambassador, I think I ought to tell you that in my opinion, by tomorrow morning, Amman will be in chaos. There will be no law and order. If I were you, I'd get every American out of town tonight."

Two hours later, we received a cable from CIA, stating it was reported that Hussein, by private plane, had landed in Rome. However, those of us who knew Hussein doubted very much the report. It was <u>not</u> in character!
As for getting the Americans out of Jordan on the night in question, it was quite impossible. We concluded it would be less dangerous for them to remain in Amman than try to evacuate them and probably get them shot in the process.

Q: Who was your DCM then?

BURNS: He wasn't there anymore. He had been transferred, and there wasn't a DCM at the time. It was really Dick Murphy, the Chief of the Political Section, who served <u>de facto</u> as DCM. He was an absolute pillar of strength. By the way, he was absolutely fluent in Arabic, though never in all the times we saw Jordanian officials together, did we ever speak anything but English. The Jordanians all spoke English. Hussein spoke English perfectly, knew every nuance of our language.

Q: Hermann Eilts in Cairo spoke Arabic fluently, but in the four years that I was with him, I'd never heard him use it officially. It was just not spoken.

Your Acting DCM and mainly you decided then . . .

BURNS: The "decision group" consisted, in addition to Murphy, of a very bright assistant defense attaché, the CIA station chief, and the Director of AID--all of them as sharp as they could be. When evacuation matters were involved, we brought in the chief of the consular section, who was responsible for keeping track of the Americans (about 400 of them) and the administrative officer.

Q: Did you use formally what's called the country team?

BURNS: Yes, informally. I'd simply say, "Get the boys in. We've got a problem." They were reading the cables as fast as I was, and they'd be knocking on my door, saying, "What are we going to do about this?" No, it was not formal in any sense of the word. It was very informal, but it worked. We were almost continuously in session, night and day, by the way. We just worked around the clock. Of the Embassy staff, which numbered perhaps 100 Americans, we had only 25 in the Embassy during the war itself, and ten of those were Marine Guards. The rest we asked to stay home.
Q: So you stayed in and slept in the embassy?

BURNS: Right around the clock.

Q: Everybody else was told to stay home?

BURNS: That's correct.

Q: Were the ones who stayed home in guarded compounds, or were they scattered?

BURNS: They were bundled together - 4 or 5 to a house. Our great worry were the hoards of Americans who had fled to Amman from the West Bank before the invading Israeli forces. There were at least 300 tourists, clergy, archeologists, etc. The chief of our consular section did a wonderful job of getting them all to move into the largest hotel in Amman, which made guarding them much easier.

Q: What was the name of the consular officer?

BURNS: Mike Davila.

Q: And the name of the assistant military attaché?

BURNS: Bill Pfeiffer. He later became a colonel and military attaché to Dick Murphy when the latter was ambassador to Saudi Arabia. A fine officer, really first-class officer.

We were lucky to have good people. You never knew what you had to do next. We had a supply of gold sovereigns which we'd gotten just before the war broke out. I'd asked the King before the war actually started for a royal guard. It was part of Hussein's personal Bedouin guard staff. They set up camp all around the Embassy, with fires going at night, boiling tea and coffee. Every now and then we'd go out and pass gold around to keep their "loyalty" undiminished.

Q: I had to count the gold in the embassy in Paris one time, all stacked up in little tiny coins. When did you know that there was not going to be, shall we say, a blood bath following cessation of hostilities?

BURNS: It took a couple of days to be absolutely certain, because on the fourth day, the Army began straggling back to Amman, all armed, and under little or no officer or non-com discipline. But the Jordanians are so well personally disciplined. I could only attribute the order that prevailed to that.

Also, any time there was a formation of a crowd, the government would sound an air raid siren, and everybody would scatter. The people never caught on. We only had one air raid during that war, and that was on the first day.

Q: Who thought up that gimmick, the King?

BURNS: The prime minister. It was his major contribution to the war. The guy after the King himself, who had the most power was Wasfi Tel. The prime minister at the time was a gentleman who wasn't terribly strong. Tel was Chief of the Royal Diwan, or the equivalent of our White House Chief of Staff.

Q: With all of the consultation with the King you had at his behest before the hostilities broke out, did he let you know in advance, in any fashion, that he was going to fulfill his obligation to the Egyptians and actually attack Jerusalem?

BURNS: No.

You know what Wasfi Tel told me after the war? He said, "Well, any schoolboy cadet could have done better in that war than we did."

About a week after the end of the war, we were able to evacuate the American staff who were not key, plus the 300 or 400 Americans who had fled to Amman. We convinced Washington to send the planes in from the east, and to paint out US Air Force insignia and substitute large red crosses. The Jordanian air force was still convinced the US had helped Israel militarily. There was real danger the Jordanian anti-aircraft gunners, still were positioned to the west of Amman, would open fire on our planes. The day before our air lift was to leave, I got a call from the British ambassador, saying that he had tried to convince Whitehall to do what we were doing. Nonetheless, London insisted on flying in directly over Israel, and with RAF insignia showing. The ambassador thought they're all going to be shot down long before they get to Amman. So we agreed to take the British, and before long, everyone else. I think there were 1,200 people evacuated in that air lift, including Russians.

At the airport, it was so dicey with the Jordanian Air Force that the King had to send his royal Bedouin guards to set up machine gun posts at the airport to protect our planes and the evacuees. Until those planes got off the ground, I admit I was nervous. They got out, however, without anything happening.

Q: You had a much smaller staff?

BURNS: The evacuated staff came back after about four months.

Another interesting thing happened. The AID mission had about 150 Jordanian employees. AID wanted us to terminate them all since we were suspending aid to Jordan, but we wouldn't agree since we knew we'd eventually resume aid. After all, we had as much interest in preserving a stable Hashemite Jordan after the war as we had before. So we did convince AID in Washington to keep the Jordanian staff on the payroll, and I want you to know they kept busy for four months until the AID program was restored, all 150 of them, writing memos to each other, as far as I could see. (Laughs) I used to tease the AID mission director about that.

Q: Peter Principle - work expands... Hussein then went to Washington shortly after the war.

BURNS: He did. He went several times, in fact. He went to Washington largely to ask for support. It didn't take long before we got back to the old basis with the Jordanians. But that was about the time I left.

Q: Harrison Simms came in October, and it was shortly thereafter that Hussein came out with his "Israel has the right to exist" condition.

BURNS: I think so.

Q: Would you say that was a direct result of having been affected by the wartime experience?

BURNS: I think that had Hussein been willing and/or able to make formal peace with Israel directly after the Six-Day War, he could have gotten the West Bank back. But, he didn't, and probably couldn't, without his dynasty falling.

Q: The last time we talked, you described for me at some length your experiences during the Six-Day War while you were ambassador in Amman. Without going over that same ground again, I would like to ask if you could possibly summarize for me how an ambassador in that particular instance or a similar instance would go about organizing his embassy for a crisis situation. What would he think about doing first?

BURNS: There are two things an ambassador would think about in a situation like that. The first is you want the people there whose functions most directly relate on the crisis that will confront you. For example, you want the chief of the political section, the station chief of CIA, and the administrative officer (because you've got the problem of keeping the embassy--the guards, the security, the communications--all running). You also want competent people. In Jordan, I went so far in one case as, to select a deputy, but not the top man, to remain in the embassy to work with us through the crisis. Of course, this was

not appreciated by the top man, but the matter was too important to follow protocol. His deputy, in my opinion, was infinitely more capable.

Q: Are there any guidelines or suggested recommendations that emerged from that experience that you've had a chance to reflect on since?

BURNS: No. It was just a natural reaction to a crisis situation. I think anyone else would have done exactly the same thing in my position.

Q: You may not have done exactly the same yourself?

BURNS: No, I think I would do the same thing again.

Q: What is the critical mass? How many people can you, as ambassador, manage in a crisis situation of that sort?

BURNS: In a situation like that, in your immediate circle of advisors, you don't want many more than about six working together. That does not count necessary security and administrative personnel who have to be there, like Marine guards or the cryptographic personnel and stenographers, personnel of that sort. I'm talking about the immediate circle of officer personnel that you're going to work with. I've seen country teams with up to 25 people. That's fine for peacetime, because those meetings are more for show and improving inter-agency relations than they are for working purposes. But when the chips are down and you've got a serious crisis on your hands, you just don't have time to play games. It would be irresponsible of you if you did.

Q: Did you have daily staff meetings in times other than crisis?

BURNS: No, I did not. I had a large staff meeting once a week, and smaller staff meetings two or three times a week. The smaller group were the officers whom I have described as having kept in the embassy during the Six-Day War. We could usually get the smaller group meetings done in 20 to 30 minutes, because I was dealing with each bilaterally continuously. I dealt with each one of the six probably several times a day on a one-on-one basis.

Q: As your best working group in a crisis situation, you had about six people. What was the size of the officer staff, as contrasted with six?

BURNS: I assume you're including the officers of the AID mission, the officers of the military assistance group, and all of that. There must have been about 70 of them, as I recall.

Q: So the crisis staff shrank from 70 down to six.

BURNS: That's correct.

Q: Does that tell us anything?

BURNS: You can draw whatever conclusion from it you like. In other words, the conclusion you might draw is that six people is enough to run an embassy, and you don't really need 70. Two comments on that. Number one, you are working under intense pressure, and you're working not eight hours a day; you're working 24 hours a day. You can't keep that up for a long period of time, obviously.

Secondly, there are a great many functions which are most desirable to perform. However, normal economic reporting or agricultural research are not relevant to getting through a war that is going to last less than a week. You need the economists back right afterwards to ascertain what the economic effects will be, but during the actual hostilities, it isn't necessary. One of the officers I had there, one of the six, was an economic officer (the AID Mission Director), but basically he was there because he was a very able officer and he could do all sorts of things that were necessary to do, other than economics.

Q: Did you have any notion when the Six-Day War broke out, how long it would last?

BURNS: No, we really didn't. We in the embassy thought it would be a short war, and we also thought that Israel would win it. A short war could be anything up to 30 days. We didn't really expect it to be over quite so soon as it was. We just had no idea the Jordanians would collapse as soon as proved to be the case.
Q: I'm sure Hussein didn't either.

In February 1970, you were appointed ambassador to Ecuador. Then over the next year or two, you had several substantive issues that came up, one having to do with tuna boats, fishing problems, and you had some kind of nationalization of ITT property, that sort of thing.

You were, by this time, not only an experienced FSO, but you were an experienced ambassador. When you arrived in Quito, how did you go about organizing your embassy and staff? What are some of the steps? Just for the record, for those of us who have never been ambassadors and who have never faced that particular question, how do you go about organizing your embassy to suit yourself, and how do you go about establishing your authority and so forth?

BURNS: The fact that you have been appointed ambassador endows you with a great deal of authority right from the start. And what I did was exactly what I had seen other ambassadors do--ambassadors for whom I have worked and whom I greatly admired. In point of fact, you end up working with a fairly small group, especially the heads of embassy sections and agencies whose responsibilities are the most germane to your problems.

In Ecuador, the economic issue played a much bigger role than it did in Jordan, so the head of the economic section and the head of the AID mission were both vital. The chief of the political section, the defense attaché, and the CIA station chief were the other ones that you worked closely with. The aforementioned five, plus the head of USIS, comprised the group I met with three times a week. Then there was a larger group that met every other week and included the agricultural attaché and other attachés of one sort or another, such as the head of NASA, who certainly did very worthwhile work, but whom it was not necessary for me to confer with a great deal.

Q: Did you call your first staff meeting the first day or the second day of the first week?

BURNS: I don't rightly recall, to tell you the truth. Probably about the second or third day.

Q: You not only were an experienced FSO, not only an experienced ambassador; you had a great deal of administrative experience, as well, at that point. Did you bring to the job of ambassador any administrative skills that you were familiar with or that perhaps you had not seen exercised by other ambassadors?

BURNS: I had one advantage that most ambassadors don't have. My previous position had been as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs in charge of administration and personnel not only for the State Department, but also for AID. The most important thing at the embassy, to be perfectly honest with you, is the quality of your staff. The fact that I had had this Washington job and also had previously served three tours of duty in our central personnel office, gave me a very good idea of exactly how the personnel process worked. I devoted a good deal of time to making sure I had a crackerjack staff in Ecuador.

When I arrived in Quito, some members of the staff were just not up to scratch. In the first six or eight months, we replaced them with highly competent people. Once you get a staff of highly competent people, that takes care of 90% of your job, providing you're willing to delegate to them, which I certainly am when they're competent.
Q: You have a personnel pool, and you have people coming up for transfer. How do you select from that pool? You can't know everyone.

BURNS: I had a simple system. The personnel officer of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs was somebody I had brought in when I was there. I had complete confidence in her judgment, and I put the whole matter in her hands. She knew exactly the kind of people I needed to have, and she got them.

Q: You didn't have, then, any administrative difficulties facing you in your assignment in Ecuador?

BURNS: I had many when I arrived, because we had an administrative officer who was not up to snuff. The security was lax, and that had to be tightened up. And it was, once we got a new administrative officer who knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

Q: Your problems, then, lasted at most six months?

BURNS: In that particular matter, that's correct. It didn't last very long.

Q: What was the most vexing substantive problem facing you when you went there?

BURNS: The most vexing substantive problem was the issue of the seizure of tuna boats. The problem involved in this matter were territorial limits of sovereignty at sea. I found that the US Government was quite divided on this. Just to recall, the Ecuadorians had a 200-mile limit for fishing rights, and we had a 12-mile limit. But the US Government finally came to the conclusion after I had left Ecuador that a 200-mile limit was more practical, not because the Ecuadorians wanted it, but because it was better for us.

It had been the tuna boat lobby that fought to keep that 12-mile limit so they would not have to pay Ecuador (and Peru) for fishing licenses. Finally, after I left, the US Navy combined with the sports fishermen of America swung the US around to agreeing to a 200-mile limit. We particularly didn't care for Soviet ships fishing 12.1 miles off New England.

Q: US tuna boats were fishing down to the 12 miles.

BURNS: You bet they were. They were getting seized for lack of license, and then they were screaming bloody murder when they would be fined by the Ecuadorians. And there was always the danger of a serious incident. Indeed, there was one occasion when an Ecuadorian warship actually fired at a US tuna boat. It missed, happily.

There was one thing that the tuna boat fishermen did which helped swing US public opinion against them. They killed dolphins. They entrapped them in the nets. In years past, you see, tuna were caught on a line. When I went to Ecuador, tuna fisherman were introducing net fishing for the first time. They could catch more fish with less fishermen that way, but unfortunately they were strangling and suffocating dolphins in the process.

Q: You say the 200-mile limit was more practical from the US point of view.

BURNS: That's correct. We were terribly concerned, for example, about free passage of straits, and one way we could establish rights of free passage of straits was to offer the bargaining chip of the 200-mile limit in return for free rights of straits, which is what we did in the Law of the Sea Conference. By the way, the Reagan Administration never ratified the Treaty.

Q: As I recall, we espoused at one time, years ago, a three-mile limit.

BURNS: We did. That was our territorial waters, and 12 miles for fishing. One thing you could do, if you went for a 200-mile fishing limit, you could then claim a 12-mile territorial limit, which appealed greatly to the Navy and offshore drillers.

One of the things that was happening with the old 12-mile fishing limit was that the Japanese and Russians were fishing out all of our sport fish.

Q: When you would get slightly ridiculous instructions, who would you call in the Department?

BURNS: It depended. We had an excellent desk officer who was very smart. (She's now an Assistant Secretary of State, by the way.) She had contacts all over. She made the contacts. In fact, the job of Ecuadorian desk officer enormously helped her career to take off because as a result of the job, she became the State Department leading authority on matters pertaining to law of the sea.

Q: Being in the right place at the right time.

BURNS: The right place at the right time.

Q: And doing something with it.

BURNS: That's right. As a matter of fact, she found her husband through the Ecuadorian desk officer job. He was the Coast Guard representative at Law of the Sea meetings that she used to attend on behalf of the Department of State.

Q: Not long after your arrival, you had nationalization takeover questions.

BURNS: Yes. It involved IT&T. I'll be perfectly honest. I think IT&T played its cards badly. They sent to Ecuador inept negotiators who alienated the Ecuadorians. These negotiators refused every reasonable offer for quite a while before accepting an offer that was no better than, if as good as, the first offer.

Q: It eventually was settled, and they did receive compensation.

BURNS: They did, that's right.

Q: It's the right of any sovereign government, of course.

BURNS: It's the right. All countries nationalize telephone companies sooner or later. It came as a complete shock to IT&T when it happened. Another thing IT&T insisted, as part of the settlement, that they be allowed to retain undeveloped land they owned. I advised them to sell as soon as they could. By the time the negotiations were over, the

government didn't care for IT&T very much, and I knew perfectly well they were just waiting for an opportunity to nationalize the undeveloped land and offer peanuts for it.

Shortly thereafter, I was in New York and saw a vice president of IT&T, and made my views plain. A lot of people in IT&T did not like my advice, but the land was sold. They got out with their money. This was a smart vice president. I wish he'd been in charge from the beginning.

Q: You mentioned oil. Ecuador became a member of OPEC. Was it already a member at that point?

BURNS: There was no OPEC when I was there. OPEC was formed as I was leaving. It hadn't come seriously onto the world scene.

Q: In late November 1972, the government of Ecuador canceled US oil concessions. Is my information correct here?

BURNS: Not correct.

Q: And a finance minister, a Mr. Vaegar Moreno, was fired because of something going on?

BURNS: I don't recall that, but there were always one or another scandal amongst Ecuadorian officials. They were handled with considerable sophistication, I thought, by the Ecuadorians. No, there was never any oil nationalization.

Q: My information is not nationalization; maybe it's just that they canceled some concessions.

BURNS: They may have canceled some concessions. I don't recall that at all. Nearly everything that Gulf and Texaco wanted, they got. They had first class people in charge of their operations in Ecuador. Texaco and Gulf did go to considerable expense to build their pipeline from the oil fields in the Amazonian basin over the two ranges of the Andes to the Ecuadorian part of Esmeraldas on the Pacific.

Q: A pipeline of that sort, I suppose, required pumping stations.

BURNS: Pumping stations for not only one range of the Andes, but two. That was because Texaco/Gulf and principally the Government of Ecuador could never come to an agreement with the Brazilians or the Peruvians about pumping the oil to a part of the Amazon. This would have been much cheaper, but Ecuadorian national honor was at stake.

The main problem was with the Peruvians. The Ecuadorians hate the Peruvians, and their fear was that if they built a pipeline to Iquitos, the Peruvians would take advantage of this and clamp the pipeline shut the next time there was a Peruvian/Ecuadorian dispute.
Q: Ecuadorians still remember the early 1940s.

BURNS: They certainly do. They remember with a great deal of sadness because of the land they lost to Peru. And the Ecuadorians never got over the fact that we were party to the final settlement, which the Ecuadorians considered to be a *.

Q: Shortly after you arrived, the USIS Center was bombed. Who was behind that?

BURNS: Probably the small Communist party in Ecuador--probably. There was a small Communist group, very small. When I arrived, they were fomenting student demonstrations and so forth. It was quite easily brought under control. In Ecuador, the Communists hold little appeal for the mass of the people.

Q: Just for the sake of someone who is not familiar with the Quito scene, and maybe not familiar with the operations of an embassy, you were informed that the USIS had been bombed, by the police or the Minister of the Interior?

BURNS: By the Director of USIS.

Q: Then what do you do?

BURNS: We try to find out the facts, first of all, exactly what happened. Who did it? Is the Ecuadorian government doing everything they can to protect our property? That's the main thing you want to know. The answer to that was, yes, they were. They brought in troops to guard USIS. You don't protest the demonstrations to the government, because the government isn't any happier with the situation than you are. What you really want to make sure of is that in the future adequate protection will be afforded to USIS and other US government property.

Q: In this particular case, though, who precisely, at least by position, did you contact in the government of Ecuador?

BURNS: The Minister of the Interior. The DCM took care of the matter with the USIS director, and I was delighted they did, because it was something they could handle at their level. They were both highly competent.

Q: This is the kind of thing that could be handled at that level?

BURNS: It could. Ecuador is the kind of place where a DCM can deal with a Minister, maybe not with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but with other ministers and with the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Ecuador was small, and you got to know people. The DCM knew the Minister of the Interior as well as I did. He got along well with him, too.

Q: Of course, on a given occasion, though, the Minister of the Interior, or anything else, could decline to receive the DCM.

BURNS: They could, but didn't. Although the Ecuadorians were very strict on protocol observance for certain things, they could also be very informal. For example, the incident I mentioned when the Ecuadorian warship fired on the American tuna boat, the DCM dealt with that matter--and in the middle of the night--with the Minister of Defense. The Minister of Defense was perfectly willing to deal with him on this. In fact, the Minister of Defense didn't know the incident had happened, and he right away understood the gravity and the portent of what had happened.

Q: You must have had a great deal of confidence in this particular DCM.

BURNS: I did, and he knew I did. That's correct.

Q: Who was the DCM?

BURNS: His name is Max Chaplin. I was very pleased with his performance.

Q: You know very well, when you say, "I dealt with the government" what that means.

BURNS: If the DCM had run into a problem with the Minister of Defense, if the Minister of Defense had said, "I won't see you," then he would have called me. He'd had to. But in this event he could handle it himself, and he did.

Q: This is just one isolated instance, the bombing of the USIS Center in Quito. Did the station chief play a role?

BURNS: The DCM did ask him for an estimate on who was involved and the background behind the attack. CIA was not much help in this matter, nor did I expect that they could be. This was really more of a police matter than anything else, because not only were the disturbers disturbing USIS, they were also disturbing the University of Quito (where the USIS Center was located at the entrance to the university). So the Ecuadorians were already pretty concerned about the whole matter.

Q: By 1972, according to my information, drugs and drug smuggling came to be a problem.

BURNS: Yes, that's correct.

Q: Was this the kind of thing that you became involved in on instructions from Washington at all?

BURNS: I didn't get too many instructions, but we were concerned. The Ecuadorian government was concerned, too. They were about as much concerned as we were. Washington sent down a drug officer from DEA to be attached to the embassy. We had to help him a lot at the beginning because he had no contacts at all. Then we helped the Ecuadorians out with money to fight drugs. We'd help finance their helicopters to destroy poppy fields wherever they could find them.

Speaking of drugs, the coca leaf has been chewed by the Indians on the west coast of South America since time immemorial. The effect is to reduce the pangs of hunger and cold, and help them endure the hard life that they have led ever since the days of the Incas. Under the Spaniards, they probably needed coca even more. Today the Indian population still chews coca leaves. Ninety percent of the population of Ecuador has got Indian blood, and 50% to 60% of the population is pure Indian.

The drug problem that bothered me the most was in the Peace Corps.

Q: Among volunteers?

BURNS: Yes. That did disturb me, because I could just see that any element in Ecuador hostile to the United States could accuse us not only of using drugs but of introducing drugs to Ecuador. We cleaned up the Peace Corps, but it was not a pleasant job. Not only the Peace Corps, but I found that an officer of one American voluntary agency was also on drugs. That got cleaned up, too.

Q: "Clean it up" is a euphemism for "get rid of people"?

BURNS: We got on the telephone; we called the head of the agency in New York and told him what was happening. He got them out of there. We were worried the whole future of our voluntary agencies could be at stake.

Let me mention American missionaries. There was one group which sprang from North Carolina Fundamentalists who ran a large station down in the Amazonian jungles. They translated the Bible into Amazonian Indian tongues, and worked to convert the Indians. Unfortunately, some of the missionaries got killed in the process by the Indians, but the missionaries persisted right on.

I went and visited them. It was an amazing experience. You were really right in the jungle. They had a plane that was specially equipped to get over the Andes, a DC-3. We had to take oxygen to get over the mountains. You landed on a corrugated metal strip similar to what was used in the Pacific in World War II. Their base was located on a major tributary of the Amazon.

Q: Was this a summer institute?

BURNS: The summer institute, yes. The Bible Institute. Hard working, very sincere people.

Q: What was the name of the spot that you went to, do you recall?

BURNS: No, I don't. There were also a large number of Mormon missionaries operating in Ecuador. Interestingly enough, most of the Roman Catholic missionaries in the Amazon region were foreign priests, not Ecuadorians. They were German, Spanish, French, and American.

Q: I found the same thing in Brazil.

BURNS: The Ecuadorian clergy were not much for going down there. They preferred the so-called sierra --the highlands.

Q: How long did you stay in Ecuador?

BURNS: A little more than three years.

Q: What did you find to be most gratifying about fulfilling this position for three and a half years?

BURNS: First of all, Quito is a lovely city, a gorgeous climate. It's 9,000 feet up, right on the Equator. It's like early October in Chapel Hill all year round. The flowers are perfectly beautiful. Then, secondly, I can say is that the people are simply great. I don't know when I have enjoyed knowing a local population the way I did in Ecuador.

Q: In 35 years, that's the place that you enjoyed most?

BURNS: I think when all is said and done, I probably enjoyed London the most, but certainly Ecuador ranked second.

Q: I'd like to ask you one question that is philosophical, perhaps, but it is of interest to those who might be reading these notes some day. I asked you already what was most rewarding about being ambassador in Quito. What are the qualities that you see that an ambassador should have?

BURNS: You could give a stock answer to that--intelligence, understanding, comprehension, and so forth. All of that of course is most desirable. But I think there have to be three qualities in addition to the ones you would normally expect. One is tact. A predecessor of mine in Ecuador was declared persona non grata because he lacked tact. It seems a very small reason to declare an ambassador persona non grata, but the fact is they put a higher premium on tact, a much higher premium on tact, than we Americans do.

A second quality that I think an ambassador should have is at least a degree of executive ability. In the old days, maybe 40 years ago, when embassies were much smaller, executive ability really wasn't all that important. But now our embassies number 300, 400 people. To keep the size of the overseas US establishment under some kind of control, an ambassador has got to have the ability to keep the lid on a larger staff and to determine when an activity is no longer needed. He's got to have the guts to say so. I think that's quite important today. It's not a normal diplomatic role at all; it's basically an American bureaucratic role, but it's an important one.

I worked for several high-ranking officials, some political appointees, some not, who were in executive positions in the State Department, management positions. They'd get awfully frustrated by the fact that the Secretary or the Under Secretary at the time had little executive ability. As one of my bosses said to me once, "What do you expect? He's been a lawyer all his life, and the only person he's ever had work under him is a secretary." One of the best executives I ever worked for was Elliot Richardson, who was a lawyer, and he was also a topnotch executive, and I'm convinced he was born with that talent. I'm convinced you can be born with it, as well as acquire it through experience.

A third quality is compassion. Not carried to maudlin extreme, but compassion so as to be understanding both to the people on your staff and to members of the government you're dealing with. That doesn't mean you have to take their side, adopt their position or anything like that, but in saying "no," you have to do so with compassion.

Q: And that comes full circle back to tact.

BURNS: I suppose you could say it's almost synonymous with tact.

Q: Everything else being equal, should an ambassador be a careerist?

BURNS: It depends totally on the man. I have known superb non-career ambassadors, as well as superb career ambassadors. I have worked for them. I've also seen some very poor non-career ambassadors, and some pretty lousy career ambassadors. With a career ambassador, the chances of his turning out to be a good ambassador is higher than if you select someone solely for domestic political reasons. But certainly a David Bruce, or an Ellsworth Bunker, or an Elliot Richardson, to name those non-careerists who come to mind, were superb ambassadors. On the other hand, I can name some absolutely superb career ambassadors--Loy Henderson, Walter Stoessel or Tom Pickering.

Q: Is there anything that you want to wrap up with here, before we bring this interview to a conclusion?

BURNS: No, except to thank you for your patience, and for asking the questions, because it would be difficult to do a similar interview as a monologue.

Q: I appreciate it very much. On behalf of the oral history program, I thank you.

End of interview