

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

LARRY COLBERT

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the first of November 2006 and this is an interview with Larry, do you pronounce it Colbert (French pronunciation) or Colbert?

COLBERT: Colbert.

Q: Colbert, C-O-L-B-E-R-T. I've interviewed Evelyn Colbert who was in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) later and I had had known her for many years and said her father was very insistent on pronouncing it COLBERT rather than give it the French...

COLBERT: Colbert (English pronunciation)

Q: Colbert English pronunciation). All right, well let's start at the beginning. Larry, you go by Larry?

COLBERT: I do.

Q: When and where were you born?

COLBERT: Glouster, Ohio. That's G-L-O-U-S-T-E-R, that's a very small town in Athens County, maybe 20-25 miles north of Athens City, which is the site of Ohio University.

Q: In what year?

COLBERT: What year was I born? March 20, 1940.

Q: Can you tell me something about say on your father's side? How did they get there and what were your...

COLBERT: About my family background?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: On my father's side, my father was one of perhaps seven children, many of them were deceased by the time I was aware of all of them. My grandfather on my father's side was a coalminer in Appalachia, they were an Irish family; I don't know at what point they came to the States but presumably at least one generation before my grandparents. My grandmother who, I don't remember my grandfather he died of black lung disease long before I was born, was a very Irish lady with a bit of an Irish accent, but she was born in the United States.

My father was the only one of all the children to go to college. He graduated from high school and then got a job in Columbus.

Q: Where was he going to high school?

COLBERT: Probably Buchtel. He went to a small township school that drew children from a number of very small towns and a rural area. He was valedictorian, I understand, then he went to Columbus and worked for a while and then found his way to Ohio University where he majored in business, worked his way through and then bought a grocery store from an uncle who had several and with another younger uncle ran a grocery store business in this town I was born in, Glouster.

My mother was from Glouster, not from Buchtel.

Q: This was in Ohio?

COLBERT: All in Ohio. Both very small towns, one maybe in Morgan County and the other, Glouster, in Athens County, two very rural Appalachian Counties which up until probably the early '40s had initially very successful and very energetic coal mining industry but then the coalmines all played out. I would say the area is more similar to Appalachia, West Virginia, than one what thinks as typically Ohio.

Q: One doesn't think of Ohio as being Appalachia does it?

COLBERT: Southeastern Ohio, Athens Country, Morgan County, the area that touches on West Virginia around Wheeling is quite poor. I recently learned that there is a special fund to get money to buy textbooks for the schools because the textbooks are 40, 30-40 years old, which is hard to believe. I remember it being poor when I was there but I don't remember the textbooks being that bad, a shame.

My mother's family was as I said were from Glouster and of Welsh extraction whereas my father was of Irish extraction, my mother's family were of Welsh extraction; both were at least three generations back native American. She went to college two years and became a schoolteacher, so my father was a merchant and my mother was a schoolteacher. I'm told that when they married, which was during the Great Depression, since he had a job and she was working for the state as a teacher, she had to quit because women whose husbands were employed could hold state employment concurrently

Q: That was a pattern.

COLBERT: Yes, so she didn't work again I think until my older sister went off also to Ohio University twenty-five miles down the road.

Q: So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

COLBERT: My mother had five children. I have an older sister, a brother who died before I was born, he died at perhaps two or three of one of those diseases that killed people in those days that don't now. Then I have a younger sister and a younger brother. We all went to Ohio University, as did our parents.

Q: What sort of business was your father in?

COLBERT: He had a grocery store.

Q: Was it a local grocery store or was it...

COLBERT: It was a small town and when he acquired his grocery store, which he bought from a relative - there were no super markets. It was one of several grocery stores, which dwindled down as Kroger and A&P and other such came into the area and supplanted the grocery stores. In probably his late 50s, early 60s the grocery store business was going to hell in a hand basket and he and his partner gave it up and he became the local post master for the last few years before illness caused him to quit working.

Q: What was, you grew up in this town?

COLBERT: I did, yes.

Q: OK, let's talk about your sort of early memories. What was it sort of like being a kid?

COLBERT: Being a small town you sort of could roam around anywhere, there were very few fences. Unlike the suburbs here where everybody has a fence between the neighbors you could go from one yard to the other yard in the back, everything was open. The upside was that you could pretty much wander around without anybody coming after you; you weren't at risk being a small town. The downside was, of course, that everybody knew everybody so if you got into any mischief your parents soon knew about it.

Q: Yeah. What was the composition of the town?

COLBERT: I'm told that at one time the "hollow", that's Ohioism for the valley, the valley I lived in, had a Polish area, a Slovak area. There were very ethnic enclaves and all the people worked in the coalmines. People spoke a variety of languages other than English I'm told. This was obviously before my time. By the time I was a child it was just your typical small Midwest town, very small, probably 2,000 people predominately Protestant, predominately Methodist, Church of Christ, the more conservative less Catholic part of Christianity. I make that point because I was in the minority then as I was a Catholic.

Q: Was this on your grandmother's side more?

COLBERT: I was Catholic on my father's side, my mother was Protestant and she converted over to Catholicism when she married my father, as did her sister who married my uncle.

Q: How Catholic was your family?

COLBERT: Oh, how Catholic is the Pope? I mean...

Q: Some families are, well, you know what I mean.

COLBERT: No, I was an altar boy. We went to Mass every Sunday, rain, sleet or snow. There were no excuses; you were expected to go on religious holidays to church, as I said earlier I was an altar boy. It wasn't negotiable; it was just something that your parents insisted upon.

Q: Was the priest an influential person in your life?

COLBERT: In the town?

Q: Or for your family.

COLBERT: That's a difficult question. I would say despite the fact that we did all the required things that the Catholics in the 1940s, '50s and '60s were expected to do, that is to say no meat on Friday, going to Mass, going to communion, and all that, my parents were pretty-liberal in terms of letting us read what we wanted, do what we wanted (within clearly understood rules in this case), and say what we thought. So I would say that we were more guided by their rules and their example than we were by the priest. Being a small town, the same priest was there from the time I can remember until the time I left to go away to college. A nice man, Father Nichol, but I don't know that he was particularly a person that I would have gone to for guidance.

Q: Well sometimes you have a very forceful personality who won't let you go to certain movies and read certain things.

COLBERT: Well his saying I could or couldn't go wouldn't really have mattered because it was what my parents said I could or couldn't do that mattered.

Q: At home, how was sort of family life. Did you sit around the table and discuss the world or the town or something?

COLBERT: We had to be home to have dinner with the rest of the family; there was really no excuse. When I played football I could miss dinner if the practice went late or was a game night but apart from that, I'm speaking for myself, but I think there were probably exceptions for my sibs as well, you had to be at home and we all ate dinner at the same time including my father. There was a lot of conversation at the table everybody talked. I think even now if the four of us get together it's everybody fighting for a chance to have their say, so that hasn't gone away. No, we discussed everything, it was a very free flowing...when people came to our house in fact they were kind of blown away by the fact we talked about all this stuff.

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

COLBERT: You know with my mother I was never sure. They used to joke that they cancelled each other's vote out. She may have been a Republican; certainly my father was a Roosevelt Democrat. I remember once when I was twelve or so coming home in the evening and saying, "If I were old enough to vote I would vote for Eisenhower" and my father said, "It's a good thing you aren't old enough to vote because if you voted for Eisenhower you'd be out in the street." So it was a Democratic household.

Q: How about again in the family news, radio, TV, newspapers anything?

COLBERT: No we received, there was an afternoon newspaper called The Athens Messenger; it was the county paper. In fact, I delivered it for around the neighborhood, I had two different paper routes one which was less convenient and when I got a chance to change to one that was more convenient I changed but I had two paper routes for a long period of time it was an evening paper. The other paper was The Columbus Dispatch, which was the big paper from Columbus, Ohio. I don't know where I would put The Athens Messenger in terms of ideology. I would probably say moderate small time paper. The Columbus Dispatch was decidedly a Republican rag, still is. But in terms of where we got our news, I would say the radio, newspapers and so on. We didn't have a television set probably until I would image whenever the Army-McCarthy hearings were.

Q: That would be about '50....

COLBERT: '53-'54.

Q: '53-'54.

COLBERT: Yeah. I remember I was allowed to skip school to watch them. My parents didn't want a TV in the house because they thought that if we had a TV we wouldn't read although in my case that was probably unlikely. I think also unlikely for my siblings.

Q: Speaking of which I take it you were a reader?

COLBERT: I would say calling me a reader would be like calling an alcoholic a drinker.

Q: Let's take a...first of all where did you get your books?

COLBERT: Well there was a public library in the town.

Q: A Carnegie library or...

COLBERT: No just a local public library and I would buy books. People knew for birthdays, holidays and Christmas that people always gave me books. I always had books, I think my older sister read a lot, reads a lot, my younger sister reads a lot. I think they would agree that I probably read more than they do in sheer volume but probably they retain more of what they have read.

Q: Do you recall let's take sort of your early years through elementary school. Any books stick out in your mind that really sort of inspired you or were a hell of a lot of fun to read?

COLBERT: It's strange, it's a long time ago. As a small child I liked the Andy Hardy mysteries. I remember they gave them to me when I was eleven or so and I read all of them. But quickly I was into reading biographies and popular histories and then adult novels so I quickly graduated to the wrong stuff. As to books that made an impression on me, I think Of Human Bondage was one.

Q: Somerset Maugham.

COLBERT: Somerset Maugham, A Tale of Two Cities, which I recently reread and was equally blown away. I don't know. I was and probably will be buried with a book. I am truth be told a bookworm.

Q: In elementary school what was the school system like that you attended?

COLBERT: It was a small public school that I could walk to. I think the teachers were incredibly good, incredibly dedicated; most of them stayed in that one school system their entire lives. I think like most people who liked school I can still remember the names of most of my elementary school teachers, many of my more junior high school and high school teachers. Some of them I think would probably compare favorably with teachers in the best prep school in the world. I think virtually anybody who valued education would say that Mrs. Betty Rose who was my senior homeroom teacher in high school and my English teacher for four years and my French teacher was an incredible individual. I could fill up your whole tape naming the names, they were really good people.

Q: You can name a few names. I figure this is one chance you might get.

COLBERT: Well Betty Armstrong was my sixth grade teacher. There were the Knight sisters, two spinsters who taught in the elementary school, both of them fabulous teachers. I still remember one thing that one of them kept harping on, 'It's not what you know but where you know how to find' and that was said probably when I was twelve or eleven and now with computers she is being proved absolutely true. She was sort of googled before Google existed. They really were superb; I think that the quality of the student body varied a great deal from those who parent's valued education and children valued education than those who didn't care at all.

Q: What subjects really grabbed you and which ones could you do without? What were they?

COLBERT: English, history, political science, and government those sorts of things grabbed me as you said a lot. Math didn't grab me at all, doesn't grab me at all and won't grab me at all forever. Science was something that you had to take to graduate. I tried to

take as many math courses and science courses in high school as I possibly could so I wouldn't have to be facing them when I went to university.

Q: How big were your classes?

COLBERT: I imagine between 35 and down. I think the class size fell off in high school a lot. Some boys dropped out because they didn't want to go after 16 and many girls dropped out because they got pregnant and other people dropped out because they had unfortunate encounters with trees when they were driving. So between automobile accidents, pregnancies and just simple no desire to go to school probably the graduating class was well under 30.

Q: Was it pretty obvious, today they call it a track-system, but those of you who were upward bound and those who were just not going, not really not...

COLBERT: I think there were people in every class who did nothing at all either from lack of ability or probably more actively lack of desire and I think the teachers taught around them. They taught basically the B-, A+ students and the others were given the assignments and probably didn't do the assignments. This is from obviously nearly 50 years ago but that's my impression.

Q: How about extra curricular activities both in the various types?

COLBERT: In high school there was a Latin club, a French club, they put on school plays, and there was an honor society. I think it was probably a typical school

Q: You mentioned football practice so you were....

COLBERT: I was slight and liked studies in a school that valued big and sports.

Q: Well when you think of a school in the coal-mining district this has been the source of...

COLBERT: Some good football players.

Q: But they are big...

COLBERT: Some really good football players came from my area and certainly I wasn't one of them. But since everybody played football and I was sort of slight and brainy and relatively economically better off than many I wanted to play football, I think that is why I wanted to play. My mother absolutely did not want me to play football period. So when I was a freshman I couldn't get permission to play because your parents had to sign the bottom line. She wanted me to play basketball; well I'm five foot eight and a half and not terribly coordinated to begin with so instead I covered the basketball games for money for the local paper. I would call in the scores and all the statistics, all the numbers. But my sophomore year I forged my parents name on the paper.

Q: That's a good start for a government career.

COLBERT: Exactly, particularly for a person going to become a consular officer but football practice obviously started before school started. My mother was teaching school, my father had a grocery business to run so the fact that I was playing football really didn't come out until I had been practicing for a couple weeks or so. Then there was a sort of coming to Jesus meeting with my father who was upset with me for forging his name but in the end he agreed. It was probably the only time in my memory that he actually went against the wishes of my mother by allowing me to play. He said, "If you want to play bad enough that you did this you can play." I don't think either one of them was particularly happy that me at 120+ pounds was playing football in a nasty league albeit most of the time I spent on the bench but I did play.

Q: With your father running a grocery store I think this would become all the kids would get co-opted into that.

COLBERT: I stacked soap and restocked shelves when I was a small child. I certainly took telephone orders. I helped clean up and most of all I delivered groceries because it was a delivery service. People would call in orders and I would drive, when I had a drivers license, I would drive rain, sleet or even heavy snow. We would deliver groceries in my hometown in weather that would probably freeze Washington, D.C. to a total standstill. I would put the chains on the old station wagon and go. One of the more fun jobs was to clean out the meat locker which was an old fashion wooden one and you had to scrape off all the drippings with a blade. Everything had to be clean.

Q: In high school was there much dating and all that?

A: As much as we could manage, of course. No, people did have boyfriends and girlfriends and so on.

Q: I was wondering because things move, I came out of the era when we kind of went with groups and then after me people started pairing off. You could almost...

COLBERT: I had male friends and female friends but I certainly did have girlfriends as well. Probably as I got older I was more interested in girlfriends than group friendships.

Q: Movies, was this the...

COLBERT: There was one motion picture theater, sort of a dump, beside a dumpy hangout which probably as I look at them now they are both closed, long since but that was where everybody hung out in the town until you could be mobile to leave the town. Then, of course, you would take your dollar, fill up your gasoline in your father's gasoline tank and cruise around the county looking for mischief to get into.

Q: How far, where was the big town?

COLBERT: Athens, maybe thirty miles away.

Q: And this is a university town?

COLBERT: It was.

Q: So I mean was this I would think of this particularly with high school kids, with college adults going around there this would really be quite a different atmosphere?

COLBERT: Athens I think when I was a child growing up was really like Athens. I mean, Athens, Greece, in a sense that it was seemingly a very sophisticated place, had nice stores. I loved the university library; the whole thing seemed very sophisticated. I tended not to go there for fun in high school or junior high school, because I tended to go to little smaller towns around. But there were two nice movie theaters in Athens then which are, of course, now closed as well so if there were a good movie it would be there.

Q: Well then was there any doubt in your mind or your parent's mind that you would go on to college?

COLBERT: I think it was non-negotiable. It was assumed that we all four would go and we would all go down the road to Ohio University because it was cheap, my parents had gone there and my father had four kids to educate and limited means.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: So we all went to Ohio University and then we went from there to other places.

Q: Well then you were at Ohio U. from when to when?

COLBERT: From 1958 until 1962.

Q: What was Ohio U. like when you went there?

COLBERT: It's really hard to compare because it's the only place that I went to university as an undergraduate. It was a land-grant college. It was the first land-grant college opened in North America as a part of the Ordinance of the Northwest Territory. It was opened, I think, in 1804; when I was there it was a beautiful red brick school with lovely elm trees, which were slowly dying off even when I was there. It had a truly lovely campus. It was a nice place to be and in fact I think it's fair to say that my freshman year I went home several weekends other than Christmas and New Year's and Easter. My sophomore year probably fewer still and even though it was only 25 miles away my parents had to come visit me, I basically stayed there.

Q: The campus, was it in that period I would assume it wasn't what I would call a mixed, a diverse campus?

COLBERT: Are you saying were there African-American, Asian women? Sure.

Q: Hispanics?

COLBERT: Hispanics would have been a rarity. Certainly there were African-Americans, this was southern Ohio but it was still Ohio. I think there were no African-Americans in fraternities then, something that I probably never noticed or remarked on, I wasn't that socially conscience at 18 or 19. I know there was a Jewish fraternity and a Jewish sorority because I worked in a Jewish sorority as a busboy for my last year. So and there may have been some social stratification but I don't know that there was anything so overt such a particular type of person could not go in a restaurant, you didn't have that sort of thing. But there was some social delineation if not discrimination. I was in a fraternity and it never even occurred to me, I'm ashamed to say, at the time that there were no African-Americans in the fraternity.

Q: I did the same thing I have right thoughts sometimes.

COLBERT: I think it's hard to be ahead of a changing world before it's actually started to change. In my high school, in my elementary school there were African-Americans in my classes. I would say the same neighborhood but the town was so small that weren't neighborhoods. I don't really think about them as being different nor had any feelings one way or the other but certainly for the most part they were on a different economic level. But in retrospect the thoughts of that sort of thing didn't really hit me until I went on to graduate school. If we can wait until we get to that point I will talk about it.

Q: What fraternity were you in?

COLBERT: I was at, how did you know I was at a fraternity?

Q: You said you were in a fraternity.

COLBERT: I beg your pardon. I was a legacy. My father was a member of Delta-Tau-Delta so and before me my brother-in-law who was also from my hometown was a Delt also so I was a legacy. I think probably had I not been a legacy I would have not been selected by that fraternity. I lived in that house for three years, my sophomore, junior and senior years. It was OK; I don't think it was a highlight of my life.

Q: My experience is the same in that some people it really takes and others it's just the place you live and where I ate.

COLBERT: I think pretty much and also for the four years I was in university I either worked as a busboy in a girl's dormitory or as the last year as I said earlier in a girl's

sorority house. So, I didn't take my meals with my brothers. I think the brother bit was a little over done.

Q: Yeah. What courses did you particularly...what did you major in and again what...

COLBERT: The history department thought I was a history major and the government department though I was a government major, so I essentially had a dual major. I liked both a lot. I remember when I was a senior I had a spare elective and I took European novel, and I thought my God they gave you three hours credit for reading novels. If I had only known, I would have been an English major. But no I was a history and political science major.

Q: How was political science at that period because political science is you know has gone through a transformation into a quantitative...

COLBERT: This was not quantitative.

Q: A lot of nonsense.

COLBERT: This was straight no nonsense, how is it organized, how does it work? How does this government work how does that government work? I thought the professors were wonderful I loved them. I really liked going to their classes. I still know their names and I think the world of them.

Q: What in history was there any particular areas in history that yourself concentrated?

COLBERT: I liked European history, I don't know why. I really wasn't interested in American history maybe because it had been taught so poorly to me by history teachers in elementary school and high school who gave you things to memorize and never got past what the War of 1812, if it were a good year. I never found American history fascinating to me then so I took a lot of European history.

Q: I'm trying to capture the period. You say you waited on tables in a woman's dorm. I take it women and men were not...how does this...

COLBERT: No, no, no, no, no I mean women who lived in dormitories had curfews, they had to be in probably by 10:00 or 10:30 on weekends and they had to be in by midnight and they had to sign in and sign out. I think the men could pretty much come and go as they liked whether you lived in a dormitory or fraternity. Sororities had curfews much like dormitories did. My first year I started off basically working in the dishpan area, working in an area that washed the dishes. Then I got promoted to counter work, that's to say putting the food out that the women took. Then one day a week they had table service and then they got to sit with a tablecloth and we would serve them the food. I wasn't really a waiter in a glorified sense I'd say, somewhere between a counter boy and something more elevated on particular days but it paid for my food.

Q: Were sports one of those things the universities in that part of the country that seemed to be very big?

COLBERT: Ohio University traditionally is a very good baseball team. A lot of players have gone to the majors from Ohio University. They traditionally have a pretty fair basketball team; their football team reminds me what they used to say in San Diego, you can tell the seasons if the Chargers are playing its winter and if it's summer by Padre's are playing but they are both in the same place, the bottom. I probably didn't tell that story very well but no, sports were important but not terribly for me.

Q: In a way Ohio State...

COLBERT: Oh no not the fanaticism of Ohio State. I would say Ohio University had a football team and at Ohio State the football team had a university.

Q: Well you there during the election of 1960 Kennedy vs. Nixon?

COLBERT: I was.

Q: How did that, I mean that was...particularly the youths were energized by this?

COLBERT: Well the circle I was living in I was certainly not the wealthiest person in the fraternity, not by a long shot. I may have been one of the least wealthy and it was very, very heavily Republican and very heavily anti-Kennedy because he was Catholic. I remember getting a lot of ribbing about the fact that this person that was running for president was Catholic. This was, of course, many, many years ago and hopefully that's gone. After Kennedy won I put a big thing up on the bulletin board, "Those who want to go to Mass voluntarily sign here. Those who want to wait until January 20th sign here. But in any case I'll be running this program." That was my revenge to them. Of course, I wasn't going to Mass myself at the time so...

Q: Did the outside world intrude much on you though?

COLBERT: No, not really, I mean I either sent my laundry home in a little tin box on the bus or my parents came and got it or sometimes I would do it myself so I would see my parents.

Q: You said these boxes you could send by mail with laundry.

COLBERT: You remember those days?

Q: Oh yes.

COLBERT: A little tin box and you'd put a level on it. Everything came back nice and clean. Not really, no, it was a very quiet time. I don't think the world really impinged on

me until the Cuban missile crises or Kennedy's assassination but I was already in graduate school by then.

Q: While you were in college, or university, did the Foreign Service, diplomacy cross your radar at all?

COLBERT: I had this vision that everybody in the Foreign Service talked like they had a mouth full of marbles.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: And that they all were from Princeton, Harvard or Yale and they were all rich, and it would be a nice career and I would love to do it but they don't take people unless they are from the establishment.

Q: Yeah, the way they talk I think somebody described it as mid-Atlantic Choctaw.

COLBERT: I think that is probably close. No I certainly, it was an ambition but one that I didn't think that I would realize.

Q: Well now so here you are getting ready to...I assume you are working on some sort of scholarship or something like this?

COLBERT: No I had ...my freshman year tuition paid for by a wealthy man, somebody I didn't know, he just gave so many scholarships a year to students. So my tuition was paid by this gentleman and I paid for my room and board all four years by working and I worked in the summers.

Q: And it was a State university.

COLBERT: It wasn't terribly expensive and then my parents paid some of it. Certainly we weren't I don't mean to imply we were poor, we certainly weren't and by the standards of the town that we were in we were almost considered wealthy but wealthy relative to everybody else. But putting four kids through school and helping my brother-in-law go to medical school at a major university would put a dent in any family as we all know.

Q: Well then what were you pointed toward as you came closer to graduation in '62?

COLBERT: Oh I knew that I wanted to go to graduate school, the attraction for me was that I wouldn't have to take biology or music appreciation or gym. I would be able to take courses in the area that I wanted. So I talked to the professors and I also had a job as a teaching assistant, grading papers for teachers so I knew all the teachers in the history department. I applied to schools, not knowing anything about the process, I did it all on my own, didn't know anything, didn't check with anybody. I took the graduate record exam and I think probably based on recommendations by my professors I assume I got

accepted at SAIS and I got accepted at the University of Missouri. SAIS offered me no money at all, just come.

Q: SAIS being School of...

COLBERT: Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. A very prestigious school and even I knew that then. But the University of Missouri offered me a teaching assistantship, which would pay me a stipend each month, which I could live on. I had to pay tuition but at least I got this stipend in which I could live on so I went to the University of Missouri instead.

Q: At Ohio were you a good student?

COLBERT: A good student. I graduated with honors probably at a 3.2 or 3.3 grade average of the 1960s I hasten to add because I think grades may be somewhat inflated now. I had all As in history and all As in political science. I would say I was a good student, not a brilliant student, but a good student.

Q: University of Missouri, where is that?

COLBERT: Columbia.

Q: This would be '62, what was that like?

COLBERT: It was very nice. It was not very dissimilar from Ohio University and it was a spread out state college on a nice campus. You could walk from class to class although most of my classes were in one building but it certainly was a lovely campus.

Q: What was your major or...

COLBERT: European history. Well that's curious as I went there, paid my tuition and started assisting the professor in his western civilization class and taking my classes. Then one day the chairman of the department called me in and said, "You know you have to have a major." I said, "I am majoring in European History." He said, "No, no, no, you have to have a major major." He was a French history professor and I said, "I work for you, can I do French history?" He said, "Well fine." So I did my masters in French history, in modern European history with an emphasis on French history.

Q: Was there any particular area of French history that...

COLBERT: 19th Century from the Revolution up to the third Republic.

Q: A very active period.

COLBERT: Lots of changes of government.

Q: All sorts of revolutions and personalities.

COLBERT: Lots of change and no change. There is a French expression “plus ca change, plus ca la meme chose” (the more things change the more they are the same). Well I think French history is probably a case in point of that. Maybe that is why it’s a French expression.

Q: While you were doing this was there sort of a trip to France in the offing?

COLBERT: No, no, no that would have been...my father would have probably had a conniption fit because money was very tight. Between my first year and second year in fact I came back here in the summer and at that time I was told that you needed a second foreign language to get a PhD. But rather than start the second language...did I, no I think I may have taken refresher French at Ohio University or I may have taken, I may have, I knew I took courses in Ohio, I did something in the summer because I didn’t have a summer job. But in the end I took my orals and I prequalified to go on for a PhD. I mean they had accepted me for a PhD. if I wanted to stay but two years of reading books and writing papers and being a graduate student and being poor sort of made me decide that I would do something else. So I did something else.

Q: Well how did...let’s talk a little bit about how did the outside world intrude during the Cuban missile crisis in ’60-’62?

COLBERT: Well I mean that was the first time when you thought wow we may not be here tomorrow. Everybody really thought that there could be a war and if there could be a war there would be a lot of dead people. So obviously everybody was watching it to see how it was going to play out. I think it was clearly a near thing. I don’t think we even knew then how much a near thing it was as we know now. So here is a time when hey you are either going to be here now or you are going to be gone. Certainly it was a very dramatic time when you focused abroad. But I think it was just something that went on and life went on. I mean you are in graduate school but around you the country was mobilizing and so on and you watched the news but you still have to go to class you still have to do your homework, you still have to go to eat and see your friends.

The Kennedy assassination was much more...

Q: That was in November of ’63.

COLBERT: November 22nd for those of us who are old enough to remember. It is sort of our Pearl Harbor Day I would say.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I was in a cafeteria with a girlfriend and we went back to her apartment and I think I spent the whole week in a daze watching television, like everybody else. It was a really traumatic thing for all of us I think.

Q: One of the things that took place during the Kennedy times did inspire a lot of young people of your age. It was the Peace Corps 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country' that sort of thing. Did that hit a note with you or not?

COLBERT: I would say you could say it did. I was coming to end my two years and obviously I didn't want to go on for a PhD. so I'm trying to decide what to do. I wrote to the Air Force and they offered me a commission in intelligence via a course of training, then I also applied to the University of Maryland Overseas Program, which is a program that still exists at the same time and the Peace Corps. So before I decided I went to talk to this professor I liked a lot, Professor David Pinkney for whom I worked, He discouraged me from the Air Force and I called the University of Maryland and they said they weren't really actively considering my application. My brother-in-law was just getting out of the Air Force where he was a flight surgeon and he was sort of down on his really superior medical skills being used poorly by women bringing their children into him who didn't have anything wrong with him because medicine was free. So he discouraged me from going into the Air Force too. So I accepted the Peace Corp and went to Turkey where I was for two years; I was a Peace Corp volunteer. I later learned that the University of Maryland had written me at the address I vacated when I graduated to offer me a job – by the time the letter reached me I was well on my way to Turkey.

Q: Just back while you were in graduate school could you give me a look at the academic life, the professors, the culture and all that? Did you get any feel for that?

COLBERT: A few of the younger professors would go out for beers with us occasionally, or pizza. We would even go to their homes. The professor that I worked for, I babysat for his children a few times who were probably in their early elementary even, maybe late elementary. I really admired him and his wife very much but in terms of socialization if you are a teaching assistant in graduate school you know you don't really mix socially with the professors very much. It seemed like a nice life style. Whether I would have been a scholar or not is probably problematical.

Q: Had you gotten to Canada or Mexico at all?

COLBERT: No, I had never been out of the country until the Peace Corps. I should back up though because I know in one class I made a caustic remark about the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) basically just to egg somebody on in the class who was a little more conservative than me and the professor came up to me and said, "Do you really believe that?" I said, "No, I was just jerking the guy's chain." He said, "I thought that was the case, but have you ever considered working for those folks?" I said, "Which folks?" He said, "Those folks." I said, "In for a penny, in for a pound." So he gave me a telephone number to call and I called it and they gave me an airline ticket to Missouri to Kansas City, Missouri, where I took a written examination and then passed the examination and they flew me to Washington where I spent two or three days in Langley. Then I went back to school I never really was interested at the time, because I didn't know at the time

what I was interested in. This was well before I joined the State Department. In fact, I think probably I did better on the CIA exam than I did on the Foreign Service exam. Maybe I was always in the wrong field?

Q: All right Turkey, did you know much about Turkey before?

COLBERT: I knew zip about Turkey. I could find it on the map, but no, I didn't know very much at all. In fact when I came back two years after being there my father who had a college education thought I had been in Saudi Arabia. He thought Saudi Arabia and Turkey was the same thing, different cultures, different nationalities, different language but it was sort of vague in everybody's mind just where I was.

Q: Before you went to Turkey talk a bit about your impression of the training. What did they do to get you ready? This is still the early days of the...

COLBERT: I went into the Peace Corps in '64 and the Peace Corps actually sent people in the field in late '63, so I was very early.

Q: Very early days.

COLBERT: I was in Turkey four; there were three groups that went ahead of me, two in '63 and one in early '64. So it was still a very new program particularly in Turkey. The training they lectured to you about the culture, they gave you an hour or so a day of Turkish for six weeks or so, which is basically like given aspirin to a person who has terminal cancer. It's a very difficult language, and an hour a day isn't going to hack it. They made us do folk dancing so we'd be able to show people how we danced so that we could explain our culture; it was sort of some good, some bad. It was sort of amateurish. We were sent off to be English teachers, so I was sent to a town called Isparta where there was already a volunteer who had been there a year already who spoke Turkish very well. His previous apartment mate, had been reassigned to Ankara, the capital, so I was assigned to live with this guy, which was just as well because I was totally incoherent in Turkish. I really couldn't communicate very well at all, so I had to sort of learn the language and what I was doing as I went.

Q: Going back looking at yourself, then many of the Peace Corps volunteers were people who were motivated to go out and change the world and all of that. Was that a normal spirit and did that infuse you a little?

COLBERT: I think it was George Bernard Shaw who said something about 'If you are not a Socialist when you are twenty and a Capitalist when you are forty you have neither heart nor head'?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I think there was some idealism, but basically you hear this is what you are going to do, go do it. So you go and you do it. I should explain that the first year I was in

a technical school for really the dummies; the kids who weren't going to Lycée These were the people who were not going to go to school beyond age 16. Many of them were several years in the same class and too old for the grades they were. Did I make an impact on them? In that group probably I was the first person they had ever seen who wasn't Turkish; I was the first person they had ever seen who wasn't Muslim; I was the first person who had a different mannerism a different way of acting, hopefully properly; and maybe I opened some eyes simply by being different. Did I teach them English? Probably not. Did many of them benefit from my being there? I don't know.

They also recruited me to teach in a small, small village and I had to get on a bus and go about an hour and then walk in this road about two or three kilometers into this very isolated town where the only thing was a teacher training school which basically taught adolescents how to go out and teach school. I taught English there and then to spend the night, walking back to main road to catch a bus the next morning Since I was not a Muslim and male, I could not be put in a private home and there was no hotel or guest house, so a janitor each evening before going home actually made a bed for me in a classroom and I slept in the school Those people in that small village made me so welcome and those kids, I think, I made an impact on. When I learned at the beginning of the next school year I was being transferred to another town and went to village to tell the school officials, the janitor subsequently came me to say that I was the only person who had treated him as an equal in his entire life. He said he was amazed that I didn't make a class distinction. In Turkish there are three levels or ways of addressing people and I addressed him the way I addressed a social equal automatically. Probably as much because I didn't know, I didn't have command of the inferior form of address and I certainly couldn't use the superior form of address which would have been taken as mocking him if I had been smart enough to do that. But I had treated him politely and not as I came to notice people in the country treated those lower in the social strata.

Q: Where were you located in Turkey?

COLBERT: Southeastern Turkey, half way between Izmir and Antak, no just north of Anatolia east of Izmir, maybe an hour, hour and a half in from the Mediterranean. Isparta is famous for its rose oil. It's the center of rose oil production; it's the prime component of perfume.

Q: Did you get involved in...was it around you the hashish or opium business?

COLBERT: No that's around Afyon. Afyon is the Turkish word for opium and there is a town called Afyon. There was no opium grown anywhere near, no poppies near me. If there were, I was unaware of it.

Q: Well this is, you were there from when to when?

COLBERT: '64-'66.

Q: Well this is the beginning of the period of the kids having what European and American kids having their “wander jahre” (wandering year).

COLBERT: I was sort of out of the way. I think in the year I was in Isparta I think two Australian girls came through wandering through on their around the world jaunt. But I saw no foreigners at all but I was only in Isparta for one year. I think the most dramatic thing that happened to me in Isparta was when I was walking to lunch one day and two Turkish MPs (military police) asked for my ID (identification) card. I didn't have an ID card because I wasn't a Turk; I had a little plastic laminated card that said in Turkish that I was a Peace Corps volunteer. So I showed him this card. Of course this MP was basically illiterate or semi literate and he said, “No he wanted to see my military or my Turkish I D...” I said, “I don't have one.” He said, “Well you are a deserter.” I said, “No, I am not a deserter, I am an American.” He said, “No, no, you are a deserter, you don't have any papers. You must be a deserter I'm taking you in.” I said, “Don't you think I talk funny?” My Turkish was better at this point but it certainly wasn't wonderful. He said, “No, you are probably from Istanbul or one of those other high-falutin places and you talk like those educated people. You are a deserter.” Well he had me and he was dragging me away and I would have probably ended up in Turkish boot camp when an officer came by who knew me and got me freed. So that was my incident.

Q: I take it in a Muslim area no dating and all that?

COLBERT: No, no, hmm, one Turkish senior non-commissioned officer got to know me and invited me to his home. He had two precocious teenage daughters, and this family became really friendly to me. I know once he said, “Well why don't you dance with my daughters?” He left me in the room with these two daughters who were quite open and I was terrified, terrified that he would either change his mind or worse.

But actually this family was very nice to me, they liked me a lot; Unfortunately I got transferred to another town so I lost track of them, but they were very nice. I had no Turkish female friends at all. I could speak to the Turkish female teachers at the Lycée where my friend taught, I didn't teach there so I didn't get to know them very well. Had I taught there I think probably I would have become romantically involved albeit Turkish style with one of them who was very attractive and I was attracted to but I was never at the Lycée and when I said I would come visit her family in the summer then I got assigned for a summer project too far away and couldn't and then I came back and got sent somewhere else. So that possible liaison which would probably have almost certainly resulted in marriage, because there was no other outcome. It was basically just a few how are you's and winks and then engagement. I think the NCO (non-commissioned officer) thought that I would become attracted to one of his daughters but then I got transferred out. Nothing happened, nor had I hopes in that direction...these were old adolescents but they were adolescents all the same. So I was very cautious.

I remember it's such a dichotomous society. I remember having dinner with his wife, his two daughters and with him and his son. The son and the old man said let's go for a stroll, “gezmekek” (to stroll). They “gezinmeked” right to a “genhani”, that's whorehouse

in Turkish and invited me to go in with them. I demurred. I didn't want to go into a whorehouse, and they were really thinking what's wrong with this person. But apart from desire not to go in, I was amazed that they had gone straight from dinner at home and taken the guest whom they apparently saw a future son-in-law with them.

Q: He's a little light in the loafers.

COLBERT: They may have thought that. I like women but I don't like whorehouses and I thought this a bit strange I just left the family. We were with the wife and daughters a few minutes ago and now we are going to a whorehouse. So they went and I went on my way. There are some strange things there. This is going to make for some great reading.

Q: Where did you get transferred?

COLBERT: I was assigned to a summer language camp, which I thought was sort of a farce. It wasn't run well but that is where I was sent. I came back to find that I had been sent to a single site which was just opening up in a place called Demirci which is in the West and North of Turkey. It's in a pine forest maybe two hours south of Istanbul, a very isolated place.

Q: Was it up near the Bulgarian border?

COLBERT: No, no, no, not in Thrace. It was in Anatolia.

Q: How was it there?

COLBERT: I had two Turkish roommates; I shared an apartment with them. They had one bedroom and I had one. My Turkish got certainly better because I was the only American there. There may have been one teacher who spoke some English, but I didn't care much for him so I used Turkish all the time. The teachers were nice folks. I taught in a real junior high school, so the students were a little more motivated. I think some of them learned some English. Like many Peace Corps volunteers I think I got much more out of being in Turkey living there, working there than the people got from my being there. I hope I wasn't a negative factor but I certainly think that more benefit accrued to me than to Turkey.

Q: I think this is often the case but you know there is a rub-off on both.

COLBERT: Well I think that if you have lived totally in another society particularly in a society that is totally different you learn something that many people in the Foreign Service never do learn.

Q: I at one point was with the board of examiners, used to give oral exams, and prior I had always had the idea that Peace Corps volunteers are a bunch of idealists and they would make lousy Foreign Service officers but interviewing Peace Corps volunteers I

found them much more level headed, well exposed, knowledgeable group than I had imagined.

COLBERT: Well in the '60s a lot of us came back and joined the Foreign Service. I thought for a while they were trying to kill us off because they sent us all to Vietnam, but that is another story.

Q: How did the hand of the Peace Corps rest on you, was it...?

COLBERT: Do you mean how was I supervised?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: They had traveling former volunteers who were inspectors who would come around and check up on you and see how you were doing. They had periodic conferences where they would call you in. So you would probably see an inspector once or twice in a year. There would be a conference once or twice, probably once a year. The farther you were away from the center the more you were on your own. I think I was probably totally on my own the second year. I think a person visited me once. But I mean your money came to your bank; it was a small amount of money to live on. You had to go to school and do your job on your own as best you could.

Q: How did you find Turkish officials, did they know how to deal with you?

COLBERT: I think many people thought I was CIA and told me so. Most people in the town just took me as foreign guest – not quite understanding how this alien dropped in on them; they were more concerned with the fact that I was Christian, American and not Muslim and not Turkish. The professional teacher class and other educated types probably thought I was there to favor the other side. That's to say they thought that I somehow was trying to do something to advance the agenda of the conservative religious right, although they could see nothing I was doing was anyway harmful, I must be favoring the other part of the dichotomy. Turkish society is a dichotomy; you've got the people who, well actually it was a three-part dichotomy – if such an expression is possible. There were the people who thought the country should be more socialist, more like eastern Germany or that way - those folks had to keep a very low profile but they were sort of left of center - but they had no real influence in society. A lot of teachers were of that persuasion but perhaps not really - just thought they were. Then you've got the people who ran the society who were basically true "Ataturkists" (Father of the Turks) and "Etats" and they wanted the country to look to West; they wanted Islam to be totally out of the government and totally out of education. They are the ones who ran things.

Then you had the vast majority of the population who were basically still in the thralls of a rather superstitious Islam. So the imams and the people who were religious were very cautious that I not do anything to attack the true way, that is to say, that I should not be a subversive in the society? I'm trying to think of the Turkish word for a non-believer.

They were suspicious of me a little bit because I was a Christian; if they had known what a bad Christian I was they probably would have been more suspicious!

Anyway, so all these folks from these three different perspectives are looking at me and watching. They are all very friendly with me but they all think you know, hmmm. This is not to say that they are not the most hospitable, friendly, helpful people in the world. I think Turks are probably just that. If you want to have a friend, have a Turk; if you want to have an enemy don't let it be Turkish'.

I don't think I left with any enemies; I think I left with some friends but even those who have education or at least limited education can sometimes trip you up. One Turkish teacher that I taught with saw a picture of my younger sister - she was in college at the time. He said he wanted to marry her and that I should "give her to him", that is to say, I should deliver her up for him to marry. I explained that I really couldn't do that and I said I couldn't do that in Turkish and that's "Yapamaz" (I can't do it). That is the 'could not' form. He said, "No, "istemez" (you don't want to do it)." It was inconceivable to him that I didn't have the power as the older son to say, "Carolyn, come over here and marry Ali because I want you to." This was a person who was a graduate of teachers training school so sometimes you ran into strange issues.

Q: Did you have trouble with the local Imam? Did they stone you anything like that?

COLBERT: Never. I made a conscience effort whenever religion came up in school to not discuss it. I never said anything derogatory about Islam, the few encounters that I had with imams I was very polite and I listened to them and they listened to me. No, no problems at all.

Q: What would you do in the evenings? Go out with the boys to have souvlaki at the café or something?

COLBERT: Well, there wasn't a great deal to do. You could listen to the radio, you could read a book, or you could go to the "chahane" (teahouse). Also, you could go for a walk, and, of course, write letters.

Q: Could you get out and around much?

COLBERT: On weekends and school holidays you could go places. You usually went by bus, always went by bus, in fact.

Q: Were there any political crisis while you were there?

COLBERT: None that would impact on me. I mean I'm sure there were things that were going on in Ankara but I was in two small towns.

Q: Every once in a while they would have a coup or something like that.

COLBERT: No, nothing that impacted on me at all.

Q: At this time did you have any contact with that strange outfit known as the American embassy or consular?

COLBERT: No, well that's not true. I got to know a vice consul in Izmir during my second year. He was the most junior person in the consulate general, and I know he had this absolutely grand apartment on the waterfront with a view of the Izmir bay. And he had Heineken, he had bacon, and he had ham. I could always crash there if I wanted. A very nice man whose name I've long since forgotten and probably must be long since retired. He later married an Indonesian I think. So I occasionally would see him. Then I met a German-American couple; he was a teacher in the DOD US military high school in Izmir. So I would often crash with them instead. But no, I was in the consulate in Izmir once because a Peace Corps volunteer girlfriend of mine, not girlfriend girl friend, but friend who had left her passport behind in Izmir and had gone back to her Peace Corps site. I had to take her passport into the consulate and give it to them so they could get it back to her. The embassy? I went in the embassy when I left to get a tourist passport, no not really. I took the Foreign Service written exam in Izmir so I must have taken it in the consulate but I don't remember.

Q: What prompted you to do that?

COLBERT: I was living overseas and finding I could do that and I needed to have a job and in the back of my mind was I had thought about this and now I had two languages and I had two years of life experience overseas and a masters degree and thought the world would be my oyster.

Q: Sure. You took the exam this would be in?

COLBERT: I took the exam the first time 1964, and I failed it because my math score was low; that was when I was in Isparta. So I got a math book and boned up on my math to bring it up to the minimal level to pass.. I mentioned earlier that my math was never my forte. So then I passed it but I didn't get the notification for a long, long time and when I got it they said you've got to take the oral and I said, "I'm in Turkey." So they said, "The deadline will pass before you get back." I made a fuss and they agreed that I could take it when I got back.

Q: So this would have been, you came back and when did you take the oral then?

COLBERT: I came back in August of '66 and I took the oral probably in September or October. No, maybe late October, early November because I know they told me that it would be six months to a year before I could join so I scurried around looking for something else but then I got in right away. So I took the oral in late fall and I was in the Foreign Service in January of '67.

Q: Did you have anything else in mind when you were getting out of the Peace Corps?

COLBERT: Well I knew that I had to get a job and the Foreign Service certainly wasn't for sure. So I wrote the Air Force because when I was in college, when I was in graduate school, and when I was in the Peace Corps my local draft board had kept very close tabs on me and every time they gave me a deferment they said, "We know where you are." I wrote back and said, "You know where I am." So I wrote the Air Force and said, "Is this offer still open?" I could still go and become an Air Force officer, this is now '67 and I'm prime cannon fodder like the rest of us were at that age and I got back a mimeograph, I had had to go by bus to a friend's place who had an English language typewriter to write this letter saying can I join the Air Force and become an intelligence per the offer I had in hand two years before? I got back a mimeographed or sort of a form letter saying, "See your local recruiter when you come back." I was ticked because I had written a personal letter to some general by name and I got back this piece of nonsense. So I wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense McNamara to complain.

Q: He was secretary of defense.

COLBERT: At the time yes. Peace Corps volunteers do these sorts of things.

Q: Well they are superior too.

COLBERT: I wrote a letter to McNamara and said, "Mr. Secretary, I see in the paper people are burning their draft cards, I see in the paper people are fleeing to Canada, I see all this stuff and I write a letter saying how can I become an Air Force officer having had this offer standing before I went into the Peace Corps and I bring these skills, two languages and so on and so forth and I get back a piece of form paper. Surely if you people are serious you would have taken my request seriously." I got back a letter from a major general who was head of the school for officer candidate for intelligence officers saying they would welcome me. And then I'm thinking to myself, "I don't know that I want to go there because if McNamara sent a message to the general and then general wrote me a personal letter because the Secretary wrote him..."

I knew enough about bureaucracy to say that might be a problem but that it might be an option. So I came back thinking I might do that but in the meantime I got a temporary job working on Capital Hill, just to keep food on the table. I worked in the folding room and you don't want to know about the folding room. In the bowels of the Cannon Building there were and probably still are these giant machines. You feed these machines; there are these ladies who sit by these giant machines and feed them stacks and stacks and stacks of correspondence from individual congressmen. Then by the other machines are stacks and stacks and stacks of franked envelopes. So you married the newsletter or the propaganda from the congressman to the proper envelopes. My job was temporarily to bring the grist for the mill, that is to say I would wheel in these stacks of stuff that these ladies were stuffing. This was minimum wage job, and in fact I was being paid well, well below that standard. Congress does not follow its own rules; it was in fact a sweatshop.

But that was just until I got another job working as a civil service background investigator person. It paid substantially more – with over time more than I would initially subsequently make a JO. I went around interviewing people as a way of doing background checks for people who needed security clearances. This was while waiting to get into the Foreign Service. I did each job for a couple months and then I got into the Foreign Service.

Q: Had you been in Washington before this?

COLBERT: No, I came here in and lived in somebody's house up on Capital Hill, rented a room.

Q: When you took the oral exam do you recall any of the questions?

COLBERT: I do.

Q: What were they?

COLBERT: There were a lot who was this, who was that, sort of like Jeopardy- type questions that required just a name or a date or something. But then there were, I remember this one person on the panel and hopefully it wasn't you said to me...

Q: Well, not in that period.

COLBERT: I'm joking but the person said, "Well how do you equate your good marks in college and graduate school with your relatively modest score on the Foreign Service exam?" I said, "Well, I was in college for six years and took courses from probably thirty or forty different professors and you gave me one exam which lasted three hours so I have to say your exam was the problem." He said to me, "That's a very arrogant answer." I said, "I think basically any logical person, any outside person who heard my answer to your question would agree with me and not with you." So I thought well there goes my chance.

Then they also asked me, they gave me names of three distinguished dead Americans and said if they came back today what would they react to and how would they react and why. There was one African-American on the panel and I remember one of the people they asked me about was Lincoln. I said, "Well, this was now 1967 and we were in the height of the Civil Rights revolution." I said, "Lincoln would be very surprised about the role of African-Americans in society. I mean he was basically a racist. He thought African-American's were inferior and if they couldn't all go back to Africa they certainly were never going to become full-fledged citizens. They were going to be some sort of social problem that the..." he is looking like I'm crazy. "I'm not saying that he is right I'm just saying if you look at the Lincoln-Douglas debates and read what Lincoln said and what Douglas said. They are basically saying the same thing except their solution is different. Lincoln was against slavery but he wasn't for integration as we know it now." The guys looking at me and I said, "Now I think if he came back and lived here for a

period the direction we are going is the right one but that would probably for him be very shocking.” I’m thinking, “Uh oh, this is another case of being, thinking like a graduate student rather than thinking like a bureaucrat.” But I did pass so...and I was right.

Q: Yeah. When you met the vice consul you had a nice view over the harbor of Izmir did while you were in Washington waiting to get in did you reference...

COLBERT: Look him up?

Q: Anyone else?

COLBERT: No, no, I just, I had come back from the Peace Corps and went back to Glouster, Ohio, for maybe three, four or five days. I was suffocated and called a friend of mine up who was living in Greenwich Village, a friend from graduate school, and said, “Jim, if you are married get divorced, if you have a girlfriend kick her out and if you’ve gone the other direction get rid of him, I’m coming to stay with you for a little while.” So I went up to New York just to get some breathing space. I stayed with him for maybe two weeks and then came down and took the oral and found some temporary work.

Q: Yeah, I take it small town I mean that was you were way beyond that?

COLBERT: I was twenty-six years old and my father was treating me like I was eighteen and I didn’t have any...I had been living on my own for eight years, four years of college, two years of graduate school and two years in a foreign country and suddenly I’m back in my own room for...I was only meant to come back because I had to come back but I couldn’t wait to get away.

Q: So you came into the Foreign Service when?

COLBERT: January of ’67.

Q: January of ’67. This might be a good place to stop I think. What do you think? Or can you go on a while.

COLBERT: I can go on a little bit farther.

Q: Why don’t we go on for a little more then? What was you’re A-100, the basic officer course, sort of the composition and the people there?

COLBERT: Mostly white male, a couple African-Americans, maybe a handful five or six women; it was a fairly large class. It was lecture format for the most part; there was no hands-on type thing as they do now.

Q: Did you feel you fit in or not? As you said before you thought these were all rather fancy people?

COLBERT: I was surprised that most people weren't of the type that I had expected I would find. Certainly there were fancy types; people who had money, and people who sort of saw the world as their oyster and perhaps it was. I think I fit in as well as anybody else. It was all new to me.

Q: Did you want to get back to Turkey or did you have any idea of where you wanted to go?

COLBERT: I had absolutely no idea and I didn't know like some of the people who were plugged in you could go over and lobby for jobs. In those days and probably in your time as well you weren't allowed to select, you were just given.

Q: You were just given, yeah.

COLBERT: And they didn't even know what was to be given, but certainly people who knew the Foreign Service or who had relatives in Foreign Service who were legacy type officers were obviously going over arranging for Madrid or Vienna.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I did none of that, I didn't think about doing any of that and I remember going over to see this lady who was in personnel and she said to me, "How do you feel about Vietnam?" I said, "How do I feel about Vietnam how?" She said, "Well, would you go to Vietnam if you were assigned?" I said, "I'm worldwide available, I thought we all were worldwide available." Of course, we weren't, but I didn't realize it at the time but I was. She said, "Well we are not sending anybody to Vietnam but I have to ask the question." Well when we were assigned six of us got assigned to Vietnam. Of the six, five were all former Peace Corps officers went to Vietnam. When I was in the Vietnam training course, the CORDS course was created so I was in CORDS I. You know about CORDS, obviously.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: So I was in CORDS I, in fact I was the first of the very first people to enter the country in CORDS because I didn't have an aptitude for Vietnamese, which is tonal. So they just gave me a brush up to get me off language probation in French and I went well before the rest of the others. So I was one of the first people to go to Vietnam in CORDS.

Q: How did you find the training?

COLBERT: For Vietnam?

Q: For Vietnam.

COLBERT: Probably better than the training for Diplomacy 101.

Q: When you were told you were going to CORDS what did they tell you you would do?

COLBERT: That's interesting. I knew I was going to Vietnam but Senator Ted Kennedy announced he was going to have hearings on the terrible plight of the refugees. The White House announced that they had sent refugee experts over to fix that problem and then they told six of us that we were going over. Then they said we had left and then we left. I arrived - I couldn't take any leave but must get right there, and I reported to the embassy who told me I belonged to AID (Agency for International Development), which I knew, and then I went to AID and they didn't know what to do with me. They sent me to CORDS, which had been just created.

So every day for about two weeks I would get up from my hotel I was staying in and report to CORDS and say, "What do you got for me?" Well they didn't know I was coming, they didn't know what to do with me, they didn't know they were getting any refugee experts of which I was theoretically one. So after a while they just got sick of seeing me, and I came in after several days of saying, "Well, I'm here" and they said, "Would you go to Quang Ngai?" I said, "What's that?" They said, "It's a province." I said, "Sure, I would go to Quang Ngai." So the next day I am on a DC-3 Dakota which had a bronze plate noting its construction date of 1938, so the plane was older than me, flying me via various in sundry stops to Da Nang.

Q: Air America.

COLBERT: Air America, exactly. The plane had all kinds of mechanical problems with several mechanical issues en route, but we finally arrived in Da Nang which was I Corps headquarters for CORDS and I got a briefing there. They then sent me off to be a refugee advisor in the province of Quang Ngai.

Q: Where is Quang Ngai located, vis-à-vis Da Nang?

COLBERT: It is south and west of Da Nang. It's between Da Nang and Cambodia and Laos.

Q: In the first place how did just when you hit Saigon how did it strike you?

COLBERT: Saigon? Apart from the noisy street generators and the ubiquitous military running around it was a lovely city. No, Saigon was a very nice place. But Saigon for me was a place that I rarely went to. I was there for maybe a week, ten days while they finally figured out what to do with me. Then I flew to Da Nang. I didn't even go in the Bunker's bunker, the new embassy. I was only in it once and that was when I was leaving. We in CORDS really weren't part of the State Department in the traditional sense. I lived in blue jeans and black pajama tops and combat boots. I think if I have a strong prejudice it's of the people who came up from Saigon embassy political section wearing their Abercrombie Finch outfits and their soft leather briefcases and flew in on Air America at 9:30 in the morning to find out what was going on but made sure they

were on the 3:30 flight out. Although they were reporting that it was safe, they sure as hell wouldn't spend the night with us.

Q: Yeah. When...

COLBERT: Pardon me, that is a little bit of prejudice but...

Q: Well no, no I mean I think that's the normal prejudice. I mean it was the suits from the big city you are telling me.

COLBERT: They knew everything but they didn't know anything.

Q: Yeah. You were in Quang Ngai from when to when?

COLBERT: I was there for eighteen months from you know I can't remember exactly. I know maybe from November of '67 until whatever eighteen months would be. I know that after eighteen months having buried a few people doing what I was doing and having lived barely through the Tet Offensive because my town was overrun, people doing what I was doing in Da Nang were executed, I got a cable from my personnel person in the State Department saying that they had agreed that since I had done my eighteen months in up-country I can have my choice of assignments and they would give me a refresher Turkish course and send me to Turkey as a political officer. But the language class wasn't set to start so they had decided to just extend me in Vietnam for six months.

Q: Oh how nice.

COLBERT: I sent back, "I don't want to be extended in Vietnam for six months. I've come here for eighteen months, I'm out of here." They said, "Well, you know we don't really have anything for you, you'll have to go on leave without pay." I thought to myself, hmmm, I've been shot at, I've been spat at, I've been flying around in helicopters, this person in Washington is not going to play this game with me. So I went back and said, "Fine, I'll go on leave without pay, but I've consulted my attorney about whether you can do this to a person." I didn't have an attorney.

Q: No.

COLBERT: In the meantime I was newly married and I thought well I've been in Vietnam for eighteen months. I've accumulated lots and lots of money; I was working for AID, and they paid me overtime. I was working seven days a week, fourteen, fifteen hours a day and being mortared and shelled at night, so I was not in a mood to be trifled with. I figured well we'd just go on a six-month holiday, or my wife can go back to her job in the Library of Congress. I don't have to work for six months; clearly I didn't have to work for six months. So I said, "Not acceptable." Well they blinked and they sent me back to the Vietnam training center to train other people for six months, which was probably a good thing.

Q: Well let's talk about Quang Ngai.

COLBERT: OK.

Q: In the first place when you got there this is getting close to a rather crucial time but when you got there what were you supposed to be doing?

COLBERT: Nobody had a clue. Somebody decided they could send me to Quang Ngai. I arrived in Quang Ngai along with another Foreign Service officer who was going to do the same thing so we were both assigned as assistants or deputies to a retired Navy warrant officer who was advisor to the provincial social welfare minister. This person was in charge of orphanages and poor people and handicapped, sort of he was the social welfare minister. He had his cadre of people who worked for him around the province and in the capital of Quang Ngai city. My boss, this warrant officer, was supposed to advise him. He was terrified of leaving the city, this little town...

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

COLBERT: I was saying that I was assigned to work for this Navy warrant officer who got up in the morning and went to the U.S. mini-compound on the ARVIN (South Vietnamese) division compound and had western style breakfast and then came and sat at his desk. He then went up by his vehicle to have lunch at the military compound and came back and then went there and had dinner and a drink and then went to bed. He never left his office. He didn't speak Vietnamese, he didn't speak French, and all he would do would be to ask for statistics from Vietnamese counterpart that had been requested by U S officials in Saigon. He would go with his interpreter and get the statistics from the person he was supposed to be advising and go back to his office.

He didn't know what to do with us and we were young and active. We wanted to do things, but he was really, really very cautious. We were young and foolish and wanted to do things. His tour was up and my fellow junior JO had gotten to know a district senior advisor, that's to say a major who was in charge of a small cadre of American military in a district outpost south of Quang Ngai so he went down there to be the civilian person there. I thought I wanted to do that at the time also at another district compound but I think it was a little nuts. Probably had I gotten the chance I would have done it then but later on I would probably not done so. But he went down there and I became the advisor and I had French so I could communicate with the Vietnamese official. Once I understood what an effective role should be, I became basically his pimp, not pimp in the traditional sense. I thought that there was very little advice I could give this man who was 45-50 years old who was a University graduate and Vietnamese and a professional welfare person - this from this 26 or 27 year old kid from another culture! So my solution was OK tell me what you need and I will get it for you. You want typewriters? I will get you typewriters. Do you want transportation? I will get you transportation. Whatever you want I can acquire. So I basically then saw myself as a facilitator. I did things which were quasi-legal but all for the good of our national interest. Nothing stuck to my fingers, I was given a black box full of local currency and each month I could use the black box to solve

problems. The only question was no receipts. The people, the American officials who gave me this black box of money, wanted problems solved and the only time I got in trouble was one month when I didn't spend the money. So I basically was this Vietnamese official's conduit to the things he needed to help people. If it had been the mafia I would have been the person over whispering in the don's ear and making things happen.

The Vietnamese official was a really fine person; I think he was one of the most outstanding civil servants I've ever met. He had an impossible job. I remember once early on I went with him to visit an orphanage. I had a gun and I walked into this orphanage and I felt like such an ass. From then on I never carried a gun anywhere I went although there were guns all around me, and we certainly had guns in our compound. I just felt that I was doing such a welfare work promoting developing, and I didn't think that I should have a gun, so I traveled with him everywhere without one. And given my aptitude with weapons it is more likely I would have shot myself than anything else. He was a good person.

My big boss on the other hand, my first boss was a total idiot. He was an FSO-1, which at that point in my life as an FSO-7, which I was, put this person as close to God as one could get. He was the province senior advisor and was totally consumed with Vietnam. He spent most of his recent life, or most of his career in Vietnam. He had been in Quang Ngai forever. He was just - well it's hard to describe this person. I will tell you a story, which will probably help explain. I remember going once to a staff meeting where he asked me "Have you distributed the blankets that came in for the refugees?" I said, "Blankets?" He said, "The blankets in the warehouse. Why haven't they gone out?" So I get in my little International Scout "jeep" and drive out to the warehouse, which is managed by a great AID person who was a retired military sergeant who had been in supply who was subsequently murdered in his bed Quang Ngai by the VC while I was still there stationed there. I said, "George, where are these thousand blankets?" He shows me the warehouse and it is empty. No bulgur wheat, no oil, no *nada* (nothing). He said, "What blankets?" "Well Jim says there are blankets here." He said, "We haven't had any blankets since before you came a year ago." I said, "I didn't hear of any blankets here either. I'm in charge of social welfare; if there were blankets I would know. I know when you get..." "No, no, no blankets." I go back the next day, "Have you distributed the blankets yet?" I said, "Not yet." I go back to see George and I said, "George what is it?" I ask. George, "Just tell him you did it." At the next staff meeting, "What about the blankets?" I said, "Oh we passed them out." "Oh good." So the report went back to Washington that we passed out a thousand blankets, there were no thousand blankets but you couldn't tell him because he wouldn't believe it. Though on another occasion, after a terrible flood (this is after George's murder, I tried directly from Saigon to get blankets and was told there were none in country. I conferred with my Vietnamese counterpart who told me how urgently the blankets were needed. I then phoned AID in Saigon and asked for talking points for the US network reporters who were coming to cover the flood victims and noted just in passing that the victims were likely to ask about blanket. We got several thousand the next week, and for the record, I lied about the reporters.

The first month or so we were there, we learned the State inspectors were coming, Foreign Service inspectors. So Paul Barbari and I, (he was the other young JO who was working there) get invited to the Province Senior Advisor Jim May's house for dinner which we were told was in honor of the inspectors. May had a Vietnamese live-in mistress who I really thought was a wonderful lady. We arrived and he gives us little white coats. We are to serve the meal and certainly not meant to sit at the table,

Q: Jeeze.

COLBERT: So we do, I mean what do we know, I mean we were mad as hell. We thought we were invited to dinner, but we were invited to work. So the inspectors say, "Well, what are you doing?" I said, "We are here serving you dinner." They thought that was quite interesting. Luckily they wrote it up.

But he got in big trouble because of My Lai. He knew about My Lai and My Lai took place in Quang Ngai.

Q: This was a massacre by American troops.

COLBERT: A military unit had gone into a village and shot a lot of people. Lieutenant Calley was the officer in charge of the unit.

Q: Lieutenant Calley.

COLBERT: Well I was there when My Lai occurred. I had been on the Batanga Peninsula where it occurred, and I was on the Batanga peninsula after it occurred. People weren't very friendly to me, but I never understood why. I expected to be called and asked about it when the investigations began, because I was there, but I never was called. Luckily for me I didn't know anything about it, which on the one hand shows you how little I knew. On the other hand perhaps how much I should have known but I didn't know. But he certainly knew about it and covered it up.

Q: Who was that?

COLBERT: James May, Jim May. I mean the guy was certifiable. He was replaced by a much more competent person later on. Vietnam would probably fill up an entire just one tape.

Q: Well let's talk. I think the Vietnam experience is an important factor. Let's talk about Tet because it happened shortly after you arrived.

COLBERT: It did because I arrived and Tet occurred. I arrived in the fall, and Tet was on February 1. The weekend of Tet was a long holiday, and I had flown on Air America to Da Nang to see my buddies doing what I was doing. We all met in the Navy officers club in Da Nang, had dinner and flew back to our various and sundry posts. It was sort of like a busman's holiday for the weekend. The guy who was in Hue, a good buddy -

everybody envied him because he had gotten Hue. Hue was a very sophisticated polished cultural city and the rest of us were in the boonies. During Tet, he was captured by the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) had his hands tied behind his back and executed in cold blood.

Q: They found him in a ditch.

COLBERT: Absolutely. Then you know.

Q: Who was this, this was...?

COLBERT: I can't remember his name but he was AID, a good guy. A friend of mine went back to Quang Nam and I went back to Quang Ngai. I got back to Quang Ngai and at some point maybe late afternoon, early evening, there was a feeling that something was going to happen. I know I was staying in Jim May's compound; the provincial senior advisor had a house with a wall around it, a big concrete wall and built into the wall were rooms, not apartments, rooms. I had a room; my room for my first year in Vietnam was smaller than this room by probably a third. It had a bed, a desk, a lamp and there was a bathroom down a little hallway and this was built inside of the wall. You went up some stairs and there were three rooms, not exactly luxury class accommodations, probably maybe 25,000 times worse than Motel 6. But, it also had a firing port with a screen.

Anyway Tet began and it was awesome. The three of us climbed up onto the roof of our little "apartment in the wall" and watched the firefight, because they were shooting over us. We all had small arms; I had a carbine, maybe two or three magazines and ammunition. Everybody had something like that; but nobody fired; because this was really between the big boys. These were rocket launchers, machine gun and this was the NVA regulars going at the Vietnamese Second Armored Division and the American military advisors on the compound. We were outside the compound; we were in the town. There were probably one, two three, four maybe five houses that had Americans living in them, maybe less. The Agency people, the Phoenix program were just down the street and then us and a couple others. So we, I don't know what the Phoenix people did during the fight but they had a lot more "toys," but we just sort of kept our heads down. It went on all night, and it was tremendous. You really were sitting in the middle of a storm of lead going in both directions, mortars, rockets and everything.

Then morning came, and the magic dragons came, puff the magic dragon. These were converted DC-3s with Gatling guns. Then the ARVIN pushed the NVA back to the edge of the city, where they stayed for a while and then they retreated further back. When it was over I think it's fair to say I could have walked from the May villa, basically just a small house with a wall around it, to the intersection which was probably 100 yards I could have just walked just on bodies of NVA and NVA that were in the streets dead without touching the pavement. I mean there were just bodies everywhere. We came out and it was all over; it was so quiet. You could smell cordite everywhere.

Every night we would back one vehicle against the metal gate. We had two metal gates that came together, and we backed the vehicle against them, so that a zapper (a person carrying satchel charge) couldn't blow the gate open. After some of weeks of agitation Paul and I had gotten our first vehicle. We had our own brand-new Scout International. The two of us that we could actually go to the refugee camps, we could go to the districts, and we could do other things – we were not tied to our office-bound warrant officer boss. We were mobile, and we were very happy. To keep our family jewels we had lined it with sandbags.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: So here we were standing in the yard along side our new Scout parked against the metal gate with the evening Tet battle over when there was this poof noise, and we were standing about as far away as your couch there...

Q: We are talking about 15 feet.

COLBERT: Thank you for helping because obviously the readers won't know, and a 16 mortar millimeter incoming went through the International Scout and blew up in the sandbags and showered sand on us. We didn't get a scratch, but that mortar missed us by 15 feet and if it hadn't gone into the sandbags it would have done some serious damage to us. So we then kept the jeep and we took the...the roof blew in very jaggedly and we pulled the jagged parts out and painted them red and labeled our Scout "The Flaming Asshole" We continued to use that Scout for the rest of the time. When it rained it was a little problematical, but it was great fun to pick up the visiting Cold War warriors from Saigon who came up. We always picked them up in that. When they came up to tell us how wonderful things were we always picked them up in that one because it had a great effect on the lower portions of their body – at least one part tightened up!

Q: What was it like getting around there?

COLBERT: If you are not going far you can go in a Scout. You can drive to Chu Lai, which was up the road maybe sixty miles. You can drive to the nearby districts. If you wanted to go to Mo Duc or Duc Fu, which were the far consular districts in the province you had to go by Air America helicopter or short take off and landing Air America plane. If you wanted to go to the highlands and there were four highland districts where the Montagnards were, then you flew by helicopter.

Q: Were you dealing with refugees the entire time? Was that...?

COLBERT: I was dealing with social welfare issues, getting and making sure that there was cooking oil and bulgur wheat and sheet metal or roofing material and concrete available for these people and to collect information from the Vietnamese to provide to the embassy people and vice versa. I think if there is any one example of how the system worked or didn't work - perhaps it is indicative of our current situation right now - I remember once I got an instruction from the embassy actually from CORDS telling me

to, go my counterpart and tell him to do 'X'. So I make an appointment to see my counterpart and I say, "Mr. Le Dam the U.S. government thinks you should do 'X'." He say, "Well Larry you know 'X' is a good thing and I would agree with you 'X' would be a really good thing to do but my government telling me to do 'Y'. He said, "Now if you can get your people in Saigon to convince my people to tell me to do 'X' I will do 'X' but as long as my people are telling me to do 'Y' I will do 'Y'."

So I sent back a message saying that I went in and asked him to do 'X' and he said as I explained. I got this message back, "Don't tell us how to do our job, go back and tell him to do 'X'." What I'm really saying is they couldn't get the people in Saigon to do something, and they are telling me to get the people who work for Saigon to do it. Does that sound familiar to you somehow?

Q: Oh yes, yes. They said, "Well we told him to do it, and that takes care of it."

COLBERT: Yeah. They were saying no to us so you go tell him to do... I mean it was crazy.

Q: I think we probably ought to stop.

COLBERT: OK.

Q: But we will put here, we were talking about time in Quang Ngai, we've talked about your time in and put it on the tape so that we will pick it up during the Tet Offensive but afterwards we are talking about how you worked with your counterpart and where you've got. There are several questions that I would like to ask the next time. The problem of corruption and lack there of or how that played, the Montagnards did you see any discrepancy between the coastal dwellers and the Montagnards? Was there a resettlement program? How did you work with American military and I guess the ARVIN and maybe did the CIA have an...

COLBERT: An operation?

Q: An operation there.

COLBERT: Sure, I can answer all of those questions.

Q: Then I don't know was that the area where the Koreans were or not?

COLBERT: When I arrived Koreans were there and I can talk about that too.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: OK, sure.

Q: And anything else that and I take it did you meet your wife there?

COLBERT: No. We can talk about your wife but we would have to back up a bit to do that.

Q: Back up a bit.

COLBERT: I would like to talk about the flood too so we should make a mental note about the flood.

Q: OK, yeah.

COLBERT: OK?

Q: Yeah, very good.

Q: OK, today is the 9th of November 2006. Larry we've got a bunch of things. Well you say you want to back up a bit about your wife. Why don't you talk about where and how you met your wife and a little bit about her background?

COLBERT: Fine. My wife is Chinese; she came to the States I think in 1962-1963 one or the other I'm not quite sure, to do a masters program.

Q: She is from Taiwan I assume?

COLBERT: She grew up in Taiwan; she's from the mainland. Her father was a petroleum engineer who worked for the nationalist government and her mother was a teacher who was from a very prominent Beijing family. I think her grandfather was the police chief of Beijing at some point in the past, presumably way back. She's quite unique in the sense that she for a woman of her generation my mother-in-law I'm talking about now, had gone to a teachers school, learned English as a young woman and had unbound feet because she refused to have her feet bound. When her father was a widower and when he remarried the mother-in-law and the new bride and the daughter-in-law or the stepdaughter more accurately didn't get along so my mother-in-law to be ran away from home when she was 15 or 16 years old which is quite remarkable for a...you are talking very early twentieth century when this wasn't done in China. She actually went several streets down to her aunt's house, but she literally left the house and refused to go back. She also selected her own husband so this is...my wife's spirit obviously was earned and derived from her mother.

In any event, as I was saying earlier, my wife came here as a graduate student initially at the University of Oregon at Portland and then transferred to George Peabody College which now is part of Vanderbilt where she got a masters degree. She then had a series of short jobs moving up for more money and change I think from Pittsburgh Carnegie Library to Albany State Law Library. When I met her she had just started working at the Library of Congress in cataloging. I met her at an assignments party, that's to say in those ancient days when Foreign Service officers didn't know where they were going, new

officers, but were simply told at the end of their basic training class she came with her apartment mate who was in my Foreign Service class, another young woman because that young woman's boyfriend was somewhere else so she brought her roommate. I met my wife at that point. I courted her while in French language training at the Vietnam Training Center. Since she was then a Green Card holder, that's to say a Permanent Resident Alien, not a citizen, I had to write two letters to Secretary Dean Rusk who of course didn't see them; one letter requesting permission to marry my future wife and another letter, which was a letter of resignation. The policy then was they either gave you permission or they didn't. If they gave you permission, they tore up your letter of resignation, hopefully, and kept your letter requesting permission to marry or conversely if you didn't get permission, they took your resignation on the assumption that you would choose wife over career, which I certainly would have done.

When I left for Vietnam permission had not come through so we didn't get married until maybe four months after Tet. Our plan had been to meet in Saigon and fly together to Taiwan to get married since my mother was long since deceased and her mother was still alive and weddings are really for mothers and for brides as opposed to grooms. In fact, her flight was cancelled in the West Coast because Ton Son Nhut airport in Saigon had been overrun and whatever American airline it was presumably Pan American couldn't land, and I, of course, was stuck in Quang Ngai ducking away from Viet Cong and NVA bullets. So we had to wait until that all quieted down.

Q: Well later we will return at some point to your wife to see did the Taiwan-China equation affect you at all and all that but anyway we will come back to that.

COLBERT: You want to come back to Vietnam now I think.

Q: Yes, let's go back to Vietnam. Why don't we start as I say how about corruption?

COLBERT: You know I didn't see it but then I wasn't really in a position to see it. I was in the province I think the big money was being made in Saigon. You heard stories about Americans who worked for AID selling things. I never saw that, you heard; well let me change that because actually I can give you a case of corruption, which I actually was involved in, that comes to mind. Not in the sense that I was corrupt.

We had sent some money to I think Tra Bong, one of the four Montagnards districts of Quang Ngai up on the Cambodian border and we learned somehow that this money had been extorted back by the army officer who ran the district. There was a Vietnamese captain in each district that was essentially the district governor. Somehow we in the provincial adviser that I worked in learned that this man had extorted the money back from the people who were supposed to get it, the victims or the people who were refugees or whatever. So I being a relatively minor player in this, very junior and being young and being the advisor to the Vietnamese refugee social welfare person, was sent by ARVIN helicopter, that's an old pot-bellied Korean War vintage helicopter - an old Marine helicopter with an Arvin crew. I was sent to this district to ask for or to get the money back. He knew I was coming; he had been told by the provincial ARVIN colonel who

was the provincial governor that I was coming. So I went to his office and this Vietnamese captain had a humongous stack of piasters, the local currency. Visualize if you can a stack of money perhaps a foot wide and a foot deep, or maybe two feet wide and two feet deep, loose money which was turned over by him to me and then I had to get the money back to Quang Ngai city. I flew back to Quang Ngai city in a semi-open helicopter, that's to say it was a closed helicopter but not successfully closed, there were some drafts, sitting on all this loose money. Basically I sat on the money for about 30 minutes on this helicopter trip and then was met and we unloaded the money and took it back to province headquarters where I'm sure it disappeared again but in any case I did bring it back. So that was a case of corruption that I am aware of.

Speaking of corruption though I think it brings to mind another story, a true story. One day we came out of province headquarters in the center of town and there was this flashing in the air and it sort of sounded almost like lightening, or thunder. But in fact what it was a Chinook helicopter was carrying in a sling capacity underneath the helicopter big pallets of metal sheet roof that corrugated roofing that AID passed out. It had been improperly slung, or rigged or the rigging broke, so that it had tilted to one side at about a 45-degree angle and the roofing had started to come out at several thousand feet and it was going back. It would make a noise as it came out like a crack as it buckled and then it would flash from the tropic sunshine but it would come down...

Q: Sort of willy-nilly.

COLBERT: Willy-nilly, sort of cascading down flashing in the sun. It was quite impressive, perhaps ten or twenty-five, or thirty thousand dollars, maybe \$100,000 worth of roofing cascading everywhere. I worked; my immediate boss was the deputy province senior adviser Colonel George Swearson, a wonderful man, a Marine. He said, "Larry, that's the only honest distribution of AID supplies I've seen since I've been here." I think maybe that was a good case of fair distribution because God decided or the winds at least decided where that sheeting landed. If it didn't slice you in half, you had some nice free sheeting.

Q: The Montagnards, you were on the border between the Montagnards and the Lowlanders weren't you?

COLBERT: I was in Quang Ngai city, Quang Ngai was divided into ten districts, six low land and four highlands. I don't know if I can come up with all the names now but there were four highland districts and I would occasionally go up there. At each highland district there was an "A" camp, a Special Forces camp and they were the advisors and the people who worked with the Montagnards in the highlands. I would go up and visit with them. I remember asking this one grizzled old Special Forces officer how the campaign for the hearts and minds at the "rice roots" level were going. I asked him sort of in a sardonic sort of way because it was just making conversation and he smiled and said, "Up here we grab them by the balls and the hearts and minds come along." I didn't spend a lot of time with the Montagnards but I did have contact with them.

Q: I was wondering, did you see sort of was there a clear line between the Montagnards and the sort of regular Vietnamese?

COLBERT: I think that there was distain on the part of the mainland Vietnamese for the Montagnards and I don't think there was any great love lost on the part of the Montagnards either but I didn't experience any of it directly.

Q: Well then moving on to the resettlement.

COLBERT: I was only involved in one large resettlement effort. I was probably in the middle of my tour when for one reason or not it was determined to move people from Quang Ngai which was in I Corps in the northern part of South Vietnam to the area around Cameron Bay which is south, I think, and east of Saigon- Ho Chi Minh City now- and in that case we flew families of people who had been displaced by the war from the contested area around Quang Ngai, Quang Ngai province, to this area around Cameron Bay. We flew them in I think Caribou's which were small military cargo craft and maybe C-130s as well. I knew I flew with them, and we then trucked them to this area and gave them their concrete and their roofing material and their cooking oil and their bulgur wheat and that's all that I remember. It was a big operation; I played a very small role in it because I was just a minion.

Q: What was your impression of the American military and the Arvin military? How did they get along?

COLBERT: Well where I was the only U.S. military units were north in a place call Chu Lai, which was an area, a U.S. military base on the beach, which is one of the initial points that we landed when we involved with our own forces. It was a large base and the Americal Division was based there, which had a very checkered record.

Q: Including the My Lai...

COLBERT: I was coming to that yes. Americal Division was the division, which had the unit, which operated in the so-called Russell Beach operation in the Batanga Peninsula. But it had a checkered record in any event in terms of it just wasn't one of the best units. I think it was a reconstructed unit that had not been active since probably the Second World War.

I had very little to do with them other than the fact that for most of the time I was in Vietnam I lived in a house, I had luckily moved from that villa where the province senior advisor lived and I had my little hole in the wall place I described earlier. I along with one, two, three other young men, or two other young men and an older man shared a house, which was really on the outskirts of town. I would say that we were part of the defensive perimeter although we weren't in that business. We felt well removed. We had a standing invitation for any U.S. military personnel who passed through who weren't assigned there. They could stop there and have a sandwich or a beer or whatever they wanted; it was just well known that they could come and go, as they liked. So we had a

lot of people come by. Things fell off trucks there all the time, off the back of trucks. Often people would come in; we had a Montagnards housekeeper/cook and she would cook somebody a steak or serve them a BLT (bacon, lettuce, tomato sandwich) whatever they wanted. We aren't talking about hundreds of people now, we are talking two or three or four a week but they were welcomed to stop and eat and have whatever they wanted.

Often a week later we'd get ourselves a gift of a case of grenades or a shotgun something that we might need. We couldn't acquire weapons, as we weren't provided weapons so we used the midnight auto supply. We could pretty much get whatever we wanted because we got along well with them and so they would say, "Thank you very much for putting us up this evening, what can we do for you?" "Well, we could use a couple gas masks."

So my encounters were basically of a social nature or there was an advisory group within the Arvin, the Second Arvin Division, which was based in Quang Ngai city, which was in charge of the security of the province south of Chu Lai. We could go there if we wished, and have a beer in the officers club or NCO (non-commissioned officers) club. It was a very small club, a very small officer's club because it was a very small advisors group. My encounter with the U.S. military was mostly with the people who were involved with CORDS. CORDS was a sandwich operation, that is to say each level was military civilian, military civilian or vice versa. So that above me was a lieutenant colonel and below me in some instances there were public affairs or public civic action teams, which were headed by lieutenants and sometimes by second lieutenants. I could call on them for projects and things. Those are the people I mostly dealt with in the military.

Q: What was the impression that you were getting both of your own observation and your other American colleagues about the performance, effectiveness of the ARVIN in your area?

COLBERT: That's a difficult question. I think the U.S. military generally held the ARVIN in somewhat disdain yet the ARVIN properly lead fought very well. I think that sometimes the leadership was poor; on the other hand the U.S. military had this tendency to step in and do it themselves. 'We can do it better, we can do it faster, we can do it.' So there was this tendency to not let the ARVIN face up.

By the same token I found it strange that a lot of South Vietnamese men of military age weren't in the military. A lot of people who worked for me, I had a cadre of Vietnamese who worked for me or indeed worked for my counter part who were of military age and weren't in. So I don't think the distribution of responsibility or the distribution of burden was equitable. Of course, that's probably true in our own society as well if you think about it. Maybe Senator Kerry didn't make his joke very well the other day but the reality was then that people who wanted to avoid service could and they could go to Canada, they could go to Europe, they could be conscience objectors or they could just stay in school or they could join the Foreign Service. I mean there were all kinds of options so even with conscription the burden wasn't being fairly borne by us so far be it for me to criticize them. Sorry for a long answer.

Q: No, no that's fair enough.

COLBERT: I would like to talk about something else for a minute. This is sort of amusing. I think I said earlier that when I went to college I got a deferment from my local draft board in this small county I'm from. From college I went to graduate school and I got another deferment and the draft board people said, "We are watching you, we know where you are." I told them, "I am from a small town so you know where to find me," and I went to graduate school. From graduate school I went into the Peace Corps and again required another deferment, which made them unhappy. That would be of 1964 when I went into the Peace Corps so that required another deferment. When I got out of the Peace Corps I came back and I had already passed the Foreign Service written and was about to take the Foreign Service oral and was asked to take my pre-induction physical.

I went to Fort Haliburt in Baltimore and I at 125 pounds to 130 pounds soaking wet was classified 1-A. The same week that Joe Namath who was then playing football for the Jets was 4-F because he had flatfeet or something. In any event, I remember that I was 1-A when he was 4-F and I couldn't do what he was doing. But I was still 1-A when I joined the Foreign Service and I was 1-A when I went off to Vietnam. About a week or so after the Tet Offensive when the APO, the military mail, was restored to Quang Ngai I got my draft notice to report for induction into the U.S. military. I was working for this wonderful Marine colonel who I just thought was the best thing since sliced bread, I mean one of the best bosses that I have ever had, one of the people that I most admire. So I said, "Colonel Sir, we have a bit of a problem here." He looked at this and said, "What are they going to do send you Vietnam? I'll fix it." So I never got drafted, I just stayed in Vietnam. I don't know to this day why my draft board did not pursue it, I think at this point the statute of limitations has long since passed and I probably saw more action direct or indirect than most people who got drafted. But I never got drafted and I avoided the draft by going to Vietnam before they drafted me so I think that was an interesting little side that probably has nothing.

Q: I got my draft notice after I had enlisted in the Air Force and I was in Korea. During the war I got my draft notice and I said, "Well here I am."

COLBERT: Bring me back.

Q: What was your impression of the CIA operations?

COLBERT: The part of the CIA that I saw was the long-range reconnaissance units, which were operational from my city although I had nothing to do with them. I knew they were there and the Phoenix program which was the program to eliminate...

Q: The cadre?

COLBERT: The infrastructure, to arrange for the termination with extreme prejudice of people who were in leadership positions in the Viet Cong or the NVA and the Chu Hoi program which was the program to encourage people to leave the Communist side and come to our side for grants of land and unity and all that sort of stuff. I knew people in those programs, some of them were former military and some were career CIA. I think they varied in quality from very good to very bad.

Q: From where you were did any of those things impinge on you?

COLBERT: On my work?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: Only in the sense that if people thought that I was doing that work then I could have become a target, more than I already was. In one instance I found out that a person who worked in the Phoenix program was using my name rather than his name to protect himself and I took umbrage of that because I didn't mind his using a cover name but using my name and my position was a bit much, a bit off the top I think.

Q: How about the Koreans in the area? The Koreans had a division around Da Nang.

COLBERT: That was in Quang Ngai where I was located. They were there when I arrived and their area of operations was very secure. They basically, I'm told, told the village elders that you are with us, everything is wonderful and grand and we'll protect you and everything will be fine. If anything happens and you don't tell us about it, don't warn us, then everything will be very bad. I think the Vietnamese were totally convinced that the Koreans had zero tolerance for any misbehaving so it was pacified in the sense that the cost of otherwise was just too high. I'm told, although I don't have any evidence to the contrary, that they ran the black market in Quang Ngai while they were there and ran it very well. But shortly after I arrived they left and it was strictly ARVIN and I think security varied from so-so to maybe almost good, back and forth.

There were areas of Quang Ngai that were no-go areas but you have to know that Quang Ngai was a problem even for the French. When the Japanese took over Vietnam after maybe 1940-41 when they came to Vietnam they didn't even try to pacify Quang Ngai and it was the Japanese who had maybe a few soldiers in the center, if at that. Major leadership elements of the Vietnamese Communist party were born there so this was real Indian country.

When I was at the Quang Ngai Airport ready to depart at the end of my tour, my Vietnamese counterpart said to me just before I went up the stairs, "Larry, you do know that every family in the province has at least one member in the VC – even mine" Hopefully in his family it was him. I say that because if it were, if it had been then when Quang Ngai fell very quickly as the South Vietnamese government began to collapse he would not have suffered and I admired the great man a great deal. If he happened to be a member of the other side he was doing a good job at what he was doing and he was

certainly a good person so he wouldn't have been persecuted and he wouldn't have gone to a resettlement camp and he wouldn't have been killed.

Q: The flood.

COLBERT: Oh the flood. There was one day or a couple days when there was tremendous monsoon rain and the rain occurred just as the tide was coming in so at the same time we had this major tide coming back from the sea, I presume it is the South China Sea. But anyway we had this terrific influx of water and then we had this terrific flood because of all the rain. So the water coming back from the tide, the rip tide and the rain the entire city flooded. You are talking maybe up to six, eight, ten feet everywhere. Let's say at its highest six, eight feet but virtually the entire town is covered. We were as I said earlier we were staying in this house, the four of us and we got a lift in a military truck, to a location perhaps one hundred yards from our house and then sort of floated or walked barely touching with our toes, but we basically got to our house and got into the house. It was a one-story house with a roof that you could get up to. The water was up to almost the top of the ceiling, there was probably maybe a two-foot gap where from the floor and it was all solid, muddy water. But the ceiling and the remaining part of the wall, which had not been covered by the water both, were black, black with insects, which had come in to escape the flood. So it was an incredible experience. There were, the house was totally, totally covered with no open space at all with insects that were trying to avoid from being drowned by the flood. We proceeded to the roof to sit it out until the rip tide went back and the water went down and amused ourselves by shooting snakes with 45s, and we just popped them both for amusement and safety until the water went down.

It was one of the most remarkable things I have experienced. To be in a city totally covered with water to a certain level and then go back and see your entire living quarters absolutely chuck-a-block full of insects of all kinds and not to mention insects of all kinds and not to mention insects, small animals as well. They had all come there for safety.

Q: Did this require an awful lot of work to put things back together again?

COLBERT: I think we had to get a new refrigerator and somebody had to clean the place up. I'm sure we didn't do it and life got back to normal in a relatively short time. I think maybe a day or two we lived on C rations of which we had lots.

Q: Well then you left there when?

COLBERT: The fall of '69. I left the country in the fall of '69. It was really quite remarkable at that point a number of people were doing what I was doing or similar things had been killed. I had gone there with that normal feeling of youth that I was indestructible and didn't really worry about it, although we were often shelled and certainly zappers came in and assassins came in and it was a dangerous place. I don't think I ever really had any angst about being killed. But as I got closer to the end I got a

little more concerned with my well being because people that I knew had been killed or seriously wounded.

I remember flying on Air America from Quang Ngai to Da Nang, which was my first stop on the way out. I had to check out through Da Nang. And when we landed in Da Nang airport there was an accident, which occurred as we were landing. They were cutting the grass around the runway and one of the employees thought it would be easier if they used fire because it was much faster so they lit the grass on fire. Unfortunately there was an ammunition dump. So the ammunition dump went off just as we were approaching, and we had to get out of that plane and run. I sat then in this ditch for 45 minutes while the ammunition cooked off albeit perhaps a mile away but it was close by when you are watching an ammunition dump going over.

Then from there I went on to my last time in Saigon to check out. I remember I was walking to Bunker's bunker that is to say what we used to call Ellsworth Bunkers embassy, this big monstrosity that we built. I was walking there to process out and a Viet Cong unit tried to take over or blow up the local main post office and I was going by at the time. So my last week in Vietnam was rather eventful. I flew into an ammunition dump blowing up and then what was an unwelcome intruder in an attempt to blow up or take over the local post office.

Q: The local post office was on a square with a cathedral wasn't it?

COLBERT: It's in the main square, that's right. You know Saigon then? Oh that's right you said you...

Q: I was there at the time. I remember. Whither in '69, the fall of '69, where did you go?

COLBERT: I went back to the Vietnam Training Center to fill time, and we found a one-bedroom apartment in southwest in one of the new high rises, relatively new then. My wife went back to work at the Library of Congress. We discovered she was pregnant and in due course we had our first child. I went back to Turkish language instruction and I was assigned to Turkey. My thought was that I had spent two and a half years in the Foreign Service; I had really no State Department experience and sort of no embassy experience. I had been upcountry winning hearts and minds or losing them. I felt that I was somewhat behind my classmates in terms of experience. In fact I was ahead of them promotion wise because I went to Vietnam as a 07 and left as a 05. So I had two promotions in less than three years and I was ahead of my class because I had gone to Vietnam and been shot at and so on and so forth. I was doing well.

On the other hand I felt really somewhat at a disadvantage because I didn't know what an OM was; an Operations Memorandum was for those of you who don't know. I didn't know how to do an Airgram; I didn't know what an Airgram was. I certainly didn't know about things like TAGS and all that good stuff. I knew nothing at all. So I thought I should at least know Turkey and my Turkish was pretty good although very, very rusty and I spoke like a peasant rather than an Istanbulu, a person from Istanbul or an Ankarli

a person from Ankara. So I thought if I went to Turkey at least the language would give me some heads up to make up for the lack of any other knowledge I had. So I asked for Turkey and they assigned me to the political/military section in Ankara via Turkish.

Q: In the first place how long were you, a few months, in the Vietnam training place?

COLBERT: Three or four months until the Turkish language class started.

Q: How did you find, you might say, the spirit there and the approach? What was your impression?

COLBERT: It's a long time ago. I think people were, most people going through it were AID. State people were a minority and whereas in CORDS I which I was in, the first CORDS group, we had already been assigned to Vietnam before CORDS was created. They weren't even sending FSOs to Vietnam for counter-insurgency work, upcountry work, when I came in. By the time I came back from Vietnam they were telling people that your first tour will be in Vietnam and if you won't go to Vietnam then you can't join the Foreign Service. So people I think knew they were going, some with enthusiasm, some with trepidation and some with resignation but basically everybody got along pretty well, I don't know. I think that the trainers, the people that talked about the politics and talked about the society and tried to prepare you for what Vietnam was about were very, very good people. Many of them had been involved in Southeast Asia for a long period of time. Erv Boomgardener who recently died, was one of them, a person from USIS (United States Information Service) who really knew the country very well. All I could bring to the table was the practical reality trying to work at a very junior level upcountry in a very big bureaucracy.

Q: Well then how did you find Turkish training? Was it able to put the polish on you that impressed upon you?

COLBERT: I wondered about that, what I would say. I think I will be honest. I was in a class with about four people, one fellow who was older was going off to be principal officer in Izmir, and we had a consulate in Izmir at the time. One person was going off to be the number two State person in Istanbul. He was a mid-level officer and the fourth person was going to Ankara to work in the embassy for another organization. I was the only one who had any previous Turkish so I should have been the star of the class. Probably wasn't the star of the class for a variety of reasons: one: I don't have a great aptitude for leaning languages. I have a good aptitude for communicating. That sounds like I'm making a joke but it's quite true. Two, I had just come back from 18 months of living a very basic existence and felt that I owed myself some living and owed myself some time with my wife, and so I don't know that I was as dedicated as I might have been had I not come back from 18 months or two years of being involved in Vietnam and three, I really didn't think the teacher was particularly good and the linguist I absolutely despised.

I got my comeuppance though, I mean, I got a two plus, two plus. It should have probably been a three, three if I had been more dedicated or more tested better or whatever. I think it was a combination of not studying hard enough, too many distractions and not having a great aptitude for language classes anyway. I got a two plus, two plus. Nobody got a three in the class so that wasn't too bad but I probably should have done better having had more than a passing acquaintance with the language.

But when I got to Ankara I had been there about six months when I got a letter from the people in personnel saying I had been low ranked because of my poor performance in language which I thought was sort of a low blow because nobody had even told me that I was even being ranked in language and I had never seen anything before it or anything. But I went to see the DCM (deputy chief of mission) and said, "Just let it pass." It passed and I did fine career-wise in the end but it left a very bad taste in my mouth because I thought if there were two people less dedicated to me in the process it was the teacher and the linguist - particularly the linguist who rarely appeared and was not very helpful. So it left a bad taste in my mouth. Pardon me for digressing.

Q: No, no, no I mean it gives a feel for the system. Where did you go? You went to where? Ankara?

COLBERT: I went to Ankara.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

COLBERT: Let's see, I was there from '70-'73. I spent a year in the political/military section working for a wonderful man named Howard Ashford who was a civil servant who was Wristonized that is to say he was converted when they merged the civil service part of the State Department with the Foreign Service willy-nilly, I think during the Eisenhower administration.

Q: It was around 1955 is a date that sticks...

COLBERT: So it was Eisenhower.

Q: I know because when I came into the Foreign Service and I remember this was something, which was going on with those of us who came in, as regular FSOs didn't understand what this was all about.

COLBERT: Well he was a fabulous boss, a gentleman, a really fine person to work for. . . There was a mid-level officer who was a senior FSO-5 and I was a junior FSO-5 if it sounds what a funny thing to say. He had been an FSO-5 for a while; I had been promoted just after leaving or just the middle of Vietnam. So I was relatively new and this was my first embassy. I did things like arrange diplomatic notes to transfer used destroyers and used submarines to the Turkish military. I arranged for over flights, arranged for military assistance and base rights and issues as SOFA, that is the Status of Forces Agreement. That is the sort of things that I dealt with but I was there on the

beginning of a long weekend - the counselor of embassy for political/military affairs Mr. Ashford was out of town and the number two I think had gone somewhere on emergency and I was in charge, that is not to say big deal but I was in charge. But it turned out that's when the Palestinians tried to overthrow King Hussein and we...

Q: That is the beginning of Black September.

COLBERT: Exactly, exactly. We then...I think in fact Hussein had been pushed out of Amman, out of the capital. We didn't have access to Amman airport, and there was an old British field called Browns Field, and we started to shuttle supplies in to help Hussein and his Bedouin native Jordanians take on...

Q: The Arab Legion essentially.

COLBERT: Yeah, but my task then became to work with the Turks to arrange that resupply. Obviously when I say work there was an army major who was an assistant air attaché, and he and I did all the notes and went over to see the Turkish Foreign Ministry, back and forth. We were the gophers. So I went from being the third person in a small section to a key player in a civil war. It was great fun, and I don't think I slept for about four days, and every time the driver would take me home I'd just get to bed and the driver would come and take me back. We would have to go over to the Foreign Ministry at 2:00 AM and then find the DCM to get him to sign the notes because we couldn't sign the notes ourselves, to arrange over flight rights and to tell the Turks what was flying over and so forth. It was good fun. At the time I had to go to the treaties and try to find out what was going on. It was good stuff for a young man and I enjoyed that.

Q: You were there from when to when? Well let's do Ankara first?

COLBERT: Well I was in Ankara from '70-'73 the first year in the political/military section but unbeknownst to me the most junior officer who was a two in the political section was not getting along with his boss so he had arranged to get himself transferred to Izmir and so there was a vacancy in the political section at the FSO-4, I'm talking new terms old terms. I was an FSO-5 and I was the most junior person in the political/military section and so the DCM calls me in and says, "We would like to move you from the political/military section to the political section. You can replace Mr. Siprell." I'm thinking, my God heady news, that's good stuff.

Q: Was that David Siprell?

COLBERT: Dudley.

Q: Dudley, Dudley Siprell.

COLBERT: I barely knew Dudley Siprell and I didn't know that he had arranged with his wife's father who was an ambassador to get transferred out of the political section and into Izmir.

So then I went to work from one of the nicest most competent persons in the Foreign Service Howard Ashford to work for Morris Draper who was perhaps one of the worst people in the Foreign Service, opinionated, arrogant, unfeeling, just generally a nasty person. When he was right, he was right and when he was wrong, he was right. He was not the most pleasant person to work for. He didn't do me any damage. I got good reviews, and he didn't wreck my career. I would, however, go home to my wife and say, "We now have two children," because we'd had had a baby in the meantime, "and this career of mine is going to be in tatters because I am working for this terrible person who can't get anything right." He didn't teach me anything except how not to behave as a human being.

But then as in all cases there was some justice because just as I was leaving at the end of my third year, I was supposed to be there for two years but I liked being in Turkey and I spoke Turkish so we extended. I got permission to do a third year in Turkey on my second tour. That is unusual, usually it was only two years for your second tour then but I got an extension and I was allowed to do three years. Near the end of my third year Macomber became ambassador.

Q: Who had been the ambassador before?

COLBERT: William Handley. He was from USIS, a competent individual, a bit of a womanizer and since the DCM had a drinking problem they made an interesting pair. I had very little interaction with Handley. I had a lot of interaction with the DCM.

Q: Who was the DCM?

COLBERT: David Cuthell, who was a Turkish language officer and had been in a parachute division that landed in the Philippines, he I think was very competent, I liked him a lot. I think he did drink a little bit more than perhaps he should, that's no secret and the man is long dead and I admire him. But he moved me to work for Morris Draper, which I found to be an interesting...

Q: Just to get a feel for this. How did Draper operate within the embassy? I mean how were the relations, I mean, sometimes nasty people to their subordinates are pretty nice...

COLBERT: Oh I think he managed up very well. I think he stomped down and kissed up.

Q: A little "ratfar" as the Germans used to say, "Unterboygen, ober treten".

COLBERT: I think he treated his wife badly. I think he was not really a nice person. Since we are saying it for the record and he is dead I'll say it.

Q: He did make a name for himself working for another not very nice person, Henry Kissinger, he and Kissinger became quite a team in the Middle East.

COLBERT: He was part of a tandem with somebody else that did shuttle diplomacy with respect to Lebanon, but that is a long time later. But in any event Macomber came and he somehow found out that I spoke Turkish, so he just sort of took me out of the political section and said, "I am going to be making all these calls and going to all these...you are going to go everywhere that I go. So you are now working for me exclusively and whatever happens happens between you and me. Do I make myself clear?" "Yes, sir." So on his initial calls I went with him and if the Turkish officials didn't speak English there would usually be an English interpreter there but I was sort of his personal safety valve and checker. So I went everywhere and I would come back and then Morris Draper would want to know what had happened and I wouldn't tell him. He would get furious with me and I would say, "Well, go talk to the ambassador, I'm just following his instructions." But Macomber just chewed through his counselors - we didn't have minister counselor, I think we just had counselors but he just ate them for lunch, so being a junior person who had been chewed on for a couple years I enjoyed watching the more senior people being chewed up.

Q: Well Macomber, there are wonderful stories about him. He married Dulles' secretary.

COLBERT: I didn't know that.

Q: But how did he relate to the Turks would you say?

COLBERT: I think he got along well; I was only overlapping with him for a brief period of time. I thought the man had tremendous energy. There was this one true story where he was going east, he was flying east to visit one of the...there were NATO/American installations in the east and he landed in this small DAO (Department of Defense airplane), It was just a small unmarked airplane. He got off the plane all bundled up because it was cold, and this American colonel came up to him and said, "Get that God dam airplane out of here we are expecting the American ambassador." The American ambassador said, "He's just arrived major." He's the one who was called 'blow torch' and he didn't suffer fools gladly or at all.

Q: You were at a different level obviously what was your impression of first Turkish officialdom and then Turkish military? But let's do the Turkish military.

COLBERT: I had very little to do with the Turkish military. Whenever the ambassador had a big reception one of my jobs was to talk to the wives of the Turkish military, because the wives basically for the most part didn't speak English and they for the most part didn't circulate very much. So if there were some person standing over in the corner who wasn't being spoken to my job since I spoke Turkish was to talk to them and often that was wives who didn't want me talking to them anyway or the odd official standing off by himself.

I thought the Turkish military that I met were very professional and knew their job very well. Turkish military has a tradition of being the protector of the constitution, the protector of westernization so they're western looking - despite current efforts on the part

of the EU (European Union) to make them otherwise that is an editorial comment. But as for Turkish officials, Turkish people generally are among the most hospitable and open and friendly as you can find. I had no bad experiences with Turkish officials. The only real Turkish official I ever dealt with were a few members of parliament I got to know and people in the foreign ministry. They were all quite open and quite nice.

Q: What was the attitude of the people you were dealing with to get stuff to help keep Hussein in Jordan? Did they see this Palestinian take over as a bad thing?

COLBERT: I don't know given the press of time I ever had time to discuss with them whether they thought that was a good thing or a bad thing. I know that the cooperation was always forthcoming. They knew what I was doing. I was very open with them and they were very open with me and there was a great urgency about getting the hardware to him so that he could prevail. I don't know that they ever said no to us, certainly they never said no to me and it was always rush, rush, rush, rush.

Q: How did your wife find her taste for the Foreign Service?

COLBERT: Well we are still on Turkey, which is good. I remember once at a cocktail party when the DCM came up to me, he was in his cups as he could be sometimes. He leaned into my face and he said, "You know Larry, I think your greatest diplomatic asset is your wife." I said, "Thank you, I think." But I would say that she was, she was a sophisticated, educated, attractive young woman who people liked who made friends easily and entertained with panache. Years later I was in Madrid and the chief of personnel there one day said to me, "Remember me Larry? I was a junior secretary back when you were a second secretary of the embassy in Ankara? People in the embassy, the staff, died to get invitations to your house, they could eat your wives Chinese cooking and go to your house." We had lots of diplomatic friends, a variety of people and I think part of it was the attraction of my wife. Certainly she was more charming and better looking than I ever was.

Q: We are talking about what year did you leave Turkey?

COLBERT: I left Turkey in 1973, I had asked to go to North Africa because I had French in my background and I didn't really want to go back to Washington. They told me there were no jobs open in North Africa. This was going to be my third tour and like most people I was going back to Washington, so we're going back to Washington. We had a toddler and a small baby so we ordered a Volvo via diplomatic sales and picked it up in Copenhagen and drove it back to Ankara, the two of us leaving our two children with the maid, terrible parents that we were. I am joking, The maid loved the kids and took better care of the kids than anybody that you could imagine.

But in any case we came back and then I got a phone call from the communications office saying a cable had arrived saying they wanted me to be principal officer in Oran. O-R-A-N, one of the three places that Operation Torch landed troops in the Second World War. I misunderstood and initially thought they were sending us to Oman as

opposed to Oran but that difference was sorted out very quickly. We set out, I think madly but wonderfully by car. We shipped our stuff and drove with a toddler and a baby, a real baby, to Izmir. From Izmir we took a car ferry to Brindisi, and from Brindisi we drove via up through Italy around the southern coast of France to Marseilles, and we took a car ferry from Marseilles to “Algerie”, Algiers and from Algiers we drove to Oran. It took us probably eight days or so. It was an adventure; it was madness, something only young people would ever do.

We did it, and we went to Oran where I was in charge of a one-officer post. The staff consisted of my wife who had to agree to be my admin assistant/code clerk, which I would like to come back to, one piednoir, that is to say a French lady who had been born in Algeria, who was a French citizen but had stayed behind when the French left who was my secretary/receptionist, a driver and then a gardener/handyman and a janitress who doubled as the downstairs housekeeper because the office consisted of what had been the drawing room of a downtown villa and the ladies drawing room was the admin officers office and the side foray entrance was where the secretary sat. You went through another set of doors and there was a big entry way and a formal dining room, a small sitting area in the kitchen. There was a formal garden in the back that badly needed repair which probably was lovely when labor was cheap and the French planter lived there. Then we lived upstairs. It was a two-year assignment.

Q: This would be '70...?

COLBERT: This would have been '73-'76. When I got there I knew nothing about consular work at all. I'd never taken the consular course, because I went directly to Vietnam. The job was consul. I was the American consul, and I flew the American flag,. However, I reported to the American interest section of the Swiss embassy, which essentially was the American compound flying a Swiss flag. But the Charge de Affaires of the interest section was under the Swiss. I reported to him but I was the American consul.

The anomaly of that was when in '67 when the Algerians and the Americans broke relations because of the 6-Day War we broke political and economic relations but we didn't break consular relations. We had a consulate in Constantine, and we had a consulate in Oran. At some point maybe in '60, at some point between when we broke relations and when I arrived in '73 the consulate in Constantine was closed because of security concerns. When I arrived in Oran it was just me and my wife and my family living in this compound. My job was to report on what was going on in the western part of Algeria, to keep an eye on the possible conflict between the between Morocco and Algeria because of the so-called Green March.

Q: That was down in the...

COLBERT: Sahara.

Q: The Spanish Sahara.

COLBERT: Yeah. When the Spanish left the Sahara the Moroccans grabbed it and the Algerians thought it should be belonging to the Saharans. So there were a lot of tension.

At that time there was major American investment in natural gas and particularly the liquidization of natural gas. So there were a number of large American companies in western Algeria, with a large American business/worker bee present so I would take care of these people. Then I had the normal visas and all that sort of stuff.

I found I really liked doing the consular work, which I hadn't been trained to do. In fact, I think my first big consular error was a wonderful one. This Vietnamese-American wife of a construction worker who was working on the natural gas liquidification plant came in with a passport, which had been limited to three months. She wanted to leave the country because her mother, father, brother somebody was ill...she had to leave. She couldn't get out because her passport was expired and she...I said, "Why was it limited?" She said, "Well I didn't have my naturalization certificate when I had to leave and so they gave me this passport. Here is my naturalization certificate." So I just extended the passport and filled out the form and sent it back to Washington. Since I didn't have cable then my only means of communication was one telephone line and an unclassified bag that came via the railroad. The classified bag I collected myself whenever I went to Algiers. So time passed and I got this nasty, nasty message from the Bureau of Consular Affairs how dare I renew this passport without getting their specific approval in advance. In fact I was right, they were wrong and the rules subsequently changed that you could exercise this modest degree of good judgment.

I found that I really, really like the consular work. So I wrote my career "mangement" officer, my career management officer more accurately and said that I wanted to change from political cone, which I didn't even know I was in, when I arrived in Ankara for my first tour, I didn't know I was a political officer. I didn't know there were cones because I had gone to Vietnam, and we were more concerned with hand grenades than you were demarches. So I wrote this person and said that I wanted to change and he wrote me back and said, "Well you are up for profession from FSO-5 to FSO-4, you are in the zone. If you change you won't be promoted because you will be competing against people who have been doing this work already." So I said, "Don't change me." Then I got promoted indeed to the august level of FSO-4 and then I wrote back and said change me and changed.

So I became a consular officer who had never taken the consular course who had nobody supervising me and in fact there was only one other consul in the country and he was a first tour officer in Algeria, so it was really a case of the blind leading the blind. We did a very good job I thought and used common sense and when we absolutely had to we looked in the FAM (foreign affairs manual). I'm a great believer in the sayings of Lou Goelz, one of the great consular officers.

Q: I knew Lou. Lou took my place in Seoul.

COLBERT: Well Lou was one of the all time great consular officers in my view and his rule was “Don’t ask, don’t ask.”

Q: Well my rule is “Ask if you don’t want to...”

COLBERT: If you know the answer.

Q: If you want to stall or something but other than that don’t ask.

COLBERT: Only ask if it is in your interest, that’s right. If a person is asking you to do something that you don’t want to do, use the State Department for cover but for God’s sake don’t ask them to exercise good judgment because they won’t.

Q: I’m trying to pick up sort of the spirit of the time when you were going to switch from political to consular, what time is it?

COLBERT: Well I waited until I got promoted and then I wrote back and switched and then continued on. The things that gave me the most satisfaction in Algeria were solving the human problems. I wasn’t trained so it was basically my doing what I thought made sense and going on from there.

I think probably one of my biggest failures occurred in Algeria and when I think about it even now occasionally. Early on I heard that an American lady was in a hospital in Oran, a military hospital, which was very strange. So I managed to go see her and it turned out that she had married a German who was involved in a German company project in a provincial town half way between Oran and Algiers. She had gotten ill, had a very serious illness, and in talking with her I found out that she was pregnant. Moreover, she had all these intolerances,; she was sort of like a walking list of don’t do this, can’t do that, sort of thing. This was a very high-risk pregnancy. I said, “You should really go back to Germany. You have in-laws there, good medical treatment and all these intolerances or special needs that you have would be treated there.” I visited her a couple times and kept talking to her, and she said no she wouldn’t leave her husband. Her response to me was to be with her husband and Algeria was pretty basic in the 1970s, and I kept urging her to go back. I even spoke with her husband who was not sympathetic to my point of view. Then time passed and I found out that she had died in childbirth, because they couldn’t treat her; there was nothing that they could treat her with. In fact, there was a Chinese medical contingent from the PRC (People’s Republic of China), in her provincial town and they were good doctors. But the medical problems were quite complex and beyond the facilities available I always felt that I should have been more able to persuade this woman to go back. So I did have failures.

I had some successes. I think the most dramatic thing that happened when I was there was there was a company called Chemico which was building liquefied natural gas plants, two of them, two giant plants in a place called Arzew which was to the east of Oran in an area where the allies had actually landed in 1942. There was already an existing liquefaction plant there run by Shell, a small one. They were building these two

giant plants, and there was a falling out between the company and a SONATRAC, the Algerian state oil and gas monopoly company. The company forfeited their contract. It then became really really dicey as to whether they'd be able to leave – it was a police state and the company was the state and the state was the company. There were very bad feelings on both side. In the end the American company employees were escorted to their airplanes with people with guns. Luckily everybody left and nobody was held hostage and all worked out well but it was sort of dicey.

Another vivid memory was when often the Algerian provincial authorities would call me up and say there is going to be a spontaneous anti-American demonstration at 2:30 PM on Wednesday of next week, it will last twenty minutes, or some other day and time. I underline the word spontaneous. That was a given, the government then was under Boumedienne and it was anti-American, it was pro-Soviet Union and the papers were controlled and had vicious cartoons - that was the way it was. Nobody would actually harm us and everywhere we went we were followed by the secret police but apart from that I was perfectly safe, I thought. So there was this humongous demonstration...my neighbor, I lived in a villa with a wall around it, and my neighbor was a Moroccan consul who lived in a similar villa with a wall around it.

As I said earlier, Morocco had absconded with the Spanish Sahara and there was this humongous anti-American, anti-Moroccan demonstration, several thousand people and my office had wooden shutters of the type that you see in the tropics and a couple on bars. Well you could just reach through and shake hands, there was certainly no bulletproof glass, and we were flush with the street. So here were four or five thousand screaming Algerians and I call up on my single telephone line which that was my only means of communication to the mission in "Algiers" and say, "I am now witnessing a demonstration of X thousands of people which had not been announced to me in advance. This was truly spontaneous or they hadn't bothered to tell me and this is a lot of people. So the DCM says to me, "Let me know if anything happens." I said, "If anything happens I won't be letting you about it." I mean I would have been dead but in fact nothing happened. It was quite an interesting experience.

Shortly after I arrived there I received a classified pouch and opened it up. Let me go back to how I got my classified pouch, as it's relevant. But I got this classified pouch and I opened it up and there was a pistol wrapped in metal foil and ammunition. So I wrapped it back up, put it back in the foil and sent it back to the people who had sent it to me. Of course they couldn't reach me except by phone, and they couldn't discuss it anyway. It had come from the RSO (regional security officer) in Rabat; there really were RSOs then, not one or more in each mission.

Q: The Regional Security Officer.

COLBERT: Exactly. The regional security officer was actually in Rabat in Morocco because in those days they were really regional and when he got this package back from me he was mightily unhappy and when I got up to Algiers there was a nasty cable waiting for me from the person saying, "How dare me send this back to them." My thinking was I

was living in this house with my wife, two small daughters, there was an Algerian policeman guarding the official entrance where the public came in, I was under 24-hour surveillance. If the Algerians wanted us dead we were dead, if the Algerians wanted us alive we were alive. But my shooting somebody with a six-shooter wouldn't save anybody's life and more likely I would shoot myself or my kids would shoot themselves. So I wasn't having any part of this and I was sending it back. It gave them real heartburn.

The safe area in the house for storing classified was what had been a small kitchen which was maybe four foot deep and two feet wide and it had one bar lock safe in it. There was a combination, not a bar lock a combination Mosler safe and then outside door had a combination safe door on it too. Once we were having trouble with the outside door, the door to the strong room and it was being impossible to open so it was stuck shut, essentially we couldn't make the combination work. So, we asked for the regional security officer to send one of their technicians. The technician came and within minutes of approaching the safe it popped open, one spin of the dial and he gave me this disdainful look like he brought me all the way from Morocco for no particular good reason. So my wife said, "Well, why don't you try it one more time?" and he was there for three days. So he agreed it was indeed broken.

It basically was for the most part a job of helping people with their problem, traveling around and seeing people in isolated areas. There were Americans in isolated circumstances such me in small posts. In my case, every two or three weeks I would be a non-pro courier and fly to Algiers. It was a gruesome trip because you had to get up very, very early in the morning and go to the airport and hope that despite your reservations, even with a reservation you could get on the airplane which was sort of like a cattle run and then hope that the embassy met you as they were supposed to with a driver. Nowadays, of course, you are met by a driver and an American. I was just met by a driver. So I arrived maybe carrying material, which was moderately sensitive or bringing back information which is sometimes very sensitive which I then had to shred and waiting for a driver. There were occasions when I actually took a taxicab to the American embassy carrying a classified bag, because nobody came to pick me up and you couldn't call. There were no cell phones, of course. And sometimes I actually drove myself in either the official car or my own; I had a Volvo station wagon which I mentioned earlier. Sometimes I drove myself with the classified making a non-pro courier run with classified in both directions. I mean mindless; now they would never permit it, never any had problem.

Once making such a trip, I don't know whether I think I was going at the time so I couldn't have had very much, I saw an automobile accident, a car had gone off a road down a gorge. I had to park, left the bag in the car temporarily, went down, picked up the person who had been in the automobile accident, carried him up, put him in the flattened out back of my station wagon,; I had folded in the seats and drove him into the provincial hospital all the time, clutching my little classified bag in my hand the entire time! I never found out what happened to him.

People in the embassy were very good, the station chief...

Q: Who was the acting ambassador then?

COLBERT: Eagleton.

Q: Bill Eagleton?

COLBERT: Bill Eagleton for the most part. Then there was another person who was a real Arabist who came at the end or came after. Eagleton was charge under the Swiss and then Parker, Dick Parker, was also my boss. They were both good guys. They were good people to work for but I was really, really, really on my own. I mean one telephone line and that's it. I had to do what I thought best on my own.

Q: Well let's talk a little about the area you worked. As I recall, Algeria you were in the western part of Algeria?

COLBERT: I was about two hours from the Moroccan border.

Q: That also is sort of the center of I can't remember the name but it's a particular area in Morocco isn't it? I mean in Algeria, who are not too happy with the ruling government?

COLBERT: I think you are thinking about the Berbers and they're actually farther, they are in the Constantine area. Oran was probably the most Levantine, the most Peonwar, the most European city in Algeria. It was the center of the OSA

Q: OSA?

COLBERT: OSA, OAS. It's also where...

Q: Which was the French...

COLBERT: Resistance.

Q: Secret army, which was basically, the French army post opposed to the...

COLBERT: No, no well I mean that's true, some people...it was the resistance group organized to prevent the French Government giving up Algeria and the headquarters was actually in a high-rise building that faced the villa that I lived in. I lived in a villa, as I described it that was on a Cornish on a road overlooking the main commercial harbor.

Q: So you weren't, the area you were in I mean was there anything sort of political going on?

COLBERT: It was a very closed society run by the military and there wasn't much to report on because basically everything was totally controlled. There was no Muslim

fundamentalist resistance at that time. The army ran things and the army in turn was run by the people who had been the leaders in overthrowing the French. They were a group of older colonels who had been in the Algerian Liberation army and they ran everything. They were called “Le Pouvoir”, (the power).

Q: Also, and correct me if I am wrong but people who have served there tell me that the Algerians just by their nature are rather dour people?

COLBERT: Dour is a compliment. The saying is ‘How do you tell a Moroccan from an Algerian? The one that’s smiling is a Moroccan.’ Algerians were not happy people although the people who looked after my family who were very nice and we had Algerian friends who were doctors and business people, but they were exceptions. For the most part Algerians were not really, at least when I was there, not really warm. I’ve met Algerians since outside of Algeria who have been very nice. I met a couple the other day that are here observing our election so I don’t really understand that. I do know that it was very, very difficult to be friendly with Algerians.

Case in point, one Algerian customs official came to our house for dinner and then got very badly beaten up by the secret police. When people get beaten up for coming to your house for dinner it really discourages other people from coming to dinner. So on a social level there was very little interface except for people who were very well placed. Our closest Algerian friend was very close to the original colonels who overthrew the French. When he was warned off he told me that he made a phone call to Algiers, and in turn the people who warned him off were warned off. You had to have that kind of “enchoufe”, that kind of “piston” to be OK.

Q: Looking at sort of the Mediterranean there are some of the people, sort of the Levantine, people who have entrepreneurial genes, I mean the Lebanese obviously the Jews there, certain Egyptians. Did you see any sort of economic sparks in Algeria at the time?

COLBERT: I think the government, which was authoritarian, and socialist in name discouraged that sort of thing. There were people who had small shops but there was not a great entrepreneurial spirit about.

I remember a Algerian doctor friend who was explaining to me that at one point the only part of the food economy which hadn’t been naturalized, say only the production of meat had been naturalized, say only the production of vegetables everything but fish. . . the fishing industry was free, people could buy the fish, come and catch the fish and buy the fish in the market. At one point it became part of the socialist system as well. He said, “Well you see, the reason that they took over the fish was the government explained that the people who had money like doctors, me for example, would pay more money than the people who didn’t have as much money so we’d get the best fish because we would pay the most money.” He said, “That’s true, I would pay top money for the best fish to feed my family, I was a doctor.” He said, “So now it’s much improved you see, the best fish is

taken by the government officials for themselves and they don't pay at all and we all pay now controlled prices for the worst cut, so it works out very well."

Another friend of mine was a doctor and she, all doctors had to work half day for the society as a whole for a nominal government fee and then they could work so many hours on their own dime. She was furious because she had to work; her job was to work in the provincial headquarters seeing all the sick people who work for the provincial government. She had seen her requisite number of 100 patients or whatever it was and this person insisted on seeing her and she said, "You know I've been here X number of hours, I've seen X number of people, I've done my bit I am leaving." He said, "No you have to see me I've paid." She said, "What do you mean I've paid? It's free." He said, "No, I've paid the guard there." It turned out that she was seeing 100 patients everyday for free, and the guard was charging I don't know how much money for each patient to get in line so the guard was making more money than the doctor was. That's what you get in the socialist system I think.

Q: Was there any mobilization or did you have any feeling that things might get rough between Morocco and the Algerians?

COLBERT: Oh yeah, the Algerians did mobilize and I tried to observe that. I don't know how much I want to talk about that because this is going to be an unclassified document but certainly we were very interested in what was going on. There was a time when it looked like Algeria would invade Morocco and there was mobilization all around, yeah.

Q: Was there anything else we should discuss do you think?

COLBERT: About Algeria? I think it was a fascinating job because I was on my own. There was a lot of responsibility because I had to look after all these people. Did I do any insightful political reporting? I doubt it. Did I do some? Yes.

Q: I mean how much insightful political reporting can one do under a socialistic dictatorship?

COLBERT: Well there's that. I think that we projected a positive image of the United States because we lived a good decent life. Apart the couple immediately before us who were absolutely first class several previous consuls who had had the job before there had problems. One person lost his mind there, one person abandoned his wife for another woman with a big scandal, there had been a series of problems, and so I think we left the post in good order and well thought of by the people who observed us. That was something I can take pride in.

Q: What did you think of the hinterland?

COLBERT: Hinterland?

Q: Of Algeria. You get out of the city because...

COLBERT: Think of it as three different countries, the very fertile lovely green coastal plain, then an area which is high plateau where you can grow wheat and crops and is very flat and maybe a hundred miles deep, and then the real Sahara desert which is either desert like we think of the southwest rocks and occasional rough branch or then suddenly it is like you have in the movies, the sand dunes and the oasis, so it was all of that. It's a very pretty country. I can understand why the French didn't want to leave; I can understand why the Algerians wanted them to leave.

Q: Was much being done wheat wise? Because it was a breadbasket for a long time and what was happening while you were there?

COLBERT: It was going to hell in a handbag. I think that the oil permitted the government to do foolish things. Socialism probably wrecked agriculture, and they had a good wine grape industry that got wrecked for religious regions, ideological reasons. No, the country was good at producing kids and not much else. That's pretty harsh isn't it?

Q: Yeah, but when you left there in '76 if I would to ask you wither Algeria what would you have said?

COLBERT: I think that I would have said that when the oil runs out they're in deep do-do. Subsequent to my departure, of course, they had an election and the Islamist's won but the army, essentially the people who were running the country, the "Le Pouvoir" decided that the people who won the election couldn't take power because they were going to displace the people who had power, so they had a very long and very bloody civil war. I think the army or the "Le Pouvoir" succeeded in essentially bringing it to an acceptable level and then with the Bouteflika coming back,- the former foreign minister coming back as president- you had some sort of amnesty and the country has calmed down a bit and maybe it will go somewhere. Certainly it's not as strictly leftist as it was. We have good relations with them now. I think they probably like our attachment because we help essentially prop the people who run their country can lean. I haven't been back for a long time.

Q: But at the time there wasn't, how did we see it is this the place where we were keeping the flag flying for the Americans or did you see any strategic interest or...?

COLBERT: I think we were very interested in being able to have access to their oil, particularly to their gas. We hoped to wean them away from being favorably inclined to the Soviet Union; we hoped they will be more like Morocco and Tunisia and certainly not more like Libya. Our relations were correct but not really cordial. They were very, very helpful in the Iran hostage situation, and I think that our relations began to improve markedly after they helped...

Q: That was after '79.

COLBERT: Yeah.

Q: But during the time you were there did the Soviet presence play out at all where you were?

COLBERT: The Soviets supplied them military equipment on a systematic basis. They had good relations They didn't allow any Soviet troops there but they certainly had good relations with them and they got all their military equipment from there.

Q: Did you get any impression of how the military equipment was being used?

COLBERT: No, I didn't get into that.

Q: OK well you left there in '76, whither?

COLBERT: There was a guy named Lorry Lawrence who was the principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Consular Affairs or its equivalent at the time who recruited me and two others to come back to work on a special project. I was very excited about this because we were going to be people who looked at things that should be done and could be done to improve consular operations.

We came back only to learn that he had gone off to be consul general in London and the powers that be didn't really want us poking around these three There were two of us who were O4s and one who was an O3. Sarah Horsey and I can't remember the name of the fellow, he became ambassador, he became a deputy assistant secretary of state and ambassador to Guyana. Anyway, so here we were these three mid-level officers.

Q: The other one was Sarah...?

COLBERT: Sarah Horsey and the other name will come to me. Anyway, but nobody really wanted us to do this, nobody wanted us monkeying around in their knickers. In particular I think Ron Somerville was very suspicious of it.

Q: Ron Somerville was for many years the executive director...

COLBERT: Director, very competent individual.

Q: One of the bureaucrats bureaucrat.

COLBERT: I would say that he could give lessons to Byzantine empires on being Byzantine.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: But he was not with this project, which we had come back for, and it soon became clear that it really wasn't going anywhere because nobody really wanted us to do anything We were each individually thinking here we had this office and nothing to do

and we aren't going to get ahead because we are not going to have a real job. So the three of us are all individually scheming to find something real to do as soon as possible because the job wasn't going anywhere.

I made my escape and went to the visa office to be sort of a glorified special assistant to Joe Olenick who was essentially the office director for post liaison in field support. I knew virtually nothing about visas because I was totally self-taught and from a post where we issued probably 300-400 a year, so I didn't know much about visas. I certainly didn't know much about post liaison but what I had was energy. But I was in this job and I thought to myself, hmmm, I've got sort of a nothing job in terms of getting ahead and by about four months I pretty well exhausted what I thought I could do with it. So I thought I would take the economic course just to get out of the job I had. I didn't really want to take the economic course but I really wanted something real.

Then I heard that the person who was consul in Dublin, the consul in Dublin had quit. This particular person apparently had a serious drinking problem, but he was well connected in the Foreign Service so the powers that be sent him to Dublin to dry out. Now the fellow who was in Dublin had a drinking problem, I don't even know his name. He had done a particularly outstandingly bad job I'm told and he wanted to be consul general in Rome. Well, they told him he couldn't be consul general in Rome so he said he would quit, bluffing. They took his bluff and they wanted to get rid of him anyway so suddenly there was an unexpected vacancy in Dublin. None of this though did I know at the time I was a minor functionary in a minor part of the bureau of consular affairs.

But then the powers that be, the people who make these decisions picked out a person to replace this person who had been maneuvered into resigning or to retiring - tricked him I think. But this particular person was totally unacceptable to Ambassador Shannon; he said I don't want that person. At this point everybody thought it was going to be good old Sammy, or whatever this person's name was but the ambassador said, "No." A friend phoned from CA/EX and said Dublin is in play. So I called up the person who was doing mid-level assignments for consular officers and said, "I'd like that job." She said, "You have only one chance in 60." I said, "Hey, one chance in 60 is better than no chances at all, put my name down." So then I took some time off, we were fixing the inside of the house we had bought I was doing all the work myself, albeit poorly. A day later she called me and she said, "Now I would say your chances are one in three that you could get the job." I said, "Well one in three is certainly better than one in 60. Persevere." I didn't make any phone calls because I didn't have any leverage. I didn't know anybody to lobby for me anyway. So then she called me back two days later and said, "You're going to Dublin." So I escaped from Washington after 18 months of what would have been a four-year sentence, a four-year exile and went to Dublin to be the head of the consular section in Dublin.

Q: I think this might be a good place to stop.

COLBERT: OK, sure.

Q: Actually we can take this all as it peaks

Q: So we will pick this up in 1978 was it then?

COLBERT: 1978.

Q: And you were off to Dublin to run the consular section? We haven't talked about that at all so we'll talk about the ambassador and what you were doing and how you settled the Northern Irish problem.

COLBERT: Exactly.

Q: Today is the 20th of November 2006. Larry, what year are we at now?

COLBERT: 1978.

Q: 1978.

COLBERT: And I am leaving with my wife and two early elementary school age children to go to Dublin.

Q: In a way Dublin is fine, but in a way it's not fine. Did you feel that going to Dublin is sort of moving yourself out of the main walk?

COLBERT: No I don't think so because I was I think a brand new 02 or a soon to be 02, I forget which. I had never been a section chief before. I was going off to run my own shop, which is what everybody wants to do. I was going to the country of my father's family's birth. I always felt more Irish than Welsh; my mother was of Welsh extraction and my father was Irish. I was going to a historic place, and I went with great enthusiasm. For those people who have not been to the embassy in Dublin it's a giant three or four story doughnut. There is an open atrium in the center that goes all the way up and the offices are on outside rings. The consular section then comprised about four-fifths of the ground floor ring. Years later because of the change in the law and the increased number of immigrants coming because of the so called visa lottery program the consular section was moved down the street to another building which was a shame.

When I arrived indeed we were just on that first floor. I arrived and had barely found where I was supposed to sit when the only other consul who had been there by herself since the departure of my predecessor handed me a signed leave slip and said she was going away for six weeks. So I found myself running this consular section, which had an IV (immigrant visas) section obviously, an NIV (non-immigrant visa) section and ACS (American citizens service) section and an enlarged federal benefit section as well on my own. . In self defense I sort of found myself running from one processing area to another like a chicken literally with its head cut off but I had great FSNs (Foreign Service nationals), and when I got to know my punitive deputy better I quickly realized that I was better off by myself anyway than having this particular lady who caused problems that I

then had to then resolve behind her. She was very rigid with the public, rude even, and she terrified the FSNs, who were I think among the nicest people that I had ever been privileged to work with. So when she left several months later I was not unhappy. Another lady came and this lady had a sense of humor and a nice work ethic and she got along well with people. It made life much more pleasant. Jane Parker was the second lady and she subsequently retired to, I think, to Hilton Head.

My first interesting story of Dublin occurred when I had been there a week or so and I got in the elevator to go upstairs and a distinguished gentleman in a dark suit got in the elevator. I said, "May I help you?" He said, "No." I said, "Well I am Larry Colbert, how do you do. I am the consul." He said, "I am Ambassador Shannon." I had not had the privilege of meeting the man at that point and I had been at post for I don't know six days, seven days, two weeks and I hadn't even seen him.

I subsequently got to know William B. Shannon. I think he was a nice man, his wife Elizabeth equally so. He was very Irish-American, he got the job because he was the first newspaper person to endorse Jimmy Carter for president when Shannon was on the editorial board of the New York Times; His reward was to be ambassador to Dublin. A nice man who really had little or no interest in what I did which is fine. I mentioned earlier that the first lady that I worked with who gave me such heart burn I had been there about...I think she had just left to go on this prolonged vacation when I got this outraged call from the ambassador and he wanted to see me. He was in a terrible state. It turned out that his wife's best friend's daughter had been refused an NIV. Well, you think so what, those things do happen. But this was a very upper class, upper middle class family, and the daughter was an Aer Lingus international stewardess. I mean that's sort of an oxymoron, how can you refuse a stewardess who had been flying on international flights and who is fully employed, obviously something that one can correct but that was my first introduction to the ambassador. He was unhappy, because his wife was unhappy, and everybody knows when ambassador's wives are unhappy the ambassadors are unhappy too.

But no, I got to know him and liked him very much. The first DCM, his name unfortunately does not come to mind, was an absolutely marvelous individual. Unfortunately, I only overlapped with him for a little while. I thought he was just an absolute prince but he had an absolute fear of flying. He also had a taste for the sauce so my last recollection of him was when he was fortifying himself one drink after the other in the Jurys Hotel when we went to see him off, so he could get on the airplane. That said, I think he was just an absolutely superb person and loved by everybody. He was succeeded by another DCM who was competent, a little bit pretentious and so on.

One of the ironies was that all the section chiefs, Bill Kelley who was admin, Kevin McGuire who was econ, a gentleman who I can't remember who was political and I all had Irish backgrounds and we all had Irish names and I think speaking for all of them we went there as Irish-Americans and we left as Americans. That's to say I found many, many people that I liked in Ireland. I liked the country, but I found out that really they

were they and we were we and there were differences and one came away with a perspective that perhaps one lacked when one went.

It was a very pleasant three years; there were lots of things that happened when I was there. Everybody in the world knows about the famous Robin Barrington incident. About a year...

Q: I interviewed Robin.

COLBERT: Robin Barrington?

Q: Yeah, would you explain what it is, was.

COLBERT: Robin was the only USIS officer at post and it was a very small post. I think there were perhaps two FSNs, at most three. Two things were going on. One, the program money that is to say the money for doing things as opposed to the admin money was being cut back and here we had one American and three FSNs running a program which had less program money than perhaps it had before by a significant margin. Second of all, I had mentioned that the ambassador was Irish-American. Well he was so Irish-American that in country team when he said 'we', we didn't know which 'we' we were talking about, whether 'we' were the Irish or 'we' were the Americans. I remember early on in my tour going in the secure conference room and the senior FSN was sitting there. It was different, I had never been to a mission where an FSN was in the secure conference room. We had no post security officer; we had an admin officer who was de facto the RSO. So afterward the meeting, I went over and said, "This is a little different." He said, "That's the way the ambassador wants it." This is a post where the military attachés secretary was Irish so you get...it was a unique post.

Well one of the unique aspects of the post was that the ambassador thought we should use program money for sending Irish performers to the States or helping promote Irish culture rather than the normal thing of promoting American culture. Now one could argue I think whether one needs to do any of that because the Irish and the Americans are so inner linked anyway, but cultural programs are cultural programs, you've got them everywhere. So I think Robin was frustrated. One, that his money was being used inappropriately by the ambassador, not illegally, inappropriately and two, there was less money than there should be. For his Christmas/New Years letter he wrote this very chatty letter about things and he made a few what he thought were funny remarks. He talked about the city was falling down into the Liffey River - meaning it was very poorly maintained and that was true. He said a few other clever things, and one thing he said was that in terms of embassies and foreign affairs Ireland was small potatoes. Well in fact it was small potatoes, but he left a copy or the original copy of his letter in the Xerox machine and sent these Christmas or New Year's letters off. Somebody then provided copies of the letter to several Irish newspapers. Well most of the Irish newspapers had the class to ignore it,-it was private correspondence but The Irish Times, which is sort of pretentious, and heavy and sees itself as sort of The London Times and The New York Times and Le Monde of Dublin published it.

Initially there was a big hue and cry by the Irish but after a day or so they really with their great sense of humor just laughed it off. But the ambassador didn't laugh it off at all because he thought in my view that he thought that Robin was saying that the whole mission was small potatoes and by extension perhaps the ambassador's work was small potatoes. So Robin was asked to leave. This all happened very quickly, because my wife and I were having a large cocktail party. Robin came to the party. There must have been 200 people; we had a big house and this was a big party, a nice sampling of Dublin society, small d, small s, but anyway a nice sampling of the diplomatic community and the movers and shakers were there. Robin came and the ambassador came too. The ambassador was in one-room and Robin was in another, and they sort of passed in the night, never speaking, never acknowledging one another. Wherever one was the other one was not and then Robin was gone the next day. So we entertained him his last night. People were very sympathetic but you make a mistake and you pay for it.

I think my feeling is what happened is one of his FSNs thought her job was going to be abolished or her prestige was going to be lessened, and the FSNs were somewhat at war with him because he was saying well given this little amount of money we really don't need the office or something. So he was got at by an unhappy FSN. I don't know if he sees it the same way as I do but that is how I see it.

*Q: I think I can't remember what he said but he said he described it. Well did you find that this kind of sour you on the ambassador or the people around you?
Because there is such a thing as loyalty up and loyalty down and this must be the case of not much loyalty down.*

COLBERT: I think it was regrettable. In point of fact you really have very little to do with the ambassador on a day-to-day basis and even in a relatively small mission. He did his job; I did my job. I dealt mostly with the DCM. The DCM was funny in a way he was so totally different than the fellow that we initially started off with. He was very taken with his own importance and had lots of mannerisms, which drove other members of the so-called country team crazy.

I remember once he called me up on the phone and he was most agitated because the outgoing cables from my large federal benefits unit, (Social Security, etc....I mean we had all of them miners, black miners, black lung disease, everything because it was Ireland) He was very agitated because the cables going to Baltimore- the cables going to Social Security - were not being written in Standard State Department English; and this was disgraceful he told me, that the quality of the things we were using in these cables was unacceptable In those days it wasn't all on line like now, I mean you had to send a cable and then the cable was transcribed. So I tried to explain to him that that was the language of Baltimore and this was Social Security verbiage/shorthand. No, no he wanted everything written out in real words and full complete sentences, not any of these strange things. So I went down to see the head of the federal benefits unit (FBU), Bernadette Collins who was a direct descendant of Michael Collins, the famous Irish minister of defense during the War of Independence. I said, "Bernadette, we have to..." She said,

“We can’t do that, that is not the way that that’s supposed to be done.” I said, “Yes, I understand that but he wants it done this way.” She said, “Baltimore is not going to like this at all.” I said, “I know, that’s why we are going to do it.” So we then for several days sent cables written out in clear King James’ English though I guess you can’t say Kings English in the Republic of Ireland, but in good Irish prose, only to get this bomb back from Baltimore saying, “What moron is doing this? This is totally contrary to standard, long-standing instructions.” Then we could go back up and show him that perhaps this was not a good idea and he backed out.

That reminds me of another story because you can’t be a section chief without being contacted about a visa not issued of interest to somebody. The same gentleman called me up very agitated that this girl had been denied a visa by the vice consul. So I looked at the case and she was a young woman from a middle class family, so I just issued a visa. So, one more Irish twenty-five year old gets or does not get a visitors visa to the United States from a middle class family, it’s a flip of a coin. So time goes by and I get a visit by DEA (drug enforcement agency) agent based in London. He wants to talk to me confidentially in my office. He said, “You know, could you pull the file on let’s say Bridget Shanahan, I am just making the name up. I did so and looked at the file and asked why it had been issued, explaining she had been arrested as a drug mule in NYC. I said it had been initially refused by a vice consul (we now had a third officer in the section) that there had been a public relations issue, and that I had reviewed the case and overturned the refusal. I did not mention the pressure from the DCM. The agent took a copy of the application and left, not before telling there had been previous indicators of prior criminal activity and that she had been caught by drug sniffing dog. But from my point of view this was really wonderful, the DEA guy went back and the young woman languished in jail presumably somewhere in the States for a while and I went up to see the DCM with this application and said, “You must remember Ms. so and so.” “Oh yes,” he says. “Well,” I said, “unfortunately there has been a slight twist.” And so I told him what happened and you could see that he was turning several shades paler as he sat behind his big desk. But the nice thing was from then on he never ever interfered in another visa case in my entire time there, so I think that was probably on the whole a good thing. You remember these things as you think about it.

If I could talk a bit about the FSNs.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: They were really, really fabulous. They were more colleagues than employees, we did things together, I had total confidence in them as people and I liked their judgment. I mentioned earlier Bernadette Collins who headed FBU and then there was a Carmen Burn, who was the NIV chief, a lovely, lovely lady, very competent who supervised five or six FSNs very well. Then there was a lady named Noel Finnegan who was the ACS FSN chief, there were two passport and citizen persons.

Q: ACS being?

COLBERT: American Citizen Services, I beg your pardon. She took care of the destitutes, the crazies of which we had a number and that sort of thing. They were really, really superb people.

Speaking of ACS cases and one comes to mind, if I may. We often parked them in the rotunda, this open area; if we had a such person we just parked them there while phoned family, authorities. In these days of post 9/11 they probably park them in the parking lot three blocks away.

But this lady had entered the United States through Dublin but then she proceeded into the UK (United Kingdom). There is a common customs barrier. If you are in one you are in the other. So she entered the British Isles from Dublin but then she went on to England. She then took a boat to the Channel Islands where she announced that she was the Queen of the Channel Islands and asked to be so recognized – totally loony tunes, but a nice little old lady. But, since she had entered from Dublin...the deal was she got sent back to where you entered from so the loony toon lady became my problem when the British police turned her over to the Irish police who in turn brought her to me and I had this lady. So we had put her up in a bed-sitter, that's to say we put her up in a little room and got money from the Department to do this with while we tried to repatriate her. She would come in everyday and knit while we waited for authorization to ship her back. I hadn't quite learned that then that I could make a phone call and get the fiscal data and cheat the system, I was still leaning my job. So we essentially played it by the rules probably for the last time. Anyway, in due course this lady who came everyday and knitted got the money to go back to the States and we wished Her Majesty well, took her out to the airport and put her on the Royal flight home and off she went.

In due course we got the nicest letter back from her son who thanked us for handling his mother. He knew she was difficult, he knew that she was problematical and we had handled this thing with compassion. It was a heartwarming letter and it was signed, sincerely so and so, prince heir apparent, so he was as nutty as she was.

There were so many of those cases. Ireland sort of for American tourist brings out the loony tunes. I don't know whether it's a combination of the people coming back to Ireland and being so excited or forgetting to take their meds when they come. We had so many crazies, so many crazies.

I remember one of my most gallant moments was chasing down a young female American who had taken all her clothes off who was running down one of the main boulevards nude. The police would do nothing because under their rules it's OK to be crazy as long as you are not harming yourself or anybody else. For many of the people in the streets this was a nice show, I mean a nice young woman running down the street nude. So I had to chase her down and put a coat on her and put my raincoat on her and get her back to a hotel and ship her back.

We had another person who came over and felt that he had been wronged by Aer Lingus. His suitcase had been misplaced or something at least in his mind. His solution to that

was to rob a bank. He picked the only bank in Dublin that was under active surveillance by armed police; most police in Dublin aren't armed, but they were expecting the IRA to hit this bank. So he picked a bank that was under surveillance by armed police, and when he went in with his gun to rob the bank the bank teller was so irate she hit him with her umbrella and chased him out of the bank. It turned out that he was crazy and had been crazy for years and had been released from institution in Chicago. When his case came to trial, we worked out a deal that they would allow him to go back under medical escort avoiding putting him up on their nickel; he would instead go back and stay on our tax nickel. But he was very persuasive and attractive I guess to the opposite sex. He was sort of a movie star type looking person. We had arranged for a psychiatrist to go back with him and when the psychiatrist got to New York, the HEW (health, education and welfare) people excused the doctor and said that they would take charge, adding that he wasn't needed any more, he could go back to Dublin right away. Then it turned out that somehow this crazy American managed to convince the Immigration and Customs people that he was the sane person and the HEW was the crazy person. So they actually arrested the escort, the HEW (health and human services person) and the crazy man stole a car and got away. That was really wonderful because the psychiatrist was perfectly happy to escort him all the way to the asylum but Health and Human Services knew better and to my knowledge the young man was never seen again - certainly at least he never came back to Dublin on my watch.

Life was like that. I mean we never knew what sort of problems we were going to face. It was a very busy place. I had really good deputies, Jane Parker and then followed by Kevin Herbert who recently retired and perhaps would be a good source to interview. We traveled all around the island as a family, we really enjoyed our three years there, and we lived in a very old Georgian house. When we first arrived we could find nothing, no place to live, and we were staying in Jurys Hotel in a very cramped situation until we on our own found this place.

I made several trips to Northern Ireland; probably in the most foolish or perhaps the most wisest thing I did while I was there I took my family from Dublin up to Belfast during the weekend of the Orange Marchers and we watched...

Q: This is the famous marchers...

COLBERT: The Battle of the Borne.

Q: Orange men get out.

COLBERT: It's medieval; it's very hard to describe but we actually watched the march. We talked to Irish Catholics, we talked to Irish Protestants, and we wandered around the city with small children. It was quite interesting. Whether in retrospect it was smart I don't know. We were young and we wanted to see it.

Q: Prior to going there how Irish did you feel? I mean was this the sort of thing that you would sit around and weep over the Irish cause and that?

COLBERT: No, no, no. I knew that my grandmother was proudly Irish. I knew that on my father's side I was Irish. I obviously rooted as a child for Notre Dame, but I had no e fix on the Irish situation, and in fact sort of came away kind of sympathetic to the British of today in that they had themselves in the situation that they inherited, not unlike perhaps current history and they're trying to keep people from trying to rip each others throats out. No, I thought the Irish were charming, nice people. Obviously doing the job that I was doing I got annoyed occasionally when the people thought they had a God given right to go to my country because they were Irish and Irish had a special relationship with us, hence the rules don't really apply. I am talking about visas obviously.

I remember a member of the Doyle, the parliament, calling me on the phone once because an Irish gentleman had been sent back, I don't know if it was voluntary departure or deportation but he had been living illegally in the States for a number of years He had been sent back, and he wanted a visitors visa to go back to resume his life in America, clearly an impossible situation if we are going to abide by the law and do our jobs. So this man who had applied several times had been refused appropriately each time. Well this member of the parliament who often called me - I mean the prime minister called me more often than he called the ambassador because I had a product, the ambassador just had a mission. He said, "How could you not give this person a visa? He's a good citizen of your country," which you just want to grind the dentine off your teeth because obviously you're talking past one another and you can't take a member of parliament and rip his heart out as much as sometimes you would like to be able to do.

That aspect of it was annoying, the sense of entitlement. I remember this mother superior came in to see me about something, whether it was a visa for her or for a visa for somebody else. For one reason or another, the person didn't qualify. She had to wait maybe 15 or 20 minutes before she could see me because that was the nature of the beast, there were just two of us and lots of people wanting our tender mercies. So when I went to see her she said, "Young man, efficiency is a Christian virtue." It had been a long day and I said, what did I say back to her, something like, I said, "As is patience."

No, all in all it was a very good three years.

Q: Could you just explain what was the visa situation particularly unique to Ireland?

COLBERT: Well, the current boom, which we don't know about now, was because of factories and good economic management and investment Ireland is booming. At that point of time, unemployment was high and a lot of unskilled people fender-benders and worker type people wanted to go to the States and thought really that that was their God given right because they were Irish and Irish are traditionally gone. When Senator Kennedy and others changed the Immigration Act in the '60s, as I recall, and got rid of national origins and the quota system. Prior to that time if you were Irish or Italian there was such a large quota that you could virtually just come in and say I want to go and it was a relatively easy process. When or got rid of that and gave every country an overall

limit which I think when I was there was either 20 or 28 thousand and you had to qualify based upon family or employment it became much more difficult because there weren't that many close relatives who were Irish close enough to petition so there was frustration.. They simply wanted to go; there was high unemployment, and historically they were used to going and yet they couldn't just go. So obviously they used the most old fashioned way of getting there if you are overseas, they would get a visitor's visa and over stay. They had a terrible over stay rate, and if they didn't get a visa then they obviously went to their member of parliament who would call you on the phone or the Bishop or somebody else, so there was great pressure to issue. This is not to say that there were not qualified applicants, there were, but there were a lot of people who weren't qualified who wanted to go. This was one of the reasons why they had a few years later Senator Kennedy and a congressman from...with an Italian background came up with the so called...

Q: Visa Lottery

COLBERT: Yes, so called lottery visa, which was supposed to be crafted so that it only applied to countries who had been negatively affected by the change in law. What they really meant was Italy and Ireland, but in fact they couldn't say that and when they didn't say that then they opened it up to a lot of other people. So it became an albatross, which continues today. It's one of my least favorite subjects.

When I was there there was no lottery visa and there was great pressure. Legal emigration was probably no more than six or seven hundred maybe less than a thousand cases a year. In terms of immigration, having been a CG in Tijuana where we did IVs and a consular officer got a branch chief in Manila and been consul general in Juarez I'm used to numbers like you are from Korea of thousands upon thousands. The IV unit when I was there consisted of just three women and IRs and work-related visas were most of it, that's to say spouses of U.S. citizens, very, very few and some employment based. But many Iris simply couldn't qualify because they didn't have the relatives to petition from who were close enough and that's why they came up with the lottery system.

Q: Did you feel the hand of the Irish-Americans in Congress, not particularly Senator Kennedy but others?

COLBERT: Oh yes, I mean when you refused a visa of interest to a Senator Kennedy or a Tip O'Neil or those folks you heard about it. We tried to be as forth coming as we could consistent with our responsibilities. I mean we would talk to them and when we could issue we did issue but sometimes you simply couldn't.

You bring up a good story. We got a new vice consul; we went from two officers to three, great things. This Irish specialty cook, sort of oxymoron when you think about it, had been voluntarily departed back to Ireland. He had been living and illegally working in Massachusetts, but he no more got back than an approved H petition came. This was before, now of course H-1Bs are not subject to Section 214B but in those days they still were. That is to say, you could refuse this person. He had been living in the States

illegally so the vice consul was very excited and said, "This is awful how can they approve this petition. How can they do this?" He was young so I said, "Well why don't we just call back to Boston and ask to talk to the district director about this?" So we did. This was a different age when you do this sort of thing. So I called the district director who I know and I said, "I've got this vice consul who is really upset that this H1B was approved for this specialty cook who you just sent back on voluntary departure. How can this be?" He said, "Well can I talk to the young man?" "Sure." He said, "Well George," he said, "may I call you George?" "That's fine" George said. "Why don't you just refuse the visa and we'll see what happens?" So George went back and refused the visa and again it was still possible then to do it. That was a Thursday, on Monday we had a call from Kennedy's office and a call from Tip O'Neil's office and we had a call from H (Congressional Relations) and we had a call from somebody else, all of them were calling about this particular case. It was not one that you really could refuse, because everybody in Boston wanted this person back. So there was a bit of that but on the other hand sometimes you could win, sometimes. It seems that all these good folk, including the district director ate regularly in the Irish pub where the applicant worked.

There was a case of a young woman who was living in Boston illegally with a journalist. The journalist was married with two children but he had left his wife and two children to move in with this Irish girl who was younger and quite attractive but she was VD'd (voluntary departure) back, that's probably a bad choice, let's say she got voluntary departure back; she was sent back to Dublin. Then tremendous pressure was beginning to build for us to issue a visa for her to go back. I knew I just knew that we would get a phone call from Tip O'Neil, because these people from the Boston Herald who were all lobbying on behalf of their reporter friend would get to Tip O'Neil. So I decided I would preempt it. I called Tip O'Neil's office and got his number one boy and said, "Look, we have this situation now. This is it. Now really we are in a bind here. We know that she was there illegally but she is also wrecking a home of one of your constituents, so maybe one of your constituents wants her to come back but I don't think the wife and the children want her to come back." I said, "From my point of view, it doesn't look good for me to be a home wrecker and it would probably look even less good for Congressman O'Neil." He said, "Don't you worry about it Larry, don't worry about, we'll cover you do what you have to do." So we did the right thing and we said no. The phone subsequently rang and it was some civil servant moron from H, I mean only you would know what I mean by civil servant, giving me this high and mighty tone about what I had to do. He said, "Congressman O'Neil wants this fixed immediately." I said, "Why don't you give Congressman O'Neil a call? I think he will see my way rather than your way." I never heard from him again. So sometimes you win, sometimes.

Q: How about the IRA (Irish Republican Army)?

COLBERT: That's a good subject. When I was there if you were in the provisional wing of the IRA, if you were Provo and you were going to the States to...

Q: Provo being what within the group?

COLBERT: Well the IRA dates back in various gyrations into the 19th century under various names. In the 20th century the IRA was in the republic those people who did not agree to the founding of the Irish Free State and signing an agreement with the British, which lead to the founding of the state. They didn't agree with the terms and they thought it was a sell out, and they then tried to undo the agreement and the so called Irish Civil War began which lasted and was bloodier, lasted maybe four or five years and was bloodier than the fight against the British which preceded it.

Over time the people who opposed the Irish Free State became the opposition party and got into power under De Valera, and there was in term yet another a splinter group that came into being which continued to be the armed opposition. These people who were opposed to British influence and the terms and their relationships existed in both sides of the border, the six northern counties, four or six I don't remember, the northern counties and the southern counties, which comprise the republic. In both states it was considered a subversive force. There were more IRA people in prison in the Republic of Ireland than there were in Northern Ireland, which was controlled by the British. The Provo's, the Provisional IRA, is a split off from the bigger IRA and it comprises the violent folks. When I was there the Provisional wing of the IRA were considered to be the fellows who were you know shooting the place up and robbing banks and shooting soldiers and killing policemen and so on.

There was the party IRA, which was called Sinn Fein, and then there was the armed group, which was called the IRA. We had lists of names of people who we were not supposed to issue visas too either because they had committed crimes or because they were professional fundraisers and criminals. What would happen would be a person coming in for a visa, and he would either be in our look out system or more likely we would get a tip from the Irish police that he would be coming in, then take down his particulars and send a cable in to report that say Shane McBride, a very famous one, had come in to apply for a visa. He would apply for a visa in the south because if he applied for a visa in the north he would have to go through the British police to get to the consulate and they would probably grab him. So he would come in and we would send in a report saying that he so and so forth and then try to get the visa office in the State Department to agree that we shouldn't issue him a visa because he was going to do fund raising or try to get arms and all that kind of nasty stuff.

Often the State Department blinked. Their track record was so so. They kept wanting a smoking gun. I would go over to the special branch, that's to say the equivalent of the FBI in Phoenix Park because they wouldn't come to see me I would have to go and see them and I would take over this case. "Yes, he is a Provo, he's a killer, he did this, this and this. But you can't quote us; you can't quote me Commissioner Hugh O'Brien." "Why not?" "Well you see if you tell them in Washington that I told you this then I'll get killed." "Why would that be?" "Well, your FBI is just a sieve," he said. "Don't trust the FBI at all, it's full of Irish-Americans, it leaks like a sieve, we don't trust them." So I would have to say "Sources told me this persons is a bad guy." Then they would come back and say, "Well we want the file. We want this." Then I would have to say, "Well it's unavailable." They would show it to me but they wouldn't let me send it back because

they didn't trust the FBI and that was an on-going problem. The FBI as far as the Irish Special Branch it was just hopelessly compromised, too many Irish-Americans who had this romantic idea about the lads. The lads were killers and thugs and they weren't nice people at all in my humble view.

Q: Did you run across oh I don't know, blow hard American, Irish-Americans who would come in? You know I was thinking...

COLBERT: Well there are two kinds of...

Q: Well I've got a touch of Irish in me too and the guys that go into a bar in Boston and how they are going to do this.

COLBERT: More typically you get the newly naturalized American citizens who comes back who comes back as an American citizen who was originally Irish. They were much more of a challenge for me and for my FSNs and particularly for their fellow former citizens in the sense that they wanted to lord it over everybody else. A lot of people came back looking for their roots, we had a hand out; we didn't do the roots thing. But people always wanted to go back and find their relatives and hopefully prove that they had done better.

One case in point comes to mind. I had to do a deposition, that's to say the federal court asked for witnesses to give their testimony before me and it concerned the nephews of an Irish-American. This fellow had gone to Boston, no to Chicago, as a young man and he had made his fortune by having a very successful saloon. He got to be very rich, very rich indeed, and at some point after he became successful he went back to his particular Irish county, shipped his big American car back, this is probably in the '50s or early '60s and quite showed off his wealth and was wined and dined and taken care of by his relatives and then went back to Chicago, made more money and never came back again. But then he died and he left all his money to his nephew Shaun. Unfortunately, he had two siblings who had children named Shaun, Shaun being a very common name. So both branches of this family thought the money was their Shaun's. So I had in my largish office on one side one family branch with one Shaun and another family branch with another Shaun and several lawyers each. This deposition went on forever for the benefit of the district judge in Chicago to decide which Shaun got the money. I remember one of the lawyers took me aside one afternoon after this had gone on interminably and said, "The only people who are going to get the money in the end are us, the lawyers. Now if they had decided to divide the money down the middle and say OK you are going to be the Shaun but you give me half that would have been OK but this thing had been going on for years.

Another case an Irish lawyer friend of mine came in to see me and said would I take a deposition outside the office. I said, "I don't like to do that, don't even like to do depositions, they are too time consuming but for you I will do it." I said, "Where?" He said, "Well I will come and pick you up." So he came and picked me up and he took me to a cloistered convent, really cloistered; women in there were not allowed to talk, and they certainly weren't allowed to go out. So we come in, I shake the hand of the Mother

Superior, who doesn't say much and she takes me over and there is this little window that looks like a teller window with bars, pulls up the blinds and here's this absolutely beautiful, gorgeous, young woman, maybe 25 year's old, exquisite. She was the only surviving heir of a wealthy American relative who had left her \$15 million; this is in 1980s now, say 1980. That's real money \$15 million, and she had been given special dispensation by the Vatican to see me and to speak to me. She showed me her passport; I asked her if she were Sister Bernadette, aka (also known as) whatever. She said, "Yes." She then signed the deposition and guess who she gave the money to? The same people who gave her permission to speak. I went back to my wife that evening and I said, "Dear, I seriously thought about cutting through those bars absconding with her and giving you half." She said, "It would have been a deal."

So life in Dublin was always interesting, always fun. Our children did well in the only integrated school in Dublin. How was it integrated? Well it had boys and girls; virtually all the schools were segregated by sex. It had Catholics, Protestants and Jews, I don't think there were any Arab Muslims, but there certainly were Catholics, Protestants and Jews. Most schools even public schools are segregated by religion there so it was quite unique but it was loosely Episcopal but it was a great school and they did very well there. We had lots of friends, I think three years was about right and that's about all I want to say about Dublin unless you have a question.

Q: You were there at a time when Dublin was still you might say Dublin was not the swingiest city in the European Union, which I think has become now. I wonder if you could comment a bit about what you saw of Irish society, relations between men and women, the classes and then also the role of the church. I mean, your personal...

COLBERT: That's interesting. There's a formality about the Irish that is to say one of my neighbors who was an accountant, chartered accountant as they say, was a gardener and he did his gardening in an old suit jacket and a tie that was how formal he was. A very nice man and I think exceptional from my point of view in that he actually invited us to dinner in his house. The Irish are very warm in a public way, that's to say they greet you warmly, but they don't tend to bring you into their circle. I think they tend to be a bit standoffish. There is a superficiality of their friendship. You really have to know them very, very well to be included. I don't think we had that many Irish friends that we considered to be close friends. We had lots of acquaintances.

They have this from my perspective interesting way of doing their weekends. On Sunday a married couple goes to his parents or her parents on alternate basis, every Sunday. So you go to Mass, then you go to Sunday dinner, heavy lunch whatever it is with one set of in-laws and then the next the other. That's a ritual you just do that. You tend to be friendly with the people that you went to school with and you tend to stay in the same orbit. I think that's true. I think there is a strata there; there is the establishment group, and then the worker bees and they are very conscience of that. I think they are very friendly and very nice, I don't know that they open up as much as some other countries that I've been in.

Q: What about the role of women while you were there? Did you see that changing or how accepting?

COLBERT: Women were in the professions, women were doctors, and women were lawyers. I remember when I was there there was one woman who was a senator and she had a twin. The lady who was a senator sort of had the press and the publicity, the one who associates here - on a somewhat reduced level – that I would say Hilary Clinton has that's to say everybody knew this lady because she was the woman senator, she was the woman politician. She had a twin sister. We knew the twin sister very well; she and her husband were social friends of ours; they were both maybe in business or something. They weren't prominent, they were nice people but they weren't famous or anything. I remember once we went to the Abbey Theater, which is one of the more famous theaters there. We came in and sat down. I think probably since I was the American consul people knew my face. This lady as I said had clearly seen me before or maybe we had met at a reception or something. She said, "How do you do?" or "Aren't you Larry Colbert?" I said, "Yes and aren't you the sister of ..." and I mentioned her less famous sister. That's to say it would be like meeting Marilyn Monroe and saying to Marilyn Monroe aren't you Joan Monroe's sister? I didn't do it in a catty sort of way since I knew the sister. So I said, "Aren't you the sister of so and so?" rather than saying, "Aren't you the famous, wonderful, grand, senator, so and so?" She sort of looked at me for a minute and smiled and said, "Yes." That was all and I didn't acknowledge her as being senator so and so. The next day the phone rang and her sister called me up and said, "You're my friend for life." It was just one of those things that happened.

I think they are very nice people but as I said earlier I went there as an Irish-American and I left there as an American.

Q: What about, well I had a friend, Dean Azikies, I don't know if you ever knew him but...

COLBERT: I met him I think.

Q: He was a consular officer but Dean came from a great family and he said when we were in Greece he said he used to get in the habit of pouring a little wine on the ground as an offering to the Gods that his parents had gotten the hell out of the Peloponnesus and had gotten out to southern California.

COLBERT: I don't know what the ethnic economic origins of my parents on my fathers side were since my grandfather on my father's side was a coalminer I have to assume that his predecessors weren't well off or he wouldn't have been working as a coalminer. So I have to think that we were blessed in the sense that we did end up in Ohio and my father worked his way through college and allowed me to end up where I did.

Q: What about the church?

COLBERT: The Irish are very strict Catholics, those that were Catholic, as opposed to those that were Protestant. The church plays a very big role. When I was there social policies were about where ours were in the 1940s or maybe the 1950s in terms of issues like birth control and all that.

Birth control was illegal up until a group of women found a young woman who had given birth several times out of wedlock who was not too sane, maybe just a little bit weak in the head. They sent her up to Belfast in Northern Ireland and put some birth control packets on her and put her on the train back down and alerted the police. The police had to arrest this poor woman who was carrying condoms in her purse. It became a big scandal because they were pointing out the ludicrousness of the law. I think the church had a stranglehold on central policy...I'll quote my father on this issue. My father was a very devoted Catholic but when he didn't like what the Pope had to say he said, "He a no play the game, no make the rules."

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: And I think the Irish may have played a good game in terms of pretending to follow the priest but they pretty much went their own way when they had to.

Q: Did they interfere at all with your operation or I mean did the priest come in. I used to get this in Yugoslavia. I would get the Orthodox priest would come in to vouch and as soon as the priest came in you knew it was a bad case.

COLBERT: I think that an Irish priest would have just about said anything to get me to issue a visa, sure. But there was this sense of entitlement and obligation that's to say if poor Shaun needed to go to America to wait on tables in Boston, why are you standing in his way? He's Irish, don't you understand? He's Irish. I think that same sense of entitlement applies to a poor vice consul in Tel Aviv has to try to say no to somebody.

Q: Yeah. Well then you left there in 1980 was it?

COLBERT: '78, I must have left in '81.

Q: In '81.

COLBERT: Then I went to Manila.

Q: So this was quite a contrast?

COLBERT: I think the biggest change was dealing with the FSNs. I went from people who saw themselves and held themselves and act as if they were your equals. I mean obviously you were the boss but they weren't obsequious, not timid whereas in Manila everything is yes sir and Mme. and so on.

Q: Did you find while you were in Dublin because obviously a local employee, a Foreign Service National is a best person to judge if somebody is going to come back and all.

COLBERT: Much better judges than we ever were.

Q: What?

COLBERT: Much better judges than we ever were. They would have been much tougher...

Q: The point is they have been dealing with this for a long time. They also know the society and...

COLBERT: They know the accents, the mannerisms, they know everything.

Q: They can look at somebody and see where they are coming from. Did you find that this was, that they shared this knowledge?

COLBERT: Oh sure, I think if anything they thought that we were too naïve, too accepting, particularly me. I think had they been allowed to make the yes and no decision on their own we would have been better off. I think one of the great tragedies of post 9/11 era is that we have taken so much responsibility away from people who were in a good position to do good work for us. Obviously there are countries where trust is less but we didn't make any qualitative decisions we just sort of threw the baby out with the wash. We took away influence, we took away process and we lost in my view. But certainly no they were excellent.

Now I would say to go to Manila there the pressures are immense, corruption is endemic and certainly FSNs get involved in that so you have to be more careful. That said the ones that were honest; the ones that were dedicated had the same good judgment that I was talking about in Dublin.

Q: You were in Manila from when to when?

COLBERT: From '81 to '84.

Q: What was your job?

COLBERT: My first job I was the American Services branch chief. It was a very big job. I had four or five officers, two mid-level and two vice consuls that rotated. I had probably around 20-25 FSNs, a very, very big passport and citizenship unit. We had at that time, well there are lots of Americans of Philippine extraction who live there, there are a lot of Americans, who had decided to live there - retired military and so on. But the biggest single part of the workload was sort of the jetsam of our military presence.

At that time we had a big naval base in Subic and we had a big air force base at Clark. Both of these facilities date from well from the Spanish American era, they have always been bases at the two locations. Clark was a cavalry post long before it became an air base...

Q: This is Tape 4, Side 1, of Larry Colbert.

COLBERT: As I was saying, there was a big military presence and then the WESTPAC, the Western Pacific Fleet, was based from Subic Bay so you had a big fleet as well, carrier flotilla. These young men were young men and so consequently they liked young women and young women often became pregnant. So we had lots of babies to deal with. I think we had two categories: conceived-out born-out and conceived-out born-in. We had them by the score.

When I took over the job I inherited a mess that I didn't know about. We were very careful we being the post, about preventing fraudulent documentation of U.S. citizenship and preventing fraudulent IV, immigrant visa, petitions and preventing fraudulent issues of immigrant visas for immediate relatives. You say why am I talking about three things at the same time? They were all tied together and I came to discover in a short period of time that we had perhaps four, perhaps five hundred cases of pending reports of birth, which had never been finished, just pending. They were cases where the mother and the child were still in the Philippines and the punitive father was back in the States; there were cases when the mother and the husband were in the States and the child was still here; and indeed there were cases when the child had been documented but the mother had not been processed to immigrate

So I, as the American services chief, only dealt with the citizen/baby cases. To my way of thinking this was totally wrong. You can't have a pending report of birth case for two, three, four, five years, either the kid is or isn't. If he is, give him a birth certificate, give him a passport and let him go to the States with his father and hopefully with his mother. If he isn't, make that decision and make the father do an IV petition for the child and he (the child) can as a stepchild or as an adopted child or whatever and get him and his mother to the States. One never questioned whether this was the mother, the question was whether this was the father. It's hard to believe, we had this room and I just spread all these cases on the floor out and I got one vice consul to assist me in one afternoon. I said, "Now we're going to approve or disapprove all of these cases in the next three weeks." He thought I was crazy. I said, "No, we are going to do it. We are going to take the ones that seem to be most approvable and deal with them and then we are going to work our way back. We are going to clean this entire backlog out because these people have been waiting forever, this is inhuman." "Well, we can't do this case because we want to go to some Samar to see if Mrs. Smith had a previous Philippine husband before she married Mr. Smith in which case this may not be valid, blah, blah, blah." "Well why haven't we gone to Samar?" "Well we can't go to Samar because the Communists control it." "How long have the Communists been there?" "Well, six years." "So, and this case has been pending four years?" "We are waiting for the Communists to leave." "Huh?" This is sort of mindless double think. "Well here's the case we have now where the IV petition was

approved for the mother, the immigrant visa petition was issued for the mother but the child was left behind.” “Well, we’re not certain that the father is really the father, it could have been this other GI.” I see, “Well, the mothers in the States, the father’s in the States and she had the child, right? He was in the Philippines at the time the child was conceived?” “Yes.” “So let’s just assume if they say that it’s their child and it came out of her body it is their child. What do you think?” “Ahhhhhh.” So in the end, kicking and screaming I think probably one of the best things I did in my entire Foreign Service, something that probably nobody ever noticed except for some families was that we got rid of the backlog.

We approved most of them. What you are really talking about in essence is whether this child goes as a stepchild on an IV or goes on a passport. But if this is her child and she is married to this GI the child should be with her. So we said we are either going to approve them this way or then we march down and sometimes we find case where we had approved the passport for the child, in essence recognizing the marriage, but the immigration service had not recognized the marriage so they did not approve the petition. Sometimes they had done the petition, we had done the passport but the IV section had not done the IV. So I set upon myself to rectify this and made some enemies in the process particularly the IV chief who was a bit of a twit but we got it done, and I was very proud of that. It seemed to me to be the humane thing to do.

Q: This is, of course, what consular work is about. You got these Senate regulations which makes sense...the main thing is what does logic say?

COLBERT: Well the logic...is this her child? Is there any doubt about that and so on? I’m losing a lot in the translation because it was complex and there were a lot of cases. “Well you know there is one-week difference here, well maybe he wasn’t at the time of conception.” I said, “We are arguing about one week?”

Ah, case in point, this is classic. I had a passport section chief at this time who had been sent from visas to passports before my arrival because they felt that she was much too influential able by the people who liked to influence her. So they moved her from visas to passports. So I inherited her. Very quickly I found out that these determinations of citizenship that she was doing on these military cases were all over the place. I wasn’t even seeing them because they were going straight in. When I started seeing them I said, “This is awful.” So I go down to see my boss Vernon McAninch and I said, “We have a problem with X, she is not really doing good work. In fact I think that although she is African-American herself that she is treating African-Americans unfairly, military and she is treating a lot of people unfairly.” He didn’t want to hear it, didn’t want to deal with it because this particular person had come into the Service laterally. She had as I say in Spanish “Enchufe” (political connections) back in Washington; he simply didn’t want to deal with it, I couldn’t get his attention. Very frustrating. So I was in a situation that I had to watch things I shouldn’t be watching constantly.

One day, I am sitting at my desk and this man who probably weighed soaking wet about 145 pounds, maybe less, came dashing past my Philippine secretary into my office and

says to me, "So I can't get it up, huh? What do you know about that?" I look up and he said, "How dare you say that I can't get it up." I'm thinking, "What is this?" It turned out that this guy was a veteran of the Second World War who had gone into a restaurant in New York City and had a really nice meal and then asked to see the cook because he thought that food must have been cooked by a Philippina and met this Philippina, who was much younger than he, and married her and they had a child. Then he retired and they came to the Philippines. In due course a second child was born. He came in to document this child, and this lady that I mentioned had told him that he was too old to father a child and he was not capable of fathering...this was not his child. Well, when you think about it he was up there in years, but on the other hand, they already had one child, no question about that. They had been married for a while and this was the second child, the first child was documented. This would be for most of us a ground ball to shortstop and Jeter would have just scooped it up and thrown it to first base, but she had sent him away saying she wasn't going to do this. So, I thought to myself, "Well Mr. Smith, I said, I can fix your problem with a signature, not a problem and give you my sincere apologies. But you see, you are part of a broader problem I'm having now." I said, "The lady you complained about I don't control her; I was given her, I got her, she is in that job and she is doing to other people what she did to you." I said, "Now, if you could forget that you saw me and see that long hall way down there and go down that long hall way. At the end of that hallway is my boss the consul general so if you could work up another head of steam and say to him what you said to me, maybe we could solve this problem for everybody else." My Philippine secretary is looking at me because Vernon McAninch is a pretty wild person and I'd only really started working for this larger than life person who we can talk about more. But this guy is sharp, he picks up on this and he said, "You want me to tell him what I told you?" I said, "With as much drama as you can make." He is gone. His secretary is named Carol something or other and she is very attractive, thirtyish, American, well-put together blond. So he just bursts right past her I love these days before 9/11. And so he goes into Vernon McAninch and says the same drill but he adds, he said, "I'll tell you what Mr. consul general." He says, "Bring that blond bimbo in and put her on the couch. I'll show you what I can do." Of course, the guy is 70 years old and she tells me about it because she finds it very funny and totally McAninch is totally non-plussed, he didn't know what to say. This man is right in his face shouting at him. So maybe an hour or so Vernon McAninch, all 275, 250 pounds of him comes down with his big stomach, walks in my office and says, "Larry, I think we may have a problem in your citizenship unit and we have to manage to transfer the lady in charge someplace else. But I heard the whole thing that took place in the CG's office, because Carol came back later and told me that she was out there just laughing like crazy because this guy was really in the boss's face and telling him what for.

But the American citizenship service thing was interesting. There were lots of interesting cases. One case comes to mind. I got a phone call that Ambassador Armacost was really agitated because he had gotten this very strong Congressional letter on a consular issue some how it had gotten to him directly, how we let that happen I don't know, Congressionals on consular issues should never go directly to ambassadors because they don't know how to deal with them and I think you will probably agree. But this was about an American who disappeared in Mindanao. This Senator was saying not enough

had been done and on and on and on. McAninch calls me and says, "What about this?" I'd only been there maybe a year, I'd never heard of this case so I write down the name and go back to my protection people and they say, "Oh, that case." (Blowing sound.)

Q: Blowing off the dust off the file.

COLBERT: The dust off the file, yeah. The person had disappeared something like six years ago, six years before. He had gone off on his own from the States and wandered around Japan for a while and then went to Mindanao where there is always, and at that time in particular, was a struggle between the Muslims and the Christians - it is Indian country, and he had disappeared. Well he didn't check in with the embassy, we didn't even know he was in the country until his family asked us to look for him. Well, five years or six years ago we had tried to find him and couldn't find him.

Well in the meantime apparently over time a head of steam built up and this Senator wanted us to do something. So the Ambassador being new in his job as ambassador wanted something done. I go to the meeting in the bubble and everybody is scratching their head or other parts trying to decide what to do. I'm just a fly on the wall; I'm only the branch chief. So they go around the room, around the room everybody was saying this was very serious because he's a very important Senator, we had to do something. I said, "May I make a suggestion?" There was a sort of who asked you to speak sort of look. I said, "Why don't you send me to find him?" They said, "Send him to find him?" I said, "Sure, you send me, I look, you report that I am looking, I come back." I said, "You want to do something? Send me." OK. So they agree and so we call up the NBI, the Philippine version of the FBI, the National Bureau of Investigation. NBI, bring me over to their office and they pull out their file, a little thin file on this disappearance which occurred God knows how many years before, blow the dust off, we look at it. Then the next day an NBI agent and I fly down to Mindanao to Zambawanga where we were met by two more people with an armed escort and we go to their headquarters, look at their file, we drive around the city looking for the man for four or five hours and then we come back and they say now, it is time for lunch. We go to lunch, have a nice lunch and go back to headquarters and they say, "Well, our view is he was either killed by insurgents, Muslim insurgents, he was killed by accident by us, that is to say the government forces, or he was eaten by a crocodile. Our preferred version after study they tell me was that we think he was probably wandering around and got eaten by a crocodile but we have no trace of him." I can say that I did look for him. So I came back and I wrote up my report and said I had gone down and looked at all the files and we had looked in the city of about two million people - "my two to three-hour search was extensive." That the police reported that it was either A, B or C and in their professional view was it was C, which we put in the letter to the Senator which was the last thing the Senator wanted to report to his constituents that is "your son was likely eaten by a crocodile." So then it was all done. To think that you are going to find a person who disappeared for six years in the jungles in Mindanao is insane but hey, I was very proud of the fact that I had found a solution to that problem.

Q: Well then how did you find...you know the Philippines is ripe with corruption? American Services there are a lot of things we do including...did you have federal benefits under you?

COLBERT: No, that's the only country in the world where there is a federal benefits office from Baltimore and a veteran's benefits office from...no, no we didn't do that. There was passport fraud; surely, people would pretend to be citizens when they weren't, that was a problem. We had a lot of baby fraud, people coming in saying this was their baby trying to circumvent the immigrant visa process either because they didn't want to take the time or they could qualify or some reason.

One particular case I remember very well a woman came in and she had given birth in one of the other islands, not Luzon the big island, where I was, but another island. She was a professional woman probably in her early forties this was her first child. She had flown to the States; she told us that she just happened to be there on business when she was nine months pregnant that she was delivered by a mid-wife with no doctor present. The child was the color of caramel and she was the color of ivory. Now there is just a little bit of reason there to be dubious, no? But she was very insistent this was her child so we said, "Well, if you will go to the panel physician and let him examine you to verify that you have given birth then we will talk, or if you would like to nurse the child in the presence of one of my female staff then we will consider that. But, barring that it is not on." Well you will get the calls from the Senators and Congressmen saying, "Why are you being like this?" But I said, "Madame, this is really not on. Now, if you want to acknowledge that you have adopted this child we can take you down to immigration service and they can start the process and you can probably arrange to take the child back with you in a month or so if you want to prepare three weeks, whatever it is going to take. But no, we are not going to just passport this child." You just can't, I mean it's clearly fraud so we did have cases like that.

There was a lot of fraud. Philippine's are hard-working, nice warm people but they are also determined to get what they want to get by whatever means are necessary. For me fraud was not as much of a problem on the ACS side. I only did that for a year and I thought that when I had finished my year the operation was working fairly well. I was happy with it, we had redone this and redone that and we had changed things. I am sure that probably I was conned sometimes. I probably made some judgments that were probably wrong you can't right all the time in this business...it's like being a surgeon, you are going to make mistakes. But I don't think the fraud was as omnipresent as it is on the other side, the visa side.

Q: What happened to you did you move?

COLBERT: Aw, that is what I am coming to. I was one year into the job and Vernon McAninch called me and said, "I want you to be the NIV (non-immigrant visa) chief." I said, "I don't really want to be the NIV chief; I'm happy where I am". He let it slide. Then several months later he had promised David Lyon that David Lyon could go from NIVs to IVs but there was a new IV chief coming in and had been assigned to IVs.

Everybody wanted to be the IV chief because it was a 01 job and the others were 02 jobs. I was perfectly happy to stay as the ACS chief, because I didn't want the grief that goes with being the NIV chief. But he found himself in a bind so he got the IV chief designate to agree to be NIV chief for a period of time and then get the IV job so he had to move David somewhere else. So David had to be ACS chief and I had to move.

David said to me once being the NIV chief in Manila is like having a migraine all day long and that's probably true. It is an immense factory, and the refusal rate is probably six-five, seventy-five percent. One friend of mine; Ed Wilkinson once said that, "Probably in most cases you can flip a coin and give a visa to every other person and you'd probably come out about right in terms of what you're doing." Certainly there are qualified applicants who are going here for legitimate reasons and coming back but there are a hell of a lot more who just want to get here. There is tremendous pressure on you, tremendous pressure from every direction, from the political section, from the station chief, from the DCM, from the ambassador from the DAO. When AID stopped giving out money in the Philippines the only thing we had left to give away was visas I think so everybody thought that their way to get what they wanted was to press you to issue visas. So there is a lot of that. There is tremendous fraud, more fraud than you can imagine. There are people who rent watches, they rent clothes, you get professional actors, and you get substitutions.

Our best story is this person who applied many, many times for a visa and was refused each time. These are pre machine-readable fees so you could apply as often as you like, there was no charge, just your time. This person applied many, many times and he was refused appropriately every time. Finally in pure disgust he said, "Mr. vice consul, I bring you more documents each time I come here " He asked, "What would it take, what do I need to get a visa from this place?" The vice consul said, "From you a letter from Jesus Christ." The next day he is back and he's got a letter from Jesus Christ co-signed by God. Didn't get the visa but no we asked for it and we got it.

Talk about fraud. Every immigrant needs to have a form from the police department saying that he is not a criminal, not a felon. There are zillions of felons in the Philippines, their prisons are full of them, walk on the street and you will probably be relieved of your valuables by one of them. There are all kinds of violence so there are criminals. But, every single person who ever brought in a police certified from the Philippine Bureau of Investigation had a clean police record. Why is that? Well, probably for the same reason that Philippine policemen have to get kids through college and put food on the table. We were just giving them a profit center. I don't know whether there was a greater price for a murderer than there was for a kidnapper but I never saw one so I don't know. No, fraud was horrendous.

Pressures were really, really awful. I really, really, really...well I will give you a case in point. I'm in the job perhaps a week and the phone rings and it is the defense attaché an Air Force colonel. "Are you the new NIV chief?" "Yes." "Well there's been some mistake." "What's that?" "Well I sent some visa referrals over and they came back marked PI, what does that mean, PI?" I said, "That means personal interview required."

He said, "Oh, you can't do that." I said, "I beg your pardon?" He said, "You can't do that." I said, "Number one, I didn't do that, the vice consul did that and number two we can do that. That mean these people have to come in and be interviewed." He said, "You don't understand, I am the defense attaché." I said, "Yes, and?" He said, "Well, I had an agreement with your predecessor, everything I send over would be issued without question." I said, "Well, I find that hard to believe but I'm not going to question your word but he is gone and I am here. They have to come in." He said, "Well, I will be calling your boss about that." I said, "More power to you." I'm thinking to myself, now if that's the way it is then I am out of here because I don't want to leave here in handcuffs. So I go in and tell the consul general the conversation. I'm no more there than the phone rings and it's this good colonel on the phone and he said, "Yes, yes, well colonel," he said, "I have this agreement with General Smith at Clark Air Force Base, I don't tell him when to fly his F-16s and," he says, "no piss ass colonel is going to tell my staff when to issue visas. Are we clear on that?" That was when I liked working for the man.

There were other times I have to admit when I didn't like working for the man because those that he could issue easily he issued and those that he couldn't issue he would bring to me. I dreaded it when I would see the mayor of Manila come with his entourage of people knowing that it was visas, visas and more visas. Visas all the time. I don't think I ever knowingly issued a visa that I shouldn't have in those circumstances but it certainly was really draining and very hard work.

In some respect and this sounds like heresy the hardest part of being the NIV chief was the overturns. That's to say issuing the ones that had been denied because you've got eight, ten vice consuls who are lied at constantly or given false documents constantly who are really on the firing line and you are well removed from the firing line. It is such a big place that there is not only an NIV branch chief there is a deputy NIV branch chief and then there are people between you and the vice consular. It is a very big factory. So when it finally gets to you it's gotten to you because somebody has made a fuss and you have to go over it in some detail.

There was one case I remember in particular. This woman had been refused innumerable times, innumerable times. Finally, the director of the Philippine FBI called me personally on the phone. Now this was a person I have to take a phone call from, it would be like J. Edgar Hoover calling you on the phone. You can't ignore him and if you did ignore him you are going to get whacked on from above anyway, you've got to take the call. So he is calling me about this case so I pull the file. It is thick, God knows how many refused applications but I look at it and I really don't understand. Here is a woman who is middle class, a wife with two or three kids, husband has a good job, and she knows the director of the Philippine FBI. What is it, what is going on here? But I know if I talk to her and I over turn this refusal I'm going to get a lot of grief from my subordinates who hate it when you over turn an issue on them. So in she comes, she is a nice lady and obviously middle-class, well dressed, well spoken and she wants to go to California to see a relative and do some other thing she wants. So I said, "Well how long do you propose to say?" She said, "Maybe three weeks, not any longer than three weeks." I said, "Well look, if I issue this visa to you will you come back here and see me and show me you are back?"

She said, "Sure." I said, "We will pick a date." So we picked a date, a bit of a copout I agree but I couldn't understand why we hadn't issued it to begin with and I was getting a lot of flack so I said OK, I will play God and issue the visa. So I issue it and oh, the flack I get from my staff, I'm cutting their legs off, I'm not being supportive, all that grief that you get from the vice consul's when you overturn their refusal, one of the reasons I wished I was still in ACS. So two weeks later the woman is back and comes in to see me. I say, "You're back?" She said, "You know, I missed my children so..." She said, "You have a pretty country and nice people but," she said, "I missed my husband, I missed my friends." She said, "I spent more money on phone calls back home than I spent on the airline ticket." So I mean there are those cases.

Q: Did you find that you had a...I think one of the most difficult things would be to get your troops, I'm thinking the vice consuls up and at them and not getting so jaundiced and all and almost acting as a psychiatrist.

COLBERT: It was a mind-numbing job. They had to do 120 interviews a day. I would image that probably 80 percent of the people were lying to them. We have the saying if a person gave you an income tax return that showed that you earned money enough to qualify it was probably fraudulent and they didn't qualify for a visa. If they gave you an income tax statement that they didn't earn enough money it was probably fraudulent meaning they earned a lot more and didn't pay any taxes and they should get a visa. I mean, it is sort of strange there but nobody in the Philippines who had anything paid any income tax, they all provide false returns. So there was no such thing as a true return. If it showed low income it meant it was fraudulent and if it showed high income it meant it was fraudulent. So, no it was very hard to get them geared up. I think what you could do is write them good reviews, what you could do is get them a break to do something else, what you could do is find reasons to get them away from doing that and be supportive when you could, sometimes you couldn't. I think for me it was a learning process. I think probably I was a better supervisor having done that than I was before.

Q: I'm sure you were it's the fire in the furnace.

COLBERT: Basically that is it; I think working for Vernon McAninch was an education in a positive sense, and an education in a negative sense. I think he crossed the line not for money but I think he crossed the line for favors, I think he crossed the line...I think he stayed in the Philippines too long. In terms of organization and getting things done he was a genius. He basically saw what you were capable of doing and put you in a position to make the thing work. I admired the man and disliked the man. I thought he was incredibly insecure, you probably don't know, he started off as a guard, he was in the army at near the end of the Second World War in Rome, and he became a guard in Rome. Then he became a file clerk, literally a file clerk when we had Americans doing that sort of manual stuff, got a degree in Michigan while working at the vice consul or even as a file clerk I don't know in one of those mini-consulates we used to have along the border. From very modest beginnings with a community college education essentially became a minister counselor. But I think he had deep insecurities and you had to be very careful around him because you didn't want to touch on those insecurities.

A friend of mine and I used to go to lunch maybe once a week or once every other week in the Hilton dining room. There was a Hilton Hotel maybe four blocks, three blocks from the embassy; it was a way to get away. We would go over there and have a light lunch in a nice environment, everything being inexpensive in the Philippines you could afford to do that. I think one of the attractions was that the line stewardess was one of the most attractive woman I had ever seen in my life, nothing ever untoward ever happened or we wanted to happen but having been served by this lovely young Philippine who knew us by name and knowing the manager of the hotel would come over it was nice. I got to know the manager of the hotel, he was British and he gave me a name plaque, Table Reserved Especially for Larry Colbert. So whenever I came there he put this down on my table. That was a small thing, we are talking I don't know five bucks, this was the Philippines everything was cheap, but it was nice. Whenever I was going there my secretary would call and so Ed and I or Dick and I whatever would just go over there and we'd have our little nameplates on it and we'd eat. No visa applicants ate there so we would be alone for an hour or 45 minutes or whatever.

One day I am there with one of my friends, one of my fellow "consular managers" and Vernon McAninch comes in with his entourage and he is there with the movers and shakers, of course, the big cheeses, the people who have lots of money. He comes over to our table and he sees this thing with Table Reserved For Larry Colbert. He was struck, "Why do you have this? Why don't I have one of these? I'm the consul general, you're just a...why do you have this?" I said, "Tom, the manager of the company, would be happy to give you one." "But he gave you one, you didn't have to ask." I'm thinking this is crazy this is juvenile. So I take the general manager aside and say, "Look, if you want to massage this mans feelings, give him one." So he went back several weeks later and there was a Reserved for the Consul General Vernon D. McAninch, Jr. To me it was sort of silly because it meant nothing. The only reason I got it was because I occasionally ate there and they liked me. But I wasn't hobnobbing with these multi-millionaires who did so.

This brings me to another case in point, the famous video. You don't know about the famous video?

Q: Is this the one in diapers?

COLBERT: No, no diapers.

Q: I mean, the one with the baby?

COLBERT: Shorts. When I was still in ACS a sister-in-law or brother-in-law of Marcos came in to the ACS unit, brought in by the political section or by some section. The son was going to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and could I arrange for a referral so the kid didn't have to stand in line. Well, the father was the most famous architect in the Philippines, the son's going to MIT, they are richer than Cristos, this is a no-brainer, this is not a problem. Now, of course now, post 9/11 you probably couldn't

do that but in those days you could, and so I did a referral, no big deal, you get accepted to MIT it tells you something anyway. So the kid didn't have to be interviewed, big deal. I thought nothing of it. That afternoon this giant cake appears. I mean I'm talking maybe four-foot square cake several layers high, this is to me to thank me for doing this. I'm thinking do I need this? You can't send back a cake, you can't, but we do have ravenous FSNs; we had probably 70 FSNs working there so we just took the cake in. And I scribbled off a little note thank you for the cake the staff really enjoyed it. I thought that was done.

So then I go home and my wife says, "What the devil are we going to do with this?" There in the middle of the living room is 110 lbs of cane sugar in a bag. You think sugar? Why sugar? Well, one of Marcos' cronies had gotten control of the sugar market and exported all the sugar, so sugar was not to be had in the Philippines. The country was producer of sugar and it was gone. So sugar was in great demand, and now I had 110 lbs of sugar which I didn't want, a strange gift wouldn't you say? What to do with the sugar? There was a Vietnamese refugee camp so I called the person who ran refugee service for AID and said, "I have 110 lbs of sugar for you." "Ah, really?" I mean there was no sugar, absolutely none. So they took the sugar away and I wrote a note back to Mrs. whatever her name was and thanked her very much for her donation. I didn't know that she knew that I was collecting sugar for the Vietnamese refugees but I appreciate very much her donation. Those sorts of things are real traps for you and you have to watch them, I don't know.

Q: You were talking about the video?

COLBERT: Oh, video. Thank you for bringing me back to the as the French say "retournons à nos moutons" (sic), or get back on subject! The next thing Mrs. Locsin (that was her name I now recall) did for me cake, sugar notwithstanding was she called me up, no she came in to see me and she said she had put me on the Malacañang guest list. Malacañang is the presidential palace in the Philippines and she had put me on the guest list. I said, "Mrs. Locsin, I'd like another favor." Now she is thinking, "Ah, he really is corrupt he's going to ask for money now." I said, "I'd like you to take me off the guest list." She said, "Don't you like the Marcos'?" Actually I didn't but I wasn't going to say so. I said, "Actually no, it's not an issues of like or dislike, I have to run this section here and I have to come to work every morning at 8:00 and I work until 5 o'clock and I am very tired. The parties in the Malacañang, if you get invited to them, you have to go, it's protocol and the parties don't start until 11 or 12 o'clock at night and they are not over until Mrs. Marcos leaves sometimes at 3:00 in the morning." I said, "And they are often several nights a week. My wife and I have small children, I am not a party person so I don't want to be on the guest list." "Oh." So she took me off. I never got invited. I was never in Malacañang in my entire life. When Marcos fell many of my distinguished colleagues in other branches of the government including my late boss Mr. McAninch were seen dancing with Mrs. Marcos and partying and making general, well having generally a good time, I will edit myself here. I avoided that fate and was very happy of it.

Q: I remember being of the consul profession myself and McAninch was known as one of the big wheelers and dealers but also as you say really a distinguished manager. But he was certainly tainted rather badly by the Philippines, as was another later consul general.

COLBERT: Actually several.

Q: Several, I mean because of this...did you feel like you were walking on eggs or were you able to...or were you talking about being tainted by the odor of money?

COLBERT: Well, it is very, very hard. I think I left there with no taint, I certainly hope so, I was never investigated, never had any reason to be investigated but certainly there is tremendous pressure on you. I think the hard thing is you can go one way, which is react to all this adoration, accept all these favors and obviously there is no free lunch. You can go that direction. You can go the other direction and just say I'm going to stay in my office, I'm going to say no to everybody, everything is rigid and I'm not going to look at anything. Neither one really works because if you are in that job you have to available – out there. You've got to make sometimes decisions, which are difficult, which at times make your vice consuls angry because you think they are wrong, which at times make your upper level bosses angry because they think they are right. Despite the pressures, you have to do what you believe is right. What is the best of a bad sort of solution? I feel sympathy for the people running this Iraq policy; they said there are no good answers. I think sometimes when you are NIV chief in a high fraud post there are some decisions that...but I think the key is not doing anything because of other considerations which benefit you. I mean sometimes you have to make a decision, which makes you uncomfortable, but as long as you are doing it for reasons which are not personally benefiting you, if that makes any sense to you, and it's hard. God only knows when David Lyon said it was like having a migraine all the time it is true. You can't go anywhere without being accosted.

My last week or so in the Philippines people were coming out of the woodwork to get their last visa renewal, or get their last problem to my...all the influential people were trying to get at me. Now these are not the people off the street, they can't get to me but these are all the movers and shakers. I mean people were coming to my house and so we had about two weeks to go and our children had been sent off early to stay with their aunt in California. So I am lamenting this problem to the general manger of the Hilton, my friend, he said, "Come stay with us for a week." He said, "Just come, I will comp you a room and you just hide." So my wife and I tell the maid who lives in we are gone. "Where are you going?" "You don't know. We'll come back to get our suitcase. We are out of here." I don't tell the consul general where I am, I don't tell my secretary, we just go to the Hilton. So we stay in the Hilton three or four nights, and the general manager of the Sheraton calls me up who also is my friend. He says, "So what's wrong with the Sheraton that you're staying in the Hilton?" I said, "Well, we had to get away from all these people, I wasn't getting any rest, my wife was being driven crazy people coming to our house." He said, "Well, I talked to Bill and he agreed that you can stay with us for the last three days. So I am sending a car over for you now and you are coming to the

Sheraton.” So I tell my wife, “We are moving to the Sheraton.” She says, “Whatever.” So we move to the Sheraton.

Now we are leaving on Sunday right? We are now at the Sheraton. My wife is not a morning person. I get up Saturday morning I go to the barbershop. Nobody knows I’m in the Sheraton except my wife and she is sleeping with me, - to keep everybody from bugging me for the last minute favor, right? In fact, I even told people that I was not allowed to issue visas for the last two weeks to get away from this, but still the calls. So I go down to the barbershop in the Sheraton get all lathered up and am getting the whole nine yards, I am happy. I am leaving the next day; I’ve done my three years. The phone rings the barber picks up and says, “Are you Larry Colbert?” “Yes.” I say on the phone, “Hello dear,” thinking the only person who knows I’m in the barbershop in the Sheraton is my wife who is in the Sheraton too. Nope, it was an associate member of the Philippines Supreme Court. He had a really funny nickname Dindon I think or whatever, but it was him. I said, “Mr. Justice, how did you find me?” He said, “What’s the use of being in the Supreme Court if I can’t find somebody when I want to?” He said, “My wife and I were having a party and we’d like you to come. We are sending a car around in an hour.” Now, I mean he didn’t want anything and on a Saturday afternoon if I’m leaving on Sunday he isn’t getting anything but that tells you how the system works. How in God’s name did he find me? A very nice man but...

Q: Well did you have a concern about bribery with your young officers but also in particularly with the male officers but not necessarily limited to that to the sex angle? Because as I recall, some of the problems of our senior consular people they had liaisons that lead to...anyway there was a sex problem.

COLBERT: They had loose zippers. I’m not aware of any vice consuls who got in trouble that way. Certainly a few of our senior officers got in trouble and there was always that threat. I think, for example, McAninch, first of all, he stayed five years, which is crazy, I don’t think you should stay at that post for more than three years. Second of all, I think you have to bear in mind that all of these people who kowtowed to you and think you are amusing, handsome, wonderful and grand really don’t think that at all, they like the fact that you can push a button and create a visa or issue a passport. So you have to bear that in mind that most of these people really aren’t your friend. They are just somebody who want to get access to you. These young women who may be throwing themselves at you aren’t really attracted to your good looks or other attributes, they may be attracted to your work related attributes. In my case, I was deathly afraid of my wife so I was on the straight and narrow.

Q: A wife is a handy asset to help you.

COLBERT: If I had gone there as a single man I almost certainly would have had a girlfriend. I mean it is human nature. I can see assigning me there at 80 years old I would probably be resurrected one way or the other because of the temptations. Luckily I went there married and intending to stay that way.

Q: One last question. Although you were obviously immersed in your business which was all consuming, what were you picking up though from country team meetings or other things about the Marcos's and all?

COLBERT: I think that when I arrived the embassy was perhaps with the exception of a couple mid-level officers were living in a fool's paradise. They were living in the same fools paradise that the White House was living in. I arrived at the beginning of the Reagan administration and the policy was then that poor Jimmy Carter and all his human rights agitation didn't understand the Marcos's are our friends and so on and so forth and so leave him alone. The chancery halls had big pictures of Marcos, from a state visit back to the States to see Reagan. The ambassador was often with Marcos and no bad words were said about Marcos. The Philippines were fed up with Marcos, Philippine's hated Marcos. There was clearly a disconnect between upper levels of the embassy and what was going on except for a few people who were trying to report otherwise.

I was there when in fact I was in Taipei visiting my mother-in-law, and we were slated to have dinner with General Ramos's father who was the ambassador to Nationalist China at the time. The son, General Ramos, was the chief of staff of the Army at the time and Ambassador Ramos, who was in his seventies, was very late for dinner. When he arrived he said, "I won't apologize you know why I am late." Well we didn't know why he was late. The reason he was late was that Aquino had been murdered in the airport that same day. I was in Manila at the time of the funeral. I left just after the funeral; it was clear then that Marcos' days were numbered. I think even Armacost came around in the end. I don't know whether he believed or he was following instructions.

But it's such a big embassy and if you are just a branch chief you don't really... I mean I didn't go to country team, there was a deputy consul general. I was deputy consul general acting some of the time. I worked with some very talented people; David Lyon was very talented. We didn't get along well because I resented the fact that I had been jerked out of ACS to be the NIV chief so he could be the IV chief. But the branch chiefs were good; I think the deputy consul general Ed Wilkinson was very good. He was actually after you in Seoul.

Q: Yeah, I visited Ed.

COLBERT: I mean Ed is a very solid guy. From my perspective, a lot of work and nice life style, nice friends, a pleasant three years but it was time to leave after three years.

Q: Just a couple quick questions. When you were doing citizenship services how did you find the prison system of justice with vis-à-vis Americans in the end?

COLBERT: Well, like any third-world country there is the process for those that have, and there is the process of those who have not. The Americans who were in jail in the Philippines mostly were on drug charges. I don't think anybody was there who was innocent of anything. I mean I never met a guilty person in prison nor have you but my impression was that those who professed innocence probably were professing falsely.

Q: Observing, where did the Philippine's head for in the States? Did you see any particular patterns or jobs or...?

COLBERT: There is a place called Daly City, which is just south of San Francisco near the airport and in the windows it says, "One speaks English here." Tagalog is the preferred language in Daly City. Daly City has more Philippines than any other place in the States. That's sort of where they go to start, just like the Irish would migrate to Boston, they go to Daly City in the San Francisco area.

Q: We then we will finish this off now. Where did you go was it 1981 I guess is it or what?

COLBERT: I was in the Philippines '81-'84.

Q: '84 so 1984.

COLBERT: I wanted to go to be a section chief in Delhi, Moscow or Cairo. So that is what I requested. Then Alan Otto, whom you may know, a great fellow who is deceased was the assignments person, the career "mangement" officer, in Washington.

Q: I think he dealt with me too.

COLBERT: He called me on the phone and said that Joan Clark wanted me to bid on the office director job post liaison and field support office director. I said, "Well, Alan I asked for this, this or this." He named those who were going to these various places, and I said, "What am I chopped liver?" He said, "Ms. Clark would like you to bid on this job." I said, "If I were not to bid on this job?" He said, "Ms. Clark said that you might say that and she said for me to tell you that Afghanistan is wonderful this time of year." So I bid on the office director job in the Visa Office. I probably would not have been qualified for it, probably would not have gotten it, probably would not have made OC and probably would never have been MC as a consequence, had I not been forced by Vernon McAninch to be the NIV chief in Manila which is a crucible as you say. So in a sense I got a job that was good for my career, which we are going to hear a little bit more about later as a result of getting a job I didn't really want. I didn't really want to be office director; I didn't want to go back to Washington; but, in fact, it turned out to be a fantastic job It turned out to give me high visibility and it was a job that got me my next job and a job that permitted me to become a personal friend of a lady who I barely knew, Joan Clark, by the time I was finished.

Q: OK so we will pick this up in 1984 and you are off to the visa office.

COLBERT: I am.

Q: You've talked about how you got the job but we haven't talked about the job at all.

COLBERT: OK.

Q: Great.

Q: OK, today is December 5th, 2006. Larry, OK what's the job? In the first place you were there from when to when?

COLBERT: I was there for two years, from 1984-1986. The job was office director of field liaison and overseas support or something like...the director for essentially overseas operations. There were and I think there still are three office directorates in the so-called visa office, the directorate of visa services. One is legislation regulations or "legs and regs" to those of us who are in the professional business. Another one is public affairs, public and congressional affairs, which is basically the public face. The first one I mentioned obviously writes draft legislation and interprets legislation after it's passed by Congress and writes regulations. It's the rule-making body and the rule-reviewing body, people who have questions about what they can or can't do or should or shouldn't do in the field contact this office for opinions. There are all kinds but that's not what I did so I don't want to talk about that.

The third office, the one I headed, at that time had four sub parts. One part, which no longer exists, was a small office, which dealt with notifying posts that individuals who had gotten refugee status in the States could bring their families. Basically it was an office which worked between the old immigration and naturalization office and the State Department relaying concerns, constructions and indeed information on visas issued for relatives of refugee, people who qualified for refugee status. That was a very small operation.

There was another small operation. We were just beginning then to make wide use of computer programs and computer assisted processings. There was an office headed by Donna Hamilton who worked for me then who and that office under her direction arranged training for people in using the various computer programs, which were just coming into effect then for processing visas. Then there was a small visa fraud office; this was prior to moving all fraud and fraud operations under a central office directly under the assistant secretary. But at that point passports had its fraud office and visas had its fraud office. So fraud operations were also under my stewardship.

Then finally- the crown jewels- the overseas support and liaison function, which basically consisted of being in regular contact with all of the issuing, posts. We had a break down geographically, and we would see that they were doing things right, advise them, get them resources if they needed and basically we were their point of contact for any operational problems. We were expected to know what was going on at all the posts and be alert to problems and, in fact, when there were problems find solutions to them. Very quickly I found that I had become basically the CA point person for visa problems. When there was a problem involving visa operations at a post, Joan Clark would say send Larry. So my wife and my children didn't see much of me much of the time because I would often be going off to look at problems.

I remember once getting a call from Alan Otto saying that there was a problem at post X, but he realized I had just came back from post Y and so he said not to worry I wouldn't have to be going although Ms. Clark had asked about me. So I came to work the next Monday thinking I would be at home for a while, and I got a phone call from the then DAS Lou Goelz saying, "Joan wants to know what you're reporting from Guyana?" Well I hadn't gotten to Guyana yet so I called my wife who threw a couple changes of underwear in a suitcase, and I left that evening for Guyana because I didn't want to tell her that I wasn't already there.

It was a fascinating job. I think the challenge for me initially was I wanted to be operational; I wanted to be doing things. It was a big office with about twenty-five or twenty-six professionals, and I wanted to do things and my job wasn't to do anything. My job was to see that the other people did things. I think it was a great training experience for me to learn how to manage lots of people who were all doing different things and not try to do their work for them. It took me a while to learn that lesson but I think it was a good lesson.

It was a challenge in the sense that you are between the front office and your staff. and it's much like in a sense running a visa section and being between the ambassador and the DCM who have one set of agendas and your vice consuls who think they are putting their fingers in the dyke keeping the dregs of society from getting to the U.S. But it was a different sort of pressure; the front office meaning the Bureau of Consular Affairs front office was a challenging place. There was a lady who was sort of the "Black Knight" who worked directly for Joan Clark and who had very strong opinions the ear of the Assistant Secretary but didn't really know much about the work. I can't remember her name, but her name usually was followed by a four-letter word on either side of it at the time.

Then for much of the time the special assistant to the Assistant secretary was a person named Michael Marine who I think was and probably, if he is still ambassador in Vietnam, still is the world's number one micro manager. He followed everything down to how fast the grass was growing which made it very difficult for a big bureau to operate when you're answering questions about minutia, which you shouldn't even be concerned about let alone the Assistant Secretary. He drove people absolutely insane. I can't remember the name of that lady, it will come to me. But those two made the work very challenging because you had to get your work done and you had to also realize these other forces were in play.

The assistant secretary was Lou Goelz who was absolutely marvelous, I learned a lot from him. I know before...

Q: He was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visas.

COLBERT: Yes, he was a DAS for visas.

Q: Deputy Assistant Secretary.

COLBERT: We had a once a week visa staff meeting in the front office. We all trooped over to the CA front office for this meeting in their conference room. A clever man he always had a pre-meeting in which he asked everybody what they were going to talk about. He didn't want any surprises. You'd mention something and he'd say, "Well, why don't you handle it this way," or "I think maybe that's better left unsaid." or "Why don't you let me handle that?" Here was this grossly overweight person who was probably even then in not good health because he was so overweight. Not a person, who gave a positive impression to look at but who really, really knew how to operate in a bureaucratic environment. So there were very, very few surprises in these meetings because he knew what everybody was going to say.

Q: Lou replaced me twice, once in Seoul and once in Naples.

COLBERT: So then you know.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: When I had come to work for him I remember I'd only been in the job for a few days and he asked to see me or I went to see him. He said, "Larry, the last three years you've been working for Vernon McAninch." I said, "Yes." He said, "Vernon and I are not close." I said, "Oh." He said, "In fact we are not friendly at all." He said, "How do you deal with that?" I said, "Well, right now I'm working for you and so Vern is my past and you are my current, you are my present, so I'm working for you so I am your man." He said, "That's what I really wanted to hear." We got a long very well after that.

I remember, I wish I could remember that lady's name. But a case in point of the sort of problems you get into. There was a fellow who'd worked directly for Reagan who is now out of office; I think maybe this was the beginning of Bush I or the end of Reagan. It would have been at the end of 1983 or '85, who was president then?

Q: That would be Reagan.

COLBERT: Well, the fellow who was his public relations person.

Q: Who yeah, Deaver.

COLBERT: Deaver, yes. Deaver apparently had strong desires that a person who was in Jamaica get a visa to come to the States to work for him in a servant capacity or some sort of domestic capacity. I didn't know anything about this because it was really being handled, as a public inquiry and I didn't do public, diplomatic or White House inquiries. But there was great pressure apparently on the assistant secretary to see that this person got a visa. I only heard about it after sort of indirectly.

Somehow it moved from the public and Congressional and White House relation's part of the shop over to mine. Then the same Michael Marine called me and said, "You know,

this is something that the White House is very interested in.” I didn’t know anything about it so I simply called Jamaica and asked to talk with the NIV chief who said, “Well, this is really and H1 or an H3 or something but it certainly is not a regular tourist visa; this person is going to work, we don’t have an approved petition. We are not about to issue a B1/ B2 visa for a person we know is going to be a domestic even for a person who worked for or is working for the President of the United States.” I then got a call from Ms. Clark herself who said that she is getting a lot of flack on this. I said, “Well Ms. Clark we can call the immigration service and suggest that they approve a H petition for this person, but they might refuse. Even if they don’t refuse they are going to remember that we asked.” I said, “And then there is the possibility that we could pressure Jamaica to issue the visa, they might say no, worse yet they might say yes and remember that we asked.” I said, “But it seems to me that if this is something the White House wants petitions are approved by INS and so they should be calling INS and not you because if the petition is approved then we can issue the visa. But, until this petition is approved we really have nothing to do. So I think they are calling the wrong person.” She said, “What are you saying?” I said that, “I think this could get very sticky if we push it very far.” She said, “You know you are the first person who told me that we should back off on this.” I said, “You know, I’m just a worker bee here but I think this is rather a sticky wicket particularly given this guys track record.” It had just come out that he had been trying to buy...he’d been buying Mercedes cars in Europe on his diplomatic passport when he wasn’t really a diplomat and reselling them.

So, when I said that I thought am I cutting my own throat, but in fact I think it worked out well.

But most of the time I just basically dealt with operational problems. A case in point, which is a story I really love. My secretary said that I had Congressman on the phone and he wanted to talk to me. Now that’s very unusual. This particular congressman, who chaired the subcommittee on immigration issues may have talked to the Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, certainly talked to God but didn’t talk to mere office directors.

Q: He was...?

COLBERT: He was chairman of the Judiciary Committee or at least the sub-committee on immigration law. So I said, “The congressman himself is on the phone and he asked for me by name?” “Yes.” Thinking this can’t be good so I said, “Yes, congressman.” “You are Larry Colbert?” “Yes.” “You’re...” I said, “That’s what I do, yes.” He said, “Well, I have this consular question for you.” He said, “Now I know a little bit about immigration law.” I’m thinking, yeah, ten times more than anybody else I know including me. “Well what would that be congressman?” He said, “Well there was this American couple of Indian extraction, they came over as students, they got married, they became citizens and now Mrs. whatever her name is, is about to have a baby.” “Yes.” “They asked her mother to come over to help out before the baby arrives to be here when the...that sounds eminently reasonable to you too?” I said, “Well, Congressman, that’s exactly what my Chinese mother-in-law did when my wife got pregnant.” He said, “Well,

the woman went in to apply for a visa and she got refused in Madras (whatever that city is called now), under Section 214(b). Now I know about 214(b),” he said, “you know about 214(b) don’t you?” I’m thinking, “Yes sir, I know.” He said, “Well I can understand that. I don’t agree with that particular decision, but I can understand a 214(b) decision. So this was explained to the woman and she called her daughter; Her daughter then filed an expeditious IV petition, (Immigrant Visa petition), paid the extra money and then the mother went in to apply for an IV-which she didn’t really want- but her daughter was about to give birth to her first grandchild, what are you going to do. The vice consul in Madras refused her as a non-intending immigrant.” He said, “Now, I’ve never heard of a non-intending immigrant Could you tell me what a non-intending immigrant is?” I said, “Well sir, I’m as perplexed as you are but since you told me it’s Madras I can almost certainly know who made this decision.” He said, “You can?” I said, “Yes, there’s a woman there who came in rather late in her career and I have some 240 posts that I have to worry about and I would say that Madras gives me more grief than the other 239 because of that lady.” He said, “Well what can you do about it?” I said, “Well, would she like to apply at another post in India, I think I can make it happen.” He said, “You can’t make her?” I said, “Nope,” I said, “if I could make her disappear I would.” So the Congressman agreed that she would go to apply in New Delhi and she got her visa and was there. That was my great non-intending immigrant story. I love that.

Q: There were two people who dealt with visas all our lives and there ain’t no such animal.

COLBERT: Well this woman simply didn’t want to issue visas to adult parents of naturalized Indian citizens because they might stay.

Q: But this does bring up a point and that is that all of us, we’ve both run consular sections, but you are at the top of the business now, what could you do about somebody who obviously was showing their prejudice, stupid decisions, rigidity. I mean in other words what could the system do about this because this is not a personnel matter, this is lives are...

COLBERT: At stake.

Q: At stake at this.

COLBERT: Lives and direction of lives. I think maybe for a consular manger I would argue that’s probably the most difficult decision to deal with. You have the decisions of space; you have the decisions of getting enough personnel, you have the decision of making sure that your section doesn’t get squeezed out by the so-called substantive sections, you notice the disdain in the way that I just said that. So you have all these other things to do but as the visa section chief or the person handling NIVs or IVs, or further up the food chain if you are a consul general in a large section, it’s the same challenge. How do you deal with the out of control vice consul or the out of control consul who makes decisions based upon their own mind set as opposed to the law and the facts? I think that is what you are asking?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I think it's really difficult. Certainly if you're the immediate supervisor you can counsel them, you can review their refusals, you can over turn their refusals, you can talk to them. In some cases, I think you simply have to write in their EER that they didn't do a good job, that they lacked perspective; that they lacked judgment, that they weren't supervisable.

The problem I think is that it is impossible to know all the mistakes that are made, be it mistakes of issuance or be they mistakes of non-issuance. Now, post 9/11, although I was out for the service when 9/11 occurred I've been a part time inspector since, the problem is that the supervisors have even less ability to correct injustice or bad judgment, malicious bad judgment in some cases because whereas before there was an old saying that we both know that there is no visa problem that can't not be fixed by issuance. That's to say, you can always issue the visa and solve the problem, hopefully for good reasons rather than bad. But now, the establishment, the Department, the whole structure is geared to making sure that we don't issue visas to people who shouldn't get them. No vice consul, no consul and certainly no consul general wants to be the person who issued another visa to a 9/11 type person, plus the training at FSI is even more geared to finding the bad applicant as opposed to looking for the good one. So it's a real challenge. I think that you can expend an awful lot of time and energy trying to convince people to be open minded, I think it is important particularly in a high-fraud post like Seoul or Manila that you bear in mind the perspective of the person who is facing this horde of people every day, 100 applicants, 150 applicants. In Manila, if you saw 100 applicants I would say 75 percent of them had false documents or were lying to you. Perhaps they were lying to you unqualified, that's unlikely but possible but certainly most of them weren't telling you the truth. When a vice consul sees that many people, so many of whom are not telling the truth that's very hard to see the truth or have any faith when you need to and I think you tend to get overly cynical.

To go back to what your question was I think it's probably the hardest single thing that a good consular supervisor has to do.

Q: Well OK but now you're talking about where you are sitting back in Washington.

COLBERT: Back in Washington I think it is a different and I digress. Back in Washington if it bubbles to your level, if it bubbles to the office director level there is obviously a political opponent. This doesn't mean that the decision was wrong, it just means that the decision has to be well thought out, well justifiable and sustainable and sometimes it isn't. Sometimes as the case I recanted about the non-intending immigrant it's totally ludicrous. Sometimes you really, really, really have to try to convince the person long distance that this is an extraordinary case that requires a re-look perhaps still a "no", but a re-look.

That brings to mind another case, which came from on high. I got a phone call at roughly lunchtime from my front office saying that an Iranian had been refused a visa in Paris. That wasn't an unusual occurrence, this was during the mid-'80s and Iranians had a very hard time getting visas.

Q: You had roving bands of Iranians throughout Europe looking and some of them would end up in some of the Pacific islands.

COLBERT: Exactly, they would go anywhere but this particular Iranian had been refused a visa in Paris, and the White House wanted this person to come to the United States. Now why the White House wanted this person to come to the United States I don't know. But, what essentially had happened was that the White House- I don't know whether it was the president or the NSC director, or somebody - had called George Shultz the then Secretary of State saying this person had gone in to get a visa to come to Washington for whatever purpose and had been refused. George Shultz then called Joan Clark and said, "You know the President has mentioned to me that so and so went in for a visa in Paris and was denied." Joan called me. Ms. Clark called me and said, "Would you look into this? I have to tell the secretary of State." So I called I guess it must have been a Friday because the embassy was already closed and weekend was coming up. I spoke to the consular duty officer who said, "Nothing we can do until Monday; this is only a visa issue, it's not really an emergency, nothing I can do." I said, "You understand, of course, that I'm not calling on my own nickel here. I am calling because the Assistant Secretary..." "Nothing we can do." So I went back to the embassy operator, the embassy operators in Paris are almost as good as those in the White House and certainly much more pleasant. I take that back I don't know that they are better in the White House. But in Paris they are really very good. I said, "I would like you to track down the consul general." At this point I was an FSO-1, fairly newly promoted FSO-1 but an FSO-1.

Q: About the colonel level.

COLBERT: About the colonel level. So the operator tracked down the consul general at 9:30 at night whoever he was. I explained why I called him. And he was most unpleasant in responding that I had no right to call him down on this matter. There was absolutely nothing that can be done, this matter would have to wait until Monday and in any event this person was an Iranian and he didn't see any reason why I should be calling. So I said, "Well, that's fine. I just wanted you to know that I'm calling because Ms. Clark asked me to call and when I hang up I will call Ms. Clark and say that I spoke with you and there is nothing that can be done. Then Ms. Clark will call George Shultz the Secretary of State, and say she is sorry nothing can be done, and then George Shultz will call the White House and say he is sorry nothing can be done." He said, "Are you threatening me? How dare you, you are just an FSO-1. I am the consul general or I am a minister-counselor." I said, "Well, let me walk you through this again. I am calling you because she asked me to call you and I'm supposed to call her back and say what's going to happen. Then she is going to call the secretary of State and tell him what is going to happen all the way up the food chain." I said, "If I am at the bottom of the food chain with all due respect you are just one bite above me." He said, "Oh." So I made an enemy but they did call the Iranian

in on a Saturday and issue a visa to him, and I think probably in retrospect it probably had something to do with Iran Contra but I mean there are instances when you've got to realize what the chips are.

Q: Back to our lady in Madras. Just how do you get a feel? You say she caused more trouble than anybody else in the system.

COLBERT: During the two years I was in the...

Q: I mean obviously this is a bad apple, because its not a...

COLBERT: She wasn't a bad person she just had bad judgment.

Q: Oh well I mean it's a bad apple, is a bad apple, professionally. Why couldn't an arrangement be made to have her transferred to be in charge of God knows, potted plants in Buenos Aires or something. In other words, couldn't the system do something because I mean there is something wrong with the system that can say we have somebody making bad judgments on peoples lives? I mean if you were to send in cables that you thought were nuts about reporting on activity you could discount but these are people's lives.

COLBERT: I think you are hitting on something very important. I think from our perspective as consular professionals we realize that these decisions are decisions that impact on people and that they can cause a lot of angst and a lot of bad things to happen. Yet, certainly in 1984, '85, '86 I don't think that the mandarins in personnel, certainly not the people who ran the Department at the assistant secretary level in geographic bureaus or the Secretary of State or any of his high-ranking deputies gave a rats whatever about consular work. To get a person like that reassigned I think it would take an ambassador doing a formal no confidence cable on the person or a principal officer trying to get the ambassador to have a no confidence thing. If HR assigned a person, in fact nobody could reassign this person except the HR folk, which would be extraordinary, or the ambassador. I don't think those folks would react to a problem like this. The fact that some poor Indian grandmother wasn't there for the birth of her granddaughter really, really wouldn't get anybody's attention I'm sorry to say.

Q: And particularly when you think about Madras as being that far from New Delhi. I mean you know...

COLBERT: And then it was a sleepy, small post, now it is a giant post and then who do you get to replace this person? No, I'm sad to say in some instances you have to work around people. There are two work arounds. There is the work around at post if you have an engaged principal officer and an engaged...

Q: How do you deal with it?

COLBERT: Well I think the bottom line if you are the supervisor is you document the person, you counsel the person and hopefully you get the person into another line of work or perhaps out of the work all together. But it's very, very hard.

When we come to Paris, which is going to be my last hurrah I will talk about a lady officer there who was of a similar ilk. But the two years I had in the visa office were rewarding I think. We did good work, I learned a lot and I got to be known in the bureaucracy, which is not only in the CA (consular affairs) bureaucracy but also in the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and CDC (Centers for Disease Control) and these kinds of contacts are invaluable when you want to get things done.

Q: Let's talk about some of the things. What about you know you look at Africa and there you are dealing with a huge country, a huge area with a consular post but not probably, overly heavily Henry work load in most places but which in a way is bad because you don't have expertise built up and...

COLBERT: And you have very junior officers doing the work with no...

Q: Very junior officers with not much back up.

COLBERT: Well, that's a real challenge and it remains a challenge. One solution is to have your area officer for Africa be on the phone to these people often and when there is travel money available have a good travel plan and make your travel plan early on, ask for more money than you are going to hopefully get, plan for more trips than you thought they will possibly agree to because when they cut you back you will get more than they would have given you otherwise. You learn all these bureaucratic games as you progress and I watched Ronald Summerville in my two stints in Washington so I learned an awful lot of stuff.

Q: Ronald Summerville is a magician as far as dealing with this. I worked with Ronald.

COLBERT: The two times I was in Washington he was the executive director of CA and many of the people who succeeded him; they also controlled the purse strings. So to go back to your question get your people out to the field, encourage your people to be in contact with these people and when you see something that looks squirrely follow up and make sure that you get it right.

One result of 9/11 is now they are trying to eliminate for untenured officers to be consular section chiefs in small single officer posts, which is a good thing because they are often alone and usually their immediate supervisor is the DCM who may or may not have any consular experience. If he did have any consular experience, it was probably as the vice consular eons ago and he couldn't wait to get out of the work, has no interest in the work and doesn't want to be bothered because he is doing important substantive work making sure that Uganda doesn't fall to the Chinese or something. I'm being a little bit sardonic but sorry...

Q: During this time what would you say were your greatest challenges?

COLBERT: Hmmm, my greatest challenges...one challenge was to work successfully with the other elements of VO in consular. Dick Scully was head of regs and legs. He was a bit of a curmudgeon, if that is the correct word, did I pronounce it correctly? Curmudgeon?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: With his cooperation and assistance you could get a lot done. If he decided to throw a spanner, a spanner into the operation nothing got done. So figuring out how to work successfully with him and the people below him so that the regulations and legislations and advisory opinion function marched in the same direction you were marching or at least you marched in their direction. It was an important thing. So playing well in the sandbox with the others in a very big bureaucracy was important because you couldn't really accomplish anything unless everybody was on the same sheet of music. Making sure that the post had the resources they needed to do the job and they were getting good advice and support by my minion.

Q: Did you find that...could you sort of smell fraudulent problems and point to the fraud people over there or not? How did that work?

COLBERT: In my experience, very little fraud is discovered by the people in Washington. I think a lot of people in Washington in the anti fraud area provide advice and tools for other people to discover it in the field. But although I had two in my two years I had two very good fraud chiefs and a good staff, I don't know that we smelled fraud very much. There are new techniques now that they have like data mining and watching for any strange patterns but fraud is basically caught on the spot. I think it's not successfully caught from Washington, sorry.

Q: How about one of the perennial problems one has is Irish visas, the IRA for one thing and just plain Irish leanings. One always hears about the Israeli lobby but probably one of the most subliminal lobbies is the Irish lobbying, which is in some ways more effective because it doesn't rear its head as much.

COLBERT: Well, the IRA issue, I think we talked about that a bit when I was consul there. The issue of issuing to people who were coming here for fundraising or coming here who had an actual or alleged record of terrorism that would have been handled by the security advisory opinions division of regulations and legislation and rarely came to me. So I can't speak of it. I presume it was pretty much when I was there. We would get the information from the Irish special branch and send it in and then there would be a conflict between the FBI, interested Congressmen and the backbone and spine of the State Department, need I say more?

But in terms of issuing visas to Irish who are were coming here to work illegally a bigger issue I think was the fact that even then the J-1 work travel visas were going

disproportionately to the Irish and the number kept going up and up and up because of special...

Q: Why don't you tell us what a J-1 is.

COLBERT: There is a special category of non-immigrant visa that permits young people to come over. In one instance as scholars, to do scholarly work but there is a specialized one called work study which is basically intended for people to come over here for up to 18 months and work, not study, work. While they work they are supposed to travel and become culturally acclimated to our society. Basically it's just a reason to bring them over here to work and take jobs from American youths unfortunately. But the number of these visas have traditionally gone to the Irish because of political ramifications, has traditionally climbed and climbed and climbed. These young men and woman work as camp counselors, as lifeguards, they work in restaurants and they do a variety of summer type jobs. Some of them are very well paid jobs, which go on for eighteen months but predominantly they are just summer jobs and as I say they go predominantly to the Irish.

Q: China was beginning to come on the visa radar. At the beginning it was really...how was China? I'm talking about...

COLBERT: The only Chinese that were coming to the States in any volume when I was there were official travel. There were very heavy restrictions then and there had to be virtually a security advisor opinion on every single one. They were limited for short periods of stay and it was nothing like the volume now where a zillion Chinese come. Chinese tourism was non-existent, very few Chinese students, they were just beginning, it was a very, very complex problem process which required all kinds of vetting and everything.

Q: The Soviet Union was still in existence at this point?

COLBERT: Yes, it was.

Q: Was there anything else you should tell us about this time?

COLBERT: It was a fun time. I knew what I wanted to do next but I was told not to do it because it wasn't career enhancing. I was told I had been a 01 since my first year in Manila and so my prospects for making OC were not great in the view of the professional naysayers. But I said I didn't really care, I wanted to go to the National War College. So I got assigned to the War College, which was what I wanted. My thought was if I made OC fine, if I don't fine, I still want to go to the War College. So I went to the War College.

Q: So you went to the War College from when to when?

COLBERT: From '86-'87.

Q: Now this is the regular War College?

COLBERT: National War College.

Q: The National War College. How did you find that year?

COLBERT: Wonderful. I tried desperately to fail so I could repeat it. No, it's a very, very, very good thing. It's laid back, at least it was laid back, lots of reading, lots of small seminars, very good lecturers coming in big groups, lots of activities like visiting aircraft carriers and submarines and red flag which is an exercise at Nellis Air Base in Nevada where they have an air squadron which copies other countries tactics and they have mock battles and you can watch them training. You meet a lot of people from other government agencies and certainly from the various military branches. It's a very good thing.

Q: How did you find having adding, you might say, both State Department and the consular dimensions to your particular cohort that you were working with? How did that work out?

COLBERT: I don't quite understand the question, which cohort?

Q: Well often the...

COLBERT: You mean the group?

Q: The Group, yeah.

COLBERT: Since the issues were national security broadly defined I think anybody's input was welcomed and I don't know that if you were a consular officer there was any attempt to negate or make fun of your contribution. In every seminar there were probably one or two people from the State Department, somebody from the Agency, and then ten or fifteen uniformed service people. They kept mixing you up so you were always with different people.

Q: Did any particular visits leave an impression that sort of stuck with you afterwards?

COLBERT: One lecture. They had all of the national security advisors from Andrew Goodpaster, who was the head of the NSC under Eisenhower, all the way through up to the one who was current at the time all on the same stage. You could ask them questions and they talked to us, quite fascinating. No, it was a fascinating year. I met some really fine people and enjoyed it a great deal. But as luck would have it, I arrived in September to start the course and I got promoted to OC in October so all the naysayers were wrong and I got to have my cake and eat it too.

Q: So wither when you finished there?

COLBERT: Ah, I had been told by the country director for China and I had been told by the then consul general in Hong Kong and indeed by the DCM in Beijing that if I made

OC I could be chief of section in Hong Kong. That sounds like a very nice thing; my wife is Chinese, obviously from Taiwan but still my mother-in-law was getting up in years and living alone and I like Asia. So I thought wow this is a done deal. I made OC and it's time for assignments and I'll be getting a phone call and what do you know I will be going to Hong Kong.

So the phone rang and it was Ms. Clark. She said, "Well I know that you really want to go to Hong Kong but I'm sending John Adams to Hong Kong." She said, "But I really would like you to go to Tijuana." I said, "Tijuana?" She said, "I really would like you to go to Tijuana." Well, if you recall earlier I had come to Washington because she really wanted me to come to Washington, now, I'm slow but I'm not terminally slow. I said, "Fine, I'll go to Tijuana." "I knew you would see it that way." She didn't say "my way" she had the grace. So I got assigned to Tijuana. I went to Tijuana.

Q: You were in Tijuana from when to when?

COLBERT: Three and a half years from '87 to '91. I stayed a little longer than three years and less than four, slightly less because I knew I was going overseas and I wanted to get my second daughter settled in college in her freshman year before we left.

If I could go back, just a minute, to the War College though. Even before I went to the War College, the last year I was in the visa office, my wife and our two children, one of whom was in, at that point, in junior high school and one was a junior in high school, we went to that amusement park in Virginia that was recently purchased by Daniel Snyder with money he should have used to buy better football players. But anyway we were standing in line for some ride, and there was this petite, lovely, young girl with this much taller, handsome young man, both of them young people. We were talking with them. We thought he was in college and she was in high school. It turned out she was a freshman at West Point and he was, this was the younger brother. So my younger daughter became very interested in the fact that this demur young woman was going to West Point. So she developed an interest in going to West Point, which didn't break my heart because it's free of course. So lo and behold I find myself in the National War College and my desk mate, had a daughter who was also a freshman at West Point.

Q: Called a Plebe.

COLBERT: A Plebe I beg your pardon, I knew better too.

Q: I grew up in Annapolis.

COLBERT: So Plebe, Yearling, Cow, and Firstie. I know all those terms from my daughter, of course. But anyway his daughter was a Plebe and he said there was a program whereby if they prescreened you to see that you had the academics and the athletic ability you could actually spend the day there as a perspective student, the parent takes you up. So I took a day off from the National War College and took my daughter up for a Friday. I went to a lecture for parents of perspective cadets and she spent a day

going to class going around with this young lady that was a plebe. The plebe was happy because she was not subject to any hassling and she couldn't be harassed when she had a guest with her. I thought to myself my daughter is never going to buy into this but in fact all the way back she said that's what she wanted to do.

So we go off to Tijuana. I have a daughter who is going to be a freshman, no, one is going to be a sophomore, and one is going to be a senior. The senior pursues this ambition for West Point, and while we are in Tijuana gets an appointment there. But to go back to Tijuana I sort am digressing a bit I guess.

Q: Oh that's ok.

COLBERT: I arrived to find perhaps the sickest place I had ever been. Two weeks before I arrived the then ambassador or the then DCM, I forget which it was sent a shrink to the post because he thought that there were serious problems, and indeed there were. Not the problems that a shrink could solve. My predecessor was inept, detached and ineffective, and I'm being polite.

The vice consuls totally ran the place. At that time there were no civil service visa examiners - all vice consuls it was a big post. Vice consuls ran everything, the supervisors were totally detached, the physical plant was a wreck, the relationships with the Mexican, and particularly with the American officials on the border, were essentially non-existent. One of my so-called section chiefs told the immigration inspectors at the border that they had no right to inspect us crossing the borders because we were diplomats; we were immune and we were better than they were. Of course that was false, we were entering the United States. So he basically soured the relationship with customs and immigration, which we had to work with everyday. It would be hard from a perspective of twenty years to explain just what a mess the place was.

It was such a mess that about the third or fourth week I was there I was so taken with trying to solve these problems that I got sort of all scrunched up from nervous tension. I was all bent over; I literally couldn't move. I remember sending a message to Mexico City to the admin counselor, a cable, saying, "The following is a list of things which are wrong with this post which have to be corrected some of which are criminally wrong," and they were a lot of admin issues as well. So he called me on the phone, Jerry Tolson was his name. He said, "Why did you send me this cable?" I said, "Jerry, before I sent the cable I had thirteen problems or fifteen problems." I said, "Now we have fifteen problems."

It took a long time, It took getting rid of some people who were coming out of their tours; it took a change of some attitudes. It took a lot of sweat and tears, and a lot of paint. It is amazing what a can of paint will do. Joan Clark said once to me, "A can of paint is an important thing." I took the rule that if it wasn't moving paint it and that included people. We worked very, very hard and I think of the many compliments that I like to remember that were paid...everybody likes to remember the complements they are paid rather than the not so complementary things that are said about them. Joan Clark came to visit about

one year into my stint there and she spent two days and she said to me, “Larry, call me Joan and you’ve done a very good job here.” That’s probably the nicest thing anybody has ever said to me.

I think when I left we had a good relationship with the Mexican officials, we were possibly seen in the community as doing what we could appropriately. We had a very good relationship with the federal agencies on both side of the border and we had a nice, pleasant work environment for the people. I really, really felt good about Tijuana. I thought it was a very, very hard job. It would be very hard to explain all the things that were wrong from terrible housing for the officers, horrible working conditions, and things that I wouldn’t even want to say that were going on which were borderline insane. I mean there are something’s that even I would be uncomfortable talking about because they were really defame people in a way that they probably should be defamed, but just awful people.

Q: Well, let’s talk about what would you talk about.

COLBERT: OK.

Q: In the first place, start with the people. You are certainly with a group of people that are vice consuls...well first let’s start with the supervisors. What did you do with the supervisors?

COLBERT: Let’s talk about an ACS chief who...

Q: ACS?

COLBERT: American Citizens Services chief, who went on subsequently down the road to be an unsuccessful DCM and an unsuccessful ambassador twice. She had the only working telephone line into Mexico when the earthquake occurred in Mexico City but she had a dinner party that evening. This occurred while I was in Spanish training but I learned about from the Mexican Des, Tijuana was the only post at that point that had a tie line, a State Department dedicated line, and it was impossible to reach Mexico City because of the earthquake. She hung up the phone- definitively cutting the connection - because she had a dinner party. This was when there had been an earthquake.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I mentioned the NIV chief who wrecked our relations with the local officials; I don’t know, it’s hard from a perspective of nearly twenty years and perhaps more than twenty years to remember. But I do know you had to change the whole attitude of everybody. You had to change the attitude of how the outside saw us by doing things differently. You had to change the attitude of people inside so we did do the things differently. You had to give people things to do that were unique and different. We set up a reporting plan; we gave people things to report on. We gave people time off to go and do things. We allowed people to go on TDYs (temporary duty) to other posts. We tried to

find ways to cause it to be a better post and then I got better people. I had as one of my deputies Katherine Peterson who is a super star and now is on her second ambassadorship.

Q: Who was the head of FSI (Foreign Service Institute)?

COLBERT: That is the lady, yes. So when you get people like that I had a public affairs officer who was just absolutely fabulous. I think to criticize myself, I went there with poor Spanish and so I would have been much more effective had my Spanish been better.

We did a lot of entertaining. . I think one of my great, great successes was I remember we gave this big cocktail party for the then ambassador who is now head of national intelligence, John Negroponte. He came up on a state visit to northern Mexico and we had a real program for him. But one thing we did was we had a big cocktail party for him, and I invited the elite of Tijuana and neighboring towns and a few people from the other side of the border as well. The Bishop of Tijuana, who was a good friend and a very good contact, a person we maintained very good relations with,-I will come back to tell you a story about him in a minute- came and he brought with him the Cardinal from Mexico City and the Cardinal from LA (Los Angeles) He didn't bother to call me nor should he have and he brought the two Cardinals. Now to have two Cardinals in your house in a provincial town that ain't too shabby.

When I presented the local bishop to the American Ambassador and his wife, the bishop said "And this is Cardinal Mahony from LA, and Mr. Ambassador, you know Cardinal so and so from Mexico City". Then the Ambassador's wife says "Oh, John and I haven't had the pleasure of meeting him yet." So I thought, wow, that isn't too shabby, the Ambassador meets the Cardinal from Mexico City in his constituent post office at our home. So we did a lot of entertaining which was good.

I think we left a much better post than we inherited. I got a lot of help from my wife on that; I got a lot of help from Katherine Peterson from that. I think the FSNs were happy and it was a good place and I am happy about that.

Q: OK, let's talk about Tijuana. I was just recently listening to the song by whatever it is there about the Tijuana jail.

COLBERT: The Eighth Street jail.

Q: Tijuana has been a sort of relief valve for the west coast or something of...particularly young people going down there to...

COLBERT: A horrible, horrible challenge because the legal drinking age in Tijuana is if your elbows can reach the bar. There is none, if you have the money you can drink. People come down, drink too much, get in their cars, get killed on the freeway going back or have accidents there or fall off balconies in hotels, get into fights, get beaten up. When we were there we figured out that something like 20 percent of all the arrests of

Americans abroad in any given year take place in Baja California. Once the mayor of Ensenada phoned me on the phone to say that during an American holiday that they had some several hundred Americans that were drunk that they had taken to the soccer field. I said, "Are they safe?" He said, "Well, they are going to stay there until they are sober and they have water." I said, "Right on, just keep them there." They didn't want to put them in jail, they were just drunk but if they had gotten in their cars and down that super highway along the mountains they'd have been killed.

We had horrible, horrible, horrible ACS cases, which required a lot of challenge. A case of several marines from Camp Pendleton who went down to Ensenada, got drunk, ran into an official car which was being driven by a Mexican naval officer and his family, two people were killed. The mother was critically injured and they were all taken to hospital. The military said we want to fly a helicopter down and evacuate the Marines. There is a strict rule in Mexico; U.S. government helicopters cannot fly into Mexico. If you think about your history you will understand why they are so leery about our military. But the military wanted to evacuate these two or three critically ill Marines.

In the meantime, under Mexican law, if you are involved in an accident and you are responsible you have to pay the damages and the damage is worth \$10 thousand or so. The governor said, "No." Or the courts said no. So we went back to the courts and they said, "Well if you can come up with the \$10 thousand damages and if they will take in their helicopter the critically ill Mexican lady as well because this woman needs really specialized care, then they can have the Marines." The Marines said, "We can't take a civilian." I said, "You can't take the civilian, you can't take the military." "What are you telling us?" I said, "We are in a foreign country, that's the law." So the military said, "We will pay the \$10 thousand, we can't get it right away, and we will take the woman." I spoke to the Mexican governor who put up the \$10,000 as loan from his pocket on my word that the Marines would pay him back. So they sent the helicopter down and took the woman and the two or three soldiers, Marines, back to Pendleton.

Well then a week later this colonel calls me up and said, "The person who told you that we were going to pay the \$10 thousand didn't have any authority to say that. We are not going to pay." I said, "You realize the governor of the state put the \$10,000 dollars up out of his pocket." Now the guy was a crook of the worst kind but it was still his \$10 thousand. I said, "You know the governor of the state put up \$10 thousand on my say so because the U.S. Marine Corps gave me their word." He said, "That's not our problem." I said, "It is your problem."

So then I thought about it and I called up and asked to talk to the commanding general of the Marine Corps. My secretary said, "The only person I can get is a sergeant." I said, "You mean the only person you can get in Camp Pendleton is a sergeant?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, let me try, I'm the CG here." I got a corporal, that is to say, they really dissed me badly. So I sent a message back to the Department of Defense, DOD, without clearing it saying, "We had arranged this for these people who were guilty of drunk driving and manslaughter and we got them out on this assurance. Now we've been told that the Marine Corps is not going to pay the \$10 thousand and all I can say is that

you realize that several thousand Marines and Navy people come over here every single month and we're not in a position to help them because our assurances on military personnel will be worthless. In fact, we were not even supposed to do military personnel, that's what the MPs were for." I said, "We won't be able to intervene to help the MPs at all because our credibility is shattered." I said, "We are also very puzzled because when I tried to call to discuss this with the flag officer at Camp Pendleton I was told there were none there and I can only reach a corporal. Who is in charge?" Whoa. I actually sent it saying that we couldn't...I got a major general from the Marine base calling me back, "How dare you send a message like that." I said, "Well, I tried to call you first." "We were aware you called" he replied. I said, "Maybe next time you will take my call." In the meantime they sent me the \$10 thousand. So we sometimes played hardball with them.

Q: Who were sort of the authorities in Tijuana?

COLBERT: The authorities? Well the drug lords really hadn't, there were drug lords, but the Felix brothers hadn't really hadn't taken over things yet. The real drug lords were further down in the south but the Felix brothers became notorious...

Q: These were the...

COLBERT: The family that ran the drug cartel in Tijuana hadn't really come to the fore when I was there. They were drug lords; we knew who they were. There was a mayor; there was a state government in Mexicali, which is another town. We had good relations with them. In constituent posts there isn't a lot going on politically. If anything happens it happens in Mexico City; it is a centralized state. While I was there the mayor of Ensenada who was a Panista, that is to say a member of the then opposition right-wing party, the PAN (National Action Party). He had been the first mayor who was elected and allowed to be elected. That is to say he was the first mayor who had ever won and been allowed to win. He was very, very popular. He ran for governor and he was the first Panista, the first opposition non PRI person to be elected governor. I think in the past PAN people had won in the north, but the votes always came out differently than how they had been cast. Sort of there were lots of hanging chads and if they weren't those in charge always found some!

So we were there when that happened and we had a very good relationship with him and a person who I came to admire a lot. I think it was very, very hard to be totally honest in that environment. In Mexico they have this thing they offer you lead or silver. That's to say if you are offered a bribe it's silver, if you refuse a bribe they give you lead, hot lead. So I think it was not a totally honest society but most people we dealt with were trying hard to do the right thing..

Q: What about on the civilian side? You must have had a lot of particularly young Americans in jail didn't you? How did that work out?

COLBERT: We had a vice consul or an FSN visit the jail every day seven days a week and there was always somebody there. Most of the charges were drunk and disorderly; and people paid a fine and got out. At any one time we had maybe thirty people in prison for serious crimes which would be bringing a firearm into Mexico or more importantly drug dealing- being a mule or being involved in the drug traffic. While I was there we had an on-going program of prisoner transfers. This is our agreement between the two countries that your nationals can serve their time in your country and their nationals can go back to their country and serve their time. So we had then and we still have an agreement with Mexico to permit Americans in prison in Mexico to petition to come back here to serve their time closer to their families. While I was there, this was an on-going process and we would send the paper work for those people who wanted down to Mexico City and they would be vetted by the Mexican authorities and then they would be vetted by our authorities and in due course there would be an agreement and they would be bussed to the border and picked up by our authorities.

While I was there the Department of Justice without telling anybody in advance announced that there would be no prisoner exchange that year because they were overrun with Mariolettos, that is to say they were overrun with Cuban criminals who fled from Castro under the Carter administration and they didn't have any room in the federal prisons for these Americans, so they could just damn well stay in Mexico. Well, the American prisoners were all set to go home, and they were very upset so they decided they would go on a hunger strike. Now in my own mind to this day I don't know whether they really were on a hunger strike or not but they said they were on a hunger strike and the Mexican authorities said they were on a hunger strike, so we got permission to buy a protein drink, sort of a food supplement because they would drink and they would drink this. So our thought was we would give them this food supplement and that way they don't die on our watch while they are protesting. Now as far as I know they could have been eating T-bone steak and we wouldn't have known, but it was a hunger strike. Over time this became a media thing. The American media were coming down to interview these starving prisoners who were starving for their right to go back to Butte, Montana or Biloxi, Mississippi, or wherever they wanted to go. It became untenable for the Department of Justice because clearly they couldn't point to us say it was a State problem. The Department of Justice made this decision and we would just refer all media, public and congressional complaints back to the Department of Justice. So the Department of justice quickly caved in a matter of several weeks allowing the exchanges to go forward.

So, lo and behold off the prisoners go. Well among the group was a person who had claimed to be a U.S. citizen. We had forwarded his claim of U.S. citizenship to Washington for determination and had heard nothing. So they came back as he was released for transfer and said, "We (the Department of State that is) have determined he is not an American citizen and note that you were feeding him for six weeks at ten dollars a day, whatever it was, and you, meaning me or the post, owe the U.S. government somehow \$1,275 or whatever it was because you fed this prisoner who was not a U.S. citizen." We found that just a little bit too much so we went back and said - they had sent their message, of course, by some informal means, but it wasn't a telegram. So we went

back by cable you know with all the appropriate distribution saying that, “With the case of Juan Delacruz (name made up) you will recall that on this date we noted that he was in prison and he said that he was a U.S. citizen and on this date we asked that he be checked out to see if he was a U.S. citizen. On later date he went on a hunger strike and we then decided to give him food. Based on the Department’s recent communication we can understand, that is the post understands, that if a person in a similar situation say destitute or in prison claims to be a U.S. citizen and doesn’t prove it we shouldn’t feed it. Were he to die and be proved he is a U.S. citizen that would really be on your head and not ours.” It was more politely worded than that. We basically said, “You are saying that we shouldn’t have fed him because you hadn’t told us he wasn’t a citizen and he claimed he was. So in the next instance when a person claims to be a citizen we don’t help him until you’re determined they are? But then can we have the name of the office that made this determination and preferably even the person so we can...” Whoa, such screams. We had misunderstood what they were saying. Well we went back and said, “Well maybe you could restate it so we could understand it more clearly.” We didn’t make any points, but we were told that the Department would pay the money and not us.

That was one of the most stupid things I had ever heard of but there were lots of those. Once the Naval attaché called and said, “We have a destroyer escort scheduled to come in to Ensenada for a ship visit but we forgot to ask for diplomatic approval from the Mexican government. Now we’ll get it, but the ships already underway. Would you ask the admiral if he could make all the arrangements pending the approval?” Well Ensenada is a very small port; it only has maybe three piers. So I went down to see the admiral and explained that they had forgotten to do it, it was coming, they would get the permission but could they have the pier lined up and could they have the water supply laid, all the things for the first ship visit.” He said, “You know we aren’t supposed to do this until we hear from Mexico City.” I said, “Well admiral, do you think you could...” Well I then drove to Ensenada with a vice consul for the visit, but the ship never appeared. We phoned my secretary who learned from the DAO that the ship visit had been cancelled a week or so before, but no one had bothered to tell us.

So I apologized profusely to the admiral who was not happy either and I went back to Tijuana drafted a cable to the Department of Defense. “Visit of the U.S.S. Stealth, aka whatever the real name was, saying that we wanted to compliment the Department of Defense on their new stealth technology. We were at the port, there was no ship so we just think it is really remarkable that this...” this was done sardonically and we info’d Mexico City. We didn’t clear it; we just sent it because I was really, really ticked. The Defense attaché was not a happy camper, because obviously the Pentagon called him and said, “What the hell is going on?” But from then on we were on distribution for all ship visit messages and they never, never messed with us again.

Q: Well then what about American tourists driving through. What was the district?

COLBERT: All of Baja California, all the way down to La Paz.

Q: What about Americans driving around there, not just drunken driving but were police casting for...

COLBERT: Police in Tijuana would occasionally stop people for real or not real offences and hit them up for money; and, in fact, policeman had to actually pay for a particular spot. If you worked a good block, you could augment your salary very well by ripping off the tourists and even ripping off your fellow Mexicans. People driving all the way down the country a lot of it is desert so you have to keep your car gassed but it's perfectly safe, it's a four-lane highway with a medium strip. A lot of it is just cactus, it's beautiful country. Down at the tip we have a consular agent in Cabo San Lucas, which is a resort area now. It's a very pretty place.

Q: Well didn't you have basically a snowbird area where all the people brought their campers down to be along the Gulf or something?

COLBERT: That would be on the Gulf area more in New Mexico and Arizona than Tijuana or Mexicali. We had people who came down on spring break, and they'd go to the resorts close up which was obviously a challenge for us as well because they would get into trouble, some of them.

Many, many, many, many Americans buy or lease a retirement either all the way down in La Paz or Cabo San Lucas or up near Ensenada farther down from Tijuana. Housing is relatively less expensive; gasoline is certainly less expensive, life pleasant since you can have help. The challenge you run into is if you buy something; sometimes the land that you think you own but was sold to you by X really belongs to Y. There is an on-going issue that's been lasting, I mean since I was there, this big resort was built on a piece of land over looking the ocean near Ensenada, basically a modern housing development, a little conclave or development and people bought their houses or they got them for 99 year leases and then only to find out that the people who said they owned the land may or may not have owned the land. The Indians said they owned the land so it was and still a big mess You really don't know whether the person selling your land might be the brother of the judges who decide whether you own it or not. There are lots of wheels on the wheels and it is a big problem. When they came in to see me, I could give them a lawyer's list. As a consul you can't solve that kind of problem. I urged people to be extremely cautious and to rent, not to buy.

Q: What about visas and the whole illegal immigration, legal immigration, that whole thing?

COLBERT: In a sense of being a border consulate the really, really bad cases don't really come to see you; they just try to get across. So it's probably more problematical in the interior. Most people who live on the border already have a border-crossing card, a mica, which it is commonly called. So I think visa work is not as challenging as...I mean certainly there are people who have to be refused and a lot of them from in the interior who had to be refused. But most really bad cases are people from the interior and they are

going to try and be smuggled across. The consulate doesn't really have an immediate role in policing the border, that's the border patrol, INS, or whatever it's called now.

Q: How did you find relations, you mentioned initially you had a problem with Customs and INS, how did that work for you?

COLBERT: I think we had a very, very good relationship. We met with them regularly; in fact I think we even worked very hard to improve relations between Customs and INS. At that time, they were both separate agencies and they didn't really like each other very much, sometimes you were mediating between them as well. We went out of our way to work with them and I think the relations were good. I hope that's the case.

Q: Well then, did you deal with lots of parents coming looking for their kids and that sort of thing?

COLBERT: Kids rarely disappeared. Missing American children were not very often a problem occasionally, very occasionally. We did immigrant visas then and occasionally you would have the case of someone who came down to acquire a child by purchase and attempt to get an immigrant visa for a child that did not qualify for an adoption visa, The bigger problem would be the kid who gets arrested for some infraction and then you'd get two approaches.

I remember one case a kid who was fourteen or fifteen stole or borrowed his fathers Porsche and drove it down and got drunk and totaled it. We called the father and the father said, "Well, I guess I've got to buy another Porsche." I was thinking to myself, if I had totaled my fathers Ford he'd have to get another son. Because when I told him I'd be dead but this man's reaction was "I guess I have to get another Porsche." I'm thinking, huh.

But then on another case I called a mother up and said, "Your son is in jail." She said, "What did he do?" I said, "Well he had a little bit to drink and got into a fight and broke a plate glass window." She said, "What's the damage?" I said, I don't remember say, "\$50 court case and \$100 for the window." She said, "Is he in any danger?" I said, "No. He's in the 8th Street jail," the famous 8th Street jail. She said, "If I don't pay?" I said, "Well, since they don't want to feed him they will just kick him out after another 24-hours." She said, "You mean if I don't pay he just spends another 24-hours in jail?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "Tell him I said to cool his heels and maybe he'll learn something from it." So I think the second is much better than the first.

The range in difficulty of ACS cases there is incredible. Every single week there is something.

Q: I hate to put it in the wrong way but for the ACS people was it fun or just a terrible grind? Sometimes, it is much more challenging than sitting on a visa line. How did you find it?

COLBERT: First of all, all the vice consuls wanted to do a stint in ACS because it was away from the visa line. Second of all, they would be working for Kathy Peterson, which in and of itself was a pleasure. Thirdly, it was a challenge to find solutions to problems. If you had good relations with the Mexican authorities, many, many times you could simply fix the problem externally, make it go away.

Q: This, of course, was consular work. Real diplomacy is on the street corner with the local authorities.

COLBERT: Absolutely.

Q: Keep it out of the hands of the legal and all that.

COLBERT: Keep Washington and Mexico City as uninformed as possible. Nobody can screw it up like Washington. We'll over tape that recording but I don't think anybody will disagree with you.

Q: I learned a long time ago that you referred things to Washington really if you didn't want to do anything.

COLBERT: If you do what you wanted to do and you knew that they would agree with you. If you wanted back up for what you already decided. Lou Goelz, bless his soul, said, "Don't ask. Never ask Washington if it's in the U.S. national interest, it's in the interest of the U.S. citizen and it ain't illegal, you can do it. If it doesn't say you can't, you can't, but don't ask."

It was a really, really, really good three and a half years. When I left some Mexican members of the Mexican leadership of the society of movers and shakers as it were, gave me a party. One lady gave me an Oscar and it said, "For Best Performance as a Consul General." I still have that Oscar. She went up to LA and had it made for me.

I would add here that our second daughter went on to the University of Santa Cruz where she did very well indeed. Graduating she went to Taipei to improve her Chinese in formal study and to teach English. She came and did an MA in Business and Asian Studies at the University of California in San Diego. She has had a success business career in California. Her older sister spent about six years in the ARMY, joined a drug company, completed a MBA at Harvard and works in marketing for a large drug company. I most proud of their continuing success – and my modest role in helping them – though most credit should go to their mother. Just she was my greatest diplomatic asset, she was their most important parent.

Q: How wonderful.

COLBERT: I really treasure it.

Q: Well then where did you go then?

COLBERT: From there I went to Madrid. I was going to suggest we stop because tomorrow I may be on a jury and I'd better go home and find out if I am lucky or unlucky.

Q: OK. Well we will stop at this point and what year are we talking about?

COLBERT: This would have been '91 and I would be going to Madrid as CG.

Q: And you went there and were there from '91 to...?

COLBERT: '94.

Q: OK, well we will pick it up at that point.

COLBERT: Okay doke.

Q: OK, today is the 24th of January 2007. Larry how did you end up in Madrid?

COLBERT: Well I really thought I was going off to be principal officer in Montreal. I truly believed it. I had done all my work to make that happen. I had been in contact with people and, in fact, EUR thought I was going, I thought the Bureau of Consular Affairs thought I was going, I certainly thought I was going, and the embassy thought I was coming. I just was waiting for the orders to go from being principal officer in Tijuana to principal officer in Montreal. I had French; I certainly seemed to have the green light for the job. Then I got a call from the DCM in Ottawa who was quite upset with me saying, "I thought that we had agreed that you were coming? I think it is very unprofessional of you to have withdrawn your name." I said, "I beg your pardon." He said, "We've been told by the Department that you've decided you didn't want to come." I said, "Well, that's the first word I've had on that. I certainly didn't withdraw my name and I certainly didn't say I didn't want to come." "Oh," he said, "we've been misinformed." So then I called back and found out that although I thought I was going, the highest level of CA had a different candidate in mind and they hadn't told me. So that they were feeling bad about it because it think they felt that they had sort of...

Q: Who were they putting in there?

COLBERT: I think Leslie Gerson; no I'm not sure who it was but it was a female, that's immaterial, but I do remember it was a woman. But in any event it wasn't me. So I called the DCM back up and said, "I checked and certainly I hadn't withdrawn my name, but in the way that the system works the Bureau of Consular Affairs gets to pick certain positions and they hadn't picked me, they had picked someone else." So he said, "Well, you know how would you like to be consul general in Ottawa?" I said, "Well, I appreciate the officer, I'd love to go to Ottawa but the Bureau of Consular Affairs is feeling bad and sorry for me so they offered me Madrid and between Ottawa and Madrid, between cold and sun, I thought if I wanted to stay married I would have to take Madrid."

I tell the story simply to say that the way assignments are made in the Department are sometimes quite Byzantine, as we all know.

Q: Absolutely. OK, so you are off to Madrid. All of a sudden you were learning about Spain. What was sort of the situation in Spain in was it '91?

COLBERT: Well in '91 the country had been democratic for sometime... democracy had been restored for a number of years. Back, I don't remember how far back, there has been a sort of a quasi-attempted coup by the army and the King of Spain, Juan Carlos, who is clearly on the side of democracy put that down. There developed a healthy multi-party system. Spain had joined NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and when I arrived we were in the process of shutting down the airbase that we had operated at Torrejon, outside of Madrid. We had already closed down an Air Force base that we had operated near Barcelona, and we had mothballed a large base that dates back to the Eisenhower administration near Seville. The American military fingerprint that predated Spanish membership in NATO had gotten much, much, much smaller. So I think at this point the only substantial and I use that qualitatively, I mean relatively the only real base that we have left in Spain was at Rota, which began as a Polaris submarine base, and now it's sort of a multi-purpose Naval facility. It doesn't do much for submarines anymore because they are no longer there.

So the military footprint was much smaller, they had joined NATO, the country was democratic, it was conservative party, which had roots back in the Franco era, and there was a Socialist party which had roots back to the pre-Franco era, but it was a true democracy. There was some terrorism based from ETA, the separatists from the Basque area. But there had been a lot of devolution of power and there were regional governments; the Basque's were allowed to use their language; the Catalans were allowed to use Catalan language. There were a lot of defederalization, power from Madrid to these various a sundry areas.

It was a markedly more prosperous and more advanced economically and political country than I remember from my days in Algeria ten years before.

Q: Well then while you were there who was the ambassador? Could you describe the embassy a little? Was there a different feel from say the Philippines or anywhere else?

COLBERT: Well I would say it was a medium sized embassy as opposed to a super large one like Madrid or London. I arrived there and there was a political appointed ambassador who had married money and then made more money I think in development. I can't remember his name, I'm sure we can look it up. He was an Italian-American, sort of a wheeler-dealer type. I think my recollection was that he was very popular with the Spanish officials; they liked him. He had been there during the Gulf War and he done I think a good job. He was informed about what was going on. Every Friday each major element of the embassy had to write a little memo as to what, I think it was every Friday, but once a week a memo to the ambassador through the DCM explaining what significant

things had happened in your particular area of responsibility. I think he took a regular interest in things.

However, when I arrived we were heading into a presidential election. George Bush senior was, the first George Bush, running for re-election on family values. I must have said re-election, this would have been after the Gulf War and it was sort of ironic given what happened with the next president and set of values but he had a sort of problem on his hands because this particular ambassador was having a raging affair with a former Spanish model, a woman very attractive and a good deal his junior. I didn't know it at the time; I mean when you arrive you don't know these things. But I remember I went to a country team meeting in the normal environment where you have those things and sitting at this big long table and I sort of said in a voice about the level of what I am using now, "Does the ambassador have a dish on his roof?" I wanted to watch football and I thought if the ambassador were away somehow I could get the U.S. football game through Armed Forces Radio, you could get it with a particular dish.

Q: We are talking about a TV antenna.

COLBERT: Yeah, a special kind of TV antenna. So I wanted to see the Redskins and asked, "Does the ambassador have a dish on his roof?" One of the section chief replied, "Yes, every night sometimes more than once." (Laughter.) Of course everybody laughed except me because I didn't know what was going on.

About this time the wife found out and so...

Q: That is usually the way...I've always found out about post affairs through my wife.

COLBERT: Exactly. Well, she found out somehow and the reason I knew she found out is that my wife and I had gone into the embassy on a Saturday or a Sunday just to pick up some newspaper, because the newspapers were sort of dropped at a central place and between the consular section and the main foray there was a big steel door. If you went down this corridor beyond the door you found the consular section, but if you went further on there was a sort of secret passage way or a not so secret passage, not secret in that people didn't know it was there, you could go directly into the residence. So she was coming out of her residence into the Chancery and she opened this door without any warning, this big steel door about decapitated both of us and went by without speaking but clearly in a very unhappy mood. Then that same day she flew out of Madrid. So he had to be replaced because we couldn't have an ambassador having an affair when the president is running on family values..

He was replaced by with a born-again Christian, or I don't know whether born again but certainly Christian with a large C who carried his religion on his sleeve. He didn't take a real interest in what was going on, he enjoyed being an ambassador and traveled a lot and it was very Christian, with a big C. Obviously staying in a Christian country, it was predominantly Catholic but it was a European Catholic.

Q: He took the wrong path.

COLBERT: But they don't carry their religion quite as much as he did. I think probably one of the best examples of that is a story that I will tell you is getting invited to a black-tie dinner at the ambassadors residence and there were maybe six or eight tables of ten or twelve people. The ambassador welcomed everybody in English; he didn't speak any Spanish at all and then sat down so everybody else sat down. But then he stood up and he said, "Oh I forgot that in our home and this is our home we always say grace before meals so that I would like everybody to hold people's hands around and I will say a prayer to the good Lord." Or something in that sense.

So I take the lady's hands on either side of me, one from the left and one from the right. The one to the left was a very sophisticated woman looked and her husband I found out latter was the head of the Jewish community of Spain. He was the senior Rabbi, and he was the official Jewish representative to the State Council on Religions, which I will come back to or whatever it is called. The lady on my right was maybe in her very early twenties. This was her first time in this level of society and her husband was very recently selected as young entrepreneur of the year kind of thing. The one on my left took my hand without any great trepidation, without any great tension having understood in English. She was in fact multilingual, being originally from Morocco. The lady on my right clearly I could feel the tension in her hand, "why are these two me grabbing my hands." So we said our little prayer, at least he did and we all sat down. I turned to the lady on my left and said, "Madam, I don't know you very well, but I do want to apologize. I did hold your hand but I didn't touch your knee with mine because he didn't mention that." She laughed out loud and I never got invited back to another black-tie dinner. I don't know if I...but he left after about a year and he was preceded by my third ambassador in three years, Gardner, former ambassador ...

Q: In Italy.

COLBERT: In Italy and...

Q: Richard Gardner.

COLBERT: Richard Gardner, right. Mrs. Gardner...

Q: Danielle.

COLBERT: Danielle was an interesting lady. I suppose I will just leave it at that. There was some question as to who ran the front office though. He certainly knew what was going on and was well plugged in with the Carter White House, because he was a career Democratic apparatchik. I think...

Q: Not the Carter White House but the...

COLBERT: Clinton White House because he had been ambassador to Rome under Carter. I misspoke, sorry. I'll tell you a story, which I think is maybe something for all of us to bear in mind.

While I was there near the end of my three years, I'm getting a head of myself but it is still about the ambassadors, the DCMship came open or was kept open. The Department because of pressure from the NSC, the National Security Council, and Sandy Berger in particular, nominated an FS-01, an FS-1 to be the DCM. There were four minister counselor running the various State Department elements, me as consul general and then one for Econ, Political and, of course, Administration. This didn't really affect me at all. One, as consular section chief who the DCM is doesn't really matter very much. He writes you but he doesn't really understand what you do anyways, poor kid. And two, I was getting ready to leave anyway. But the two or in fact the three other minister counselors particularly the econ, political and the econ and the political were very unhappy about this fact that they were minister counselors and they were going to be supervised by a person two grades lower than them in a job which actually called for minister counselor rank.

But the Department because of pressure from the NSC was going to make the assignment. You can imagine there were a lot of bidders to be DCM in Spain. But it was going to happen except then the Ambassador weighed in and said, "This really was a problem." He pointed out to the NSC that they were looking for an entry level person who worked in the NSC and they had apparently identified a candidate for this entry level professional job, a person who turned out to be a minority, graduate of Harvard who had gone on scholarship and been interviewed selected on merit. Ambassador Gardner apparently reportedly said, "Well look I have a son who would really like to have that job." So he had real affirmative action working here. They dumped the guy that they offered the job to who was a minority who had gone to Harvard on scholarship and gotten the job on his own merit to hire the ambassador's son. The Gardners certainly weren't poor; he was a lawyer from Manhattan and a professor at...

Q: Columbia.

COLBERT: Columbia, and so we had affirmative action. The FS-1 came to Madrid and Gardner's son got the job in the White House. In fact the guy who came as a FS-1 DCM I'm told did a good job, I wasn't there.

Q: Who is this?

COLBERT: I don't want to say because I am not certain of the name, but I think the point is the person who got the job got the job because he had been working in the NSC and the National Security Adviser shoved him down the throat of the establishment. Interesting.

Pardon the diversion.

Q: No, no, no but it gives the feel for the...how things happen. I won't say how they work but how they happen.

COLBERT: Well when I arrived in Madrid I was in charge of supervising the two consulates, Bilbao and Barcelona and running the consulate in Madrid. The Olympics were going to be in Barcelona and the new principal officer didn't want to be supervised by a consular officer; she wanted to be supervised by a substantive officer.

Q: Who was that?

COLBERT: A lady whose name will come to me in a while.

Q: Ruth Davis was it?

COLBERT: No, this was a person who followed Ruth Davis. She made somewhat of a fuss about it, but on the other hand this is the way it was and this was the way it was going to be. But then suddenly in the case of Barcelona with the Olympics everybody was telling her what to do, everybody was going to Barcelona for reasons related to the Olympics, security, military, agency, everybody was giving her instructions and I found that I had the responsibility but I didn't have the authority. So I went to the DCM and said, "You know this is really not a good situation here. I'm theoretically in charge, but I don't know what the hell is going on and it's clear that in some instances I'm not going to know what is going on." So he said, "Well what if I were to supervise?" I said, "Well, if you would like to supervise the two posts that was fine by me." I've been doing it for a year and you've been happy but if you want to take it over..." He said, "Well I will take it over." So in the end, I simply gave up responsibility for supervising her. I continued to be responsible for the consular aspects of the post but I gave up supervising the post. I don't know whether my successor liked that or not but I was comfortable with it.

Bilbao was subsequently closed. I think it is really funny because I'm not sure whether I proposed giving it up or the DCM proposed giving it up because there was a very difficult situation that occurred in Bilbao. Shortly after I had agreed to give up supervising the two posts overall, and at this point I'm not sure in my mind whether I proposed it or the DCM proposed it but something happened in Bilbao, which was quite difficult. It was a two-officer post and the more junior person, who was called me to complain about how he was being treated by his superior – "being hit on in a word" It was a very delicate matter so I went to the DCM and reported the situation to him. He said, "Well what are you going to do about it?" I said, "Ah, as you recall this is now your problem so he was stuck with a very difficult and potentially very embarrassing situation, one which I was glad was not mine to deal with.

To go back to the operation of the embassy there were really good people; there was really first class organization. If I can give an example, the Army attaché had minored in Spanish at West Point, had taught Spanish at West Point as a mid-level, probably a captain or fairly light major, then had done a detail, or sort of assignment at a Spanish military school at the lieutenant colonel level. He knew everybody in the Spanish

military, everybody in the Spanish Army at least. The station chief told me once over a drink that nobody that he knew outside the theater, that is to say outside the operational zone, nobody in Europe had done more to assist us in terms of getting cooperation, getting things to happen during the first Gulf War than the Army attaché. It was because of his tremendous contacts with people who are now generals and very senior commanders in the Spanish army. The Spanish did not send troops to the Gulf but they had been heavily involved in Iraq in a way, which was important for us. I think he was able to get great cooperation. As an example, the political counselor was very, very good at what he did, I mean everybody there was professional mind you, a very good embassy.

Unfortunately, there were clashes as there always are. The second admin counselor - the first admin counselor was very low key, very proficient, very experienced - the second one was very energetic, very direct perhaps and got things done but he broke lots of eggs to make his omelet. For reasons, which were never quite, clear to me a war broke out between the senior military attaché and the admin counselor. Both of them accused the other of all kinds of things. The inspector general of the State Department came to investigate in large measure the admin counselor because of accusations that he thought came from the senior military attaché. In the end they ended up screwing each other, I think the Air Force colonel would have made general had he not gotten involved in this ... I dropped the _____.

Q: You were going to say a pissing contest.

COLBERT: I was.

Q: But we won't say it.

COLBERT: We won't say it but in this context. It was ironic because they both liked and I think both respected me so they would periodically come into my office and vent about the other one, and I had to sort of just listen and nod and not take sides. I think both of them helped make a difficult situation worse. But I think part of it in large measure was the admin counselor when he decided to go a particular way he went. If 99 percent of the embassy didn't want to go that way and he thought it was the way to go he could make it happen and we would go that way. On the other hand he was very competent I will give him that. It was very unfortunate.

Both DCMs were very good..

In consular operations there really were not that many problems. We had the normal ACS type cases which we do everywhere within Europe and I had a very good team of people. We had several very difficult extradition cases, which went well.

Q: Do you recall any of them? I mean what...?

COLBERT: I do and one in particular comes to mind. A Cuban refugee from Castro had managed to get through Columbia or Yale medical school, one of these established

medical schools and at some point established a practice in Florida that more and more dealt with Medicare and Medicaid patients. There's a rule that no more, or there was a rule at that time that no more than a certain percentage of your practice can be Medicare and Medicaid. He got an exception to the rule from either, I think from the Reagan or the Bush administration; he got the exception from however you get one. Then it came to pass that he embezzled or cheated the government out of perhaps \$200 million of overcharges and fraudulent claims. But he had gotten this exception, and then he fled to Venezuela and apparently there was not really a really strong effort to get him back. There was a warrant out for his arrest but he was in Venezuela.

When the administration changed or shortly before the administration changed and Clinton came in he had fled or proceeded to flee to Madrid where I inherited the headache. He took a Spanish wife. Under Spanish law if you have a Spanish wife it's virtually impossible to extradite a non-Spanish person from Spain. However, he brought his American wife along too, and he had her in one house and he had his so-called Spanish wife or Spanish wife in another house. So my job was to move this extradition forward. I think the role of a consular officer or the consular section in such instances is at most you are just sort of just a postman. You take the legal papers to the MFA over and bring the response back and forth. You might try to massage the system a bit but it either goes right through or it becomes political. If it becomes political then your role becomes very finite.

But in this case we did the paper work correctly and everything was moving along but it was taking a long time. This was now a new Department of Justice under new leadership, and they would like to have this "Republican" crook back, as it was a Democratic administration, not that these things were ever political. But they wanted this guy and so we were working the problem and I get a phone call saying from the Department of Justice that they would like to send over a Department of Justice person and an FBI agent to assist me. I said, "Well assist me how?" "Well, assist you in making this happen." I said, "Well, I don't even see any way you can assist me. I've sent the paperwork over, I figured I was going to check on it and make the right motions that it goes from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the Ministry of Justice to the judges to make the determination. I don't really see what we are supposed to do here." But I was told they were coming, so they came.

I had a wonderful FSN assisting me who was a lawyer who handled all the legal stuff. So she called over to the senior judge who did extraditions and said these two people are in town. So she got a call back; she knew them very well; I knew them as well. The judges had told her that provided that she and I would come along the judges would like to invite the two American visitors to lunch, very unusual. Normally, diplomats treat government officials to lunch; rarely do government officials treat you to lunch, very rare. But certainly we were honored and we accepted.

On the appointed day the four of us, in a government vehicle, were dropped off at a restaurant that I didn't even know existed. I thought I knew most of the restaurants in the area before. Of course, there are a lot of restaurants. Anyway we go into this lovely

restaurant and there is a waiter there and he offers us all a glass of champagne, a very nice champagne, and introduces everybody including one of the judges who was a person I admired a great deal, he was in a wheelchair because ETA had tried to blow him up on a couple of occasions and one time they nearly succeeded.

So we are having the champagne with these judges and a couple of hangers-on in the main room. Then we proceeded into the dining room and we have taken over the whole restaurant. Also if you look down the street the street had been blocked off with soldiers with machine guns, not for our purposes but to keep the judges alive because every where they went they went with body guards and they were going to be in this restaurant for a period of time so we had the whole restaurant. So we sit down to this fabulous meal, it was soup and that sort of meal. Maybe after the second course, by that point or at least the second serving of a different wine, the FBI leaned over at me and said, "What do you think this meal is costing?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, would it be more than my per diem?" I said, "Well, it would probably be per person about what your per diem per room board and incidentals for two days and certainly for one day." He said, "Well, I can't stay, I can't afford it." I said, "You don't understand, they are paying." He said, "Well no, our regulations say that I can't eat a meal unless I pay for it." "Well this is overseas and you are under their auspices, their treat. Sometimes I treat them but not usually, not this luxuriously or which ever but certainly this is their treat, they invited you. You are their guest, they are having a feast." "I can't stay" he said. I replied "If you get up and leave then I would say the chances of getting the good doctor back on extradition has dropped substantially. You will have insulted these folks and our hosts only have to say no, there is no appeal, and the good doctor will stay here in Spain." He said, "You mean I have to stay here and enjoy myself?" I said, "Yes." So he stayed and I thought that was funny. Afterwards he said, "Do you have to do this often?" I said, "Occasionally."

I have never forgotten that he was going to walk out because he couldn't afford it under his per diem. In fact, we did get the good doctor back and I think the meal helped a bit. It is just a different world out there.

Q: You were talking about American services. Can you think of... I mean just to get a feel because in Tijuana you had what the daily going to the jails and cleaning them out. What sort of things did you have?

COLBERT: The problems we had there were mostly street crimes involving American tourists or American residents - dying, people getting sick. We had a horrible, horrible problem with people arriving at Madrid airport and picking up their rental car and then on the super highway coming into the city having a flat tire and a "good Samaritan" stopping to help them and robbing them instead. When I first arrived we had maybe ten of these a week, certainly ten of them a month. They were constant. We tried everything. We tried to get the rental car company to pass out a flyer, to post and pass out a flyer which warned people if they got a flat tire to just keep on driving and ruin the tire but don't stop. Go into a filling station or go to a hotel but don't stop on the highway because you are going to be robbed either by being conned and think you are getting help or the person

will simply rob you period. When we went to the Spanish police about this problem we were told that these were Peruvians or these were Chileans. They were South Americans who they deport and they just come back again because they didn't need visas. But we really were getting nowhere and we were getting very frustrated because these people were either being ripped off and we felt sorry for them. Also it was a big workload problem for us. We felt that we should be able to solve this problem. So finally the occasion arrived, a person came in who had this happen to him. I asked the vice consul to bring this person into my office. I said, "Well certainly at the Hertz, Avis, National, whatever rental car company they did give you this flyer didn't they?" "No they didn't." I said, "Oh, well we had an understanding with them that they would do this and we are really sorry. It really would be wrong of me to suggest that you sue the company. So I won't suggest you sue them because if you were to sue them and I had suggested it that would really be a terrible thing. So please don't sue them." I said, "This vice consul here sitting behind me is my witness that I am not suggesting that you sue them. This is really a serious problem." The guy sued them despite my not recommending it.

We got an irate telephone call from the general manager of one of the big car rental companies saying that I had suggested that Americans sue them and that he was going to be doing something nasty to me. I said, "Well, I can tell you categorically I did not suggest that they sue. I did not suggest that and I have a witness to that affect." I said, "If you ask the person who is suing you if I suggested that they sue you, you know, he will tell you under oath that I didn't suggest that." But strangely enough after they were sued all of the staff at the rental counters started passing out the flyers, and I thought that was a good thing. The kicker was that I didn't suggest that they sue.

Q: I have to add that it's not quite coming across on the transcription but the tone of voice, I think, saying that let's say there was a leading inference in...

COLBERT: I have say for the record say that I did not suggest him to sue.

Q: I understand completely. But tell me, this sounds like it had to have been an inside job.

COLBERT: It was, we determined that there was a person watching the people getting the rental car contract and then another person with a cell phone spotter and it was a team. They (the thieves) observe, that the persons (or persons) is obviously coming from the United States or Canada and renting a car. When it is apparent which rental care the traveler(s) is getting, somebody would put a needle in a tire. Some people involved were even working in the car rental company.

Q: That is what I imagined I mean because...

COLBERT: It was a very, very big problem. I don't know whether the problem has resurrected or not but I was happy that we were able to do something to force the car rental companies to take an interest in it. Their position seemed to be well; it's not our problem. This happened off our property...but it was their problem.

Q: Yeah, well it sounds, I mean if you are renting a car and you take the car off the rental car agency property the initial insertion of ice pick or something had to take place on the property.

COLBERT: The rental companies were flaming mad, but that was something we dealt with. There were lots and lots of muggings, occasionally knifings. There was a problem unfortunately of the Spanish police harassing people of color, not in a sense that they were picking on African-Americans or Hispanic Americans of darker skin. They were really looking for Moroccans and Tunisians and others. So when we said we don't want you to single out our citizens, they would say we are not singling out your citizens, we are looking for people who don't belong here and who are here illegally. So we occasionally got some complaints about that. I never did find a satisfactory explanation. I did urge people to carry their passports or at least a copy of their passports with them so they could avoid something, which shouldn't have occurred but did occur.

Q: Were there any problems involved with the Basque conflict for Americans?

COLBERT: Well I think there is always the risk that if the Basque terrorists did something nasty you could find yourself inadvertently in the middle of it. The Basque for the most part would usually phone a warning before they blew something up or did something. They targeted police and military for the most part. This is not to say that I approve of that but the chance of an American being killed was definitely low. Bombs went off in and around us, and at least in a couple of occasions within the block or two of the American embassy which is right in the best section of Madrid.

Q: How involved was Richard Gardner with the consular operations?

COLBERT: In my recollection, not at all. I know that many, many consular section chiefs have had negative experiences with front office getting involved in visa decisions primarily. My recollection is - from 15 or so years back; it's been so many years now - that we did not. I can't think of a single time that he tried to influence a visa decision one way or the other.

But then while I was there I finished up something that my predecessor had started which was negotiating things inclusion in the visa waiver pilot program. So that Spaniards didn't need visas for a period of up to 90 days in the States, as tourists, certainly to get a company exchange L visas or H1 visas or H1B temporary worker visas. If they had the petition, they got the visa. Student visas were not a problem. So no, I think the only people that had problems getting visas would have been non-Spaniards particularly non-Spaniards from other than European countries and most European countries had the visa waiver anyway. So I didn't really see it as a problem.

I had two very good visa chiefs, oh...and interesting story which I can tell you. I had just come to work and my secretary said, "Senator from Georgia..." who had been there for a long time, Senator Nunn.

COLBERT: "Senator Nunn was on the phone and wanted to talk to me." He knew my name, that's never good. I came on the phone and indeed it was the Senator. But he said, "Are you Larry Colbert?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well I want you to know that the illegitimate daughter, the daughter of Fidel Castro, is in such a such hotel right now and I would like you to arrange for her immediate entry into the United States." I said, "Well Senator that would probably require humanitarian parole and with all due respect the immigration office, immigration service is right down the road from the Senate and I have to get their authority. Maybe you could call them?" I said, "I'm saying that respectfully but this is really an INS issue rather than a State Department issue." He said, "I don't like to work with those folks..." He was in the Senate and he was very powerful, he was at the time a senior member of the Senate, "I want you to make this happen.", he told me. I said, "Well, give me your name and number and I'll get right back to you."

Now I was reasonably competent I could work this out. But what I didn't know t was whether the information was true; probably was true; but my next unfortunate decision was to go up and tell the DCM that this whatever her name was, not Castro, was in Madrid having what turned out, been smuggled out by exchanging her passport for that of a Spanish tourist. It was a rigged deal, the Spanish tourist looked like her, went in and Castro's daughter left with the Spanish tour group. So I go up and tell the DCM that unbeknownst to the Spanish government and unbeknownst to us until my phone call, we now have a unexpected guest! Anyway, is in town. Suddenly everything had to be handled on an Eyes Only situation. Don't tell anybody, we've got to talk on a secure telephone, we are going to do this, we are going to do that all by secure means. Meanwhile I had promised the Senator I would call him back. I was told by the DCM I couldn't call the Senator back - it will all be handled in Washington. I was thinking this was not going to work this way. But this was not really a State issue. But anyway, so I'm told to go over to the hotel with the number two person in the political section who was a Cuban-American and see if this really was the lady in question. In fact, he even knew who she was and confirmed her identity right away.

While with the DCM, I neglected to tell my boss that I told my visa section chief, my unit chief, about this. Then we have to make an appointment to go talk to the head of American affairs at the M F A and tell him that this lady was in Madrid; we have to call on the secure phone to Washington, etc., etc., etc. Everybody is being mobilized in Washington; at this point the whole government is gearing up. I come back to my office after several hours of all this "burn before you read type cables and telephone calls to find out that my subordinate on his own initiative - bless his heart - had simply called down to Rome, got the INS officer in the regional INS office on the phone, explained who the person was and recommended humanitarian parole and got the parole.

So the Department is still trying to decide what to do, whom to talk and I go back up to the DCM and I said, "Well, the Immigration Service has decided to grant humanitarian parole effective immediately and will draw them up a letter." He said, "We don't have any guidance." I said, "You don't need any guidance, the Immigration Service has decided to do this, our job is simply to provide the lady with a transportation letter."

“Oh,” he said, “Well, umm, I have to send an immediate classified cable back to the Department.” I said, “OK, can I call the Senator?” “No.” I was thinking this is not really going well at this particular point. Luckily I went down and the phone rang and it was the Senator saying you owed me a phone call. So I said, “Senator, we are going to have a sort of off-the-record telephone conversation right now.” I said, “My instructions are to let the Department of State talk to you, not to phone you.. At some point in the next millennium they will be calling you.” He said, “You’re being sarcastic.” I said, “Well, just a little. But off-the-record it’s all arranged and it’s been agreed to and she will be on this Delta flight into Atlanta tomorrow.” He said, “Really?” I said, “Really.” So he was there, there was a nice photo op.

In the end I convinced the DCM to let me send a vice consul along with her since she spoke no English, was well into the “free booze in her room, as well as the existence of Castro agents in Madrid and finally because we had paid her way. That was a nice propaganda tool and everybody was happy but it was a consular issue that was rather straightforward but became unduly complicated because of...

Q: This so often happens. This is why most of us learn only if you want to delay advise the furthers up.

COLBERT: I thought in the case of who she was we had to let the DCM know that she was in the country. But I did not expect that it would then become a federal case or unduly bureaucratic. But it was a success and I credit my sometimes overly energetic officer, I mean the same officer on another occasion came to me to say that we had gotten this message that there were people being smuggled into the United States through Madrid airport and that they were looking and this had been on going for some time and they had been investigating it. He was very upset that the Department knew this, or if the Bureau of Consular Affairs Anti-Fraud Office knew about this why didn’t they tell us. He was very agitated, because he was also the fraud officer. I was very calm about it when this happened but unfortunately for me Mary Ryan, the Assistant Secretary was coming to Madrid the next day, and I was involved in making her schedule and taking care of her. So I said, “Just handle it.” He brought me a cable he was going to send back which was very intemperate. I was very busy, and I said to him, “Tone it down, just tell them why we think they are not handling this right and send it off.” I never saw it again and he sent out one that was toned down but not enough so that the DCM called me up and said that he was very upset with the cable and that we can’t talk that way to the Department of State and he was going to personally withdraw the cable or have it cancelled, or something. He was very upset with me. I said, “Well it is one I dropped and I had told my subordinate to tone it down and I thought he would. I was preoccupied with other matters, I didn’t check.” So he was unhappy but it went out. But actually it reappeared because it was the only negative thing in my EER that year saying that I let a cable go out that I shouldn’t have. I thought well in the greater scheme of things that’s OK. So the young man who saved my bacon in one case perhaps fried it a bit in another which always. It all worked out.

Q: Well then did you, how did you find, what was your sort of I don't know impression of Spanish society? You'd been in other countries and then what was your impression of Spain?

COLBERT: I think it was hard to make close Spanish friends I think. You have acquaintances, but I don't think we made many Spanish friends that were of the type that would invite me to their homes, a few but not very many. But they were gracious, kind; it was a pleasant three years. I was able to leave after three years. I thought the food was fresh but not spicy enough to my taste.. I thought the life style was very pleasant, I think that they knew how to live life. I think that the little cafes that sprung up and one could go get yourself a fino and olives and some other things to munch on around six o'clock or seven o'clock in the evening the stroll around. No, it was a nice place.

It's hard I think being in such a civilized place where everybody seemingly gets along very well to realize what it must have been like in the middle thirties when they were killing each other right and left – no pun intended.

Q: Well then in '93, was it or...?

COLBERT: '94.

Q: '94 whither?

COLBERT: Whither? Actually, I went to Ciudad Juarez as consul general, a border town facing El Paso. Again I think it might be constructive to talk about how I got there. I was saying a little while ago that Mary Ryan paid an official visit to Madrid. A year or two before I had the unfortunate, unpleasant encounter entertaining and taking around her predecessor the famous Betty Tamposi, who most people would say was one of the worse political appointees in recent memory Mary Ryan, of course, was quite different so we went, and looked, and saw and did and so on. We were coming back from visiting Seville where we had a consular agency that used to be a consulate general and on the train we talked about some of my staff and where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do and at some point she said, "And what about you, what do you want to do next?" I said, "I want to be a principal officer in Ciudad Juarez, I had enjoyed the challenges at the border, the problems on the border when I was in Tijuana and I would like to do it again." She said, "She thought that was possible." And lo and behold I got assigned there.

Q: So you were in Ciudad Juarez from when to when?

COLBERT: From '94 to '97.

Q: Talk a bit about Ciudad Juarez.

COLBERT: Well, it's a place of contradictions. It's one of the richest cities in Mexico. It has the highest level of education – of literacy in Mexico; it has a major industrial basis of Maquiadora, that is a major industrial base maybe several hundred maybe even more

factories that manufacture for the U.S. It was the second state to elect a Panista or so called opposition party mayor and governor (now of course the PAN are running the federal government but at that time they were the second state to be allowed to win the election, that is was allowed to have the people who were elected win. It is a very northern city in which they had the same disdainful view of Mexico City and the government elite as they did in Tijuana, the other border town.

In comparison with El Paso literacy rate is lower and the unemployment rate is higher. In comparison with El Paso which is just across the border it is poorer, El Paso is the poorest major city in the United States but it's richer per capita by far than it's neighbor to the south which is richer than most of Mexico. It's a city of contrast. It has several universities including a couple of very good ones. It was a major transit place for illegal immigration, had been until the fencing went up and the Border Patrol become more active; the migrants then moved farther into the desert and away from the city. It is a major transit point for illegal narcotics. It is the home of one of the major cartels. It's full of very, very, very nice people. Most people in Ciudad Juarez have immediate relatives in El Paso and vice versa. Perhaps 60 percent of the homes in El Paso speak Spanish as a first language. Most people in the two cities go back and forth as regularly as people from Virginia go to Maryland; the only difference is you have to have travel document and .

It is the largest immigrant visa operation in the entire world that we have. While I was there roughly twenty percent of all the immigrant visas issued worldwide were issued there. Normally, when I was there, we issued a thousand immigrant visas a day. I may be overstating...no I don't think that. That figure is probably right on. I know the day after Richard Nixon's funeral we issued two thousand. Why did we issue two thousand? Because we do all the immigrant visas for all of Mexico and they had their appointment letters and they turned up and the government announced at the last minute that we would be closed for Richard Nixon's funeral. So we had all these people who had come from the United States to get their papers to go back to the United States both from Mexico to get their papers to go into the United States. It meant extra time from their modest jobs with lost income and the added expense for hotels and meals – usually for an entire family, so we had to move out –as the cowboys used to say in movies...

Most of our immigrant visas issues are to people who are already in the States and having gotten to the States illegally have somehow acquired inequity to somehow come back and get visa based on employment and a visa based upon personal relationships, blood relationships.

I remember very well the inspectors coming to inspect my post. At the end of the inspection the admin inspector said to me he was, "...very disturbed to find after auditing our records on one day that three people had gotten their immigrant visas without paying for them and that we were out \$600." I said to him, "Well you know Sam we actually put that in your briefing materials." The point I was making was we certainly hadn't hid it from them. I said, "You will also note that we also of the three people, the three families, which included 300 visas, in all three instances people had come in and lacked a document and we put them on sort of administratively of hold while they went

off to get another piece of paper or papers. In the rush of the day, which was the day after Richard Nixon's funeral there were 2,000 immigrant visas. So these people had managed to acquire, to pick up their documentation, pick up their visa without paying and certainly that was a terrible mistake, even in light of the fact that we were doing two thousand cases probably what a normal post would do in two or three years?

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I said, "You will also note that we wrote the people and assured them that a check for the requisite amount so at that point we were really only out \$200 or something, whatever the amount was. And in point of fact, we have 26 immigrant officers here, 26 immigrant officers and each officer put in a few bucks out of their pockets voluntarily so that the cashier would not be forced to make up \$200 that she only made \$4 or \$5 thousand a year. So the government didn't lose a penny. But we did make a mistake." I said, "Let's put it another way," I said, "Last year this post collected \$26 million in immigrant visa fees, \$26 million." I said, "And you are saying that we lost temporarily \$600. If I were working for General Motors or General Electric or IBM if I had lost \$600 on \$26 million I would be getting a cash bonus." He was not amused. But I think that was sort of an eyeglass, green eyeshade view. In fact we actually were making a profit for the government, after you deducted out our modest operating costs.

Q: Did the illegal operation, illegal immigrant thing, did that touch you at all?

COLBERT: Only when something happened which caused a public relations problem.- when an immigrant drowned in a canal there were these big water canals, irrigation canals, when an immigrant was or was not allegedly mistreated by the border patrol, when an alien smuggler or illegal was shot or allegedly harmed by the border patrol or others. That became a public relations problem, but the most part the people who were going to sneak in didn't come to see us, they went around us. For the most part long time residence of the state of Chihuahua, which is the about the size of Indiana and Illinois together or maybe Indiana and Illinois and Ohio, it is the biggest single state in Mexico., most of the people who lived there could get visas anyway and they had been coming and going for generations.

I remember once the honorary consul of France who was from Chihuahua City the capital, came to see me and he had this other guy in tow with him, and I thought "Hmmm." Here was this lawyer coming to see me with this cowboy and what was this alarm going off, oh he is coming in to get this guy a visa. I'm, you know, not terribly happy because I have to do something that I don't want to do, I'm consul general and I shouldn't actually be doing visa cases. Yet, he is an important person and I've got to be nice to him. So there is so-called cowboy friend, there is a Texas expression 'All hat and no cattle' or "All belt, because they had these big belts, and no cattle." This guy had a big cowboy hat and I'm thinking "Hmm, cowboy, Some Cowboy indeed." He had a 50 thousand hectare spread in Chihuahua, he had a 25 thousand hectare spread in New Mexico and he had a small little place, 100 thousand hectares in Brazil, this cowboy. He was one rich man! It turned out that the cowboy, in front of me, had come in to get a

student visa for his daughter to go to Calvert Military Academy and that she would be the fourth generation to go to Calvert Military Academy. You find those connections, you find people who have connections in the United States going back many, many, many years.

But I mean you did have problems. There were pollution issues, there were water problems, and there were certainly border violence problems. I think my best, well there were actually two stories which I can tell which will probably indicate how complicated the job can be. Because as the principal officer at a border post it is not like being principal officer in Barcelona where there is representation, catering to the scholarly patron, whither the provincial government.. You're operational, you are problem solving, you are an immediate reactive person. You are almost like being on point in the military patrol.

Case in point, one Thanksgiving my wife and I decided since neither of our adult children were coming that we'd go across the border and have Thanksgiving in the El Paso club. The El Paso Club was a nice restaurant, on top of a bank where we were allowed to eat as long as we paid, courtesy of one of our Mexican friends who was a long time member there – sort of a courtesy membership. We'd go in. eat and pay the bill, that's all. It was a nice place with a view and we were going to have a nice leisurely Thanksgiving dinner at the El Paso Club. At about eight o'clock in the morning we got a call that the Mexican police had pursued a notorious carjacker, murderer and criminal with his gun moll, his girlfriend into the United States. He had attempted to hijack a car that contained a woman who turned out to be the wife of the senior military officer. He got in the car and threw her on the ground and he and his moll took off. Shortly there after, they were pursued by a convoy of Mexican police who were up kind of up on getting this guy with the police determined to catch them, because he was really a bad guy. There is a road that runs along side the border on the U.S. side and it runs alongside the border on the Mexican side. Well the Mexican road goes quite a long way but well past Juarez going east in the direction of New York City, so to speak. There is a small border-crossing place, it has a bridge, the water may be ankle deep, maybe more, and on one side is the U.S. and the other Mexico, there is no real fence, it is desert.

Well this villain drove his car into the water, up and by-passing the U. S authorities and went directly into the States. Well, the cavalcade of Mexico police followed him. as well shooting at him. At some point his car become stuck and so Mexican police grabbed the carjacker and his moll, the companion who turned out to be a career criminal too, and dragged the two of them back across the border. Before they could manage all that, the U.S. customs service managed to grab and arrest two Mexican policemen. So now that is when I got the phone call about eight o'clock in the morning. The Mexicans had the two bad guys and the Americans had the two Mexican policemen. Everybody was thoroughly ticked off. They had invaded our country, they had fired guns in our country and the U.S authorities were very unhappy. The Mexicans were equally unhappy that we had their people. We had kidnapped their policemen, and our point of view was they had kidnapped two innocent civilians from our side of the border.

It was becoming a sort of press circus as well. So I confer with everybody I can, tell the embassy what's going on and the embassy tells me it is going to send a diplomatic note of protest. So taking my cell with me I go to have my Thanksgiving early. Everybody is on their cell phones talking back and forth but it's a true "Mexican standoff". But saner minds are beginning to realize we need to calm down...the federal authorities on the U.S. side realize that they don't really want to press charges; they don't really want to prosecute these two Mexican policemen on federal charges. So they very cleverly gave them over to the El Paso police or actually to the state police, but the U S still has them on their hands. And the Mexicans authorities are embarrassed by the actions of their police, yet there is Mexico City and the Mexican press to consider I'm at this point sort of neither them nor them – not on either side but wanting a face-saving solution - sort of in the middle. I'm conferring with the consul general of Mexico in El Paso and I'm conferring with the Mexican officials and U.S. Officials, so back and forth and back and forth we go. Many, many phone calls in all directions – countless.

So then the U.S. authorities decide they want to come visit the kidnapped civilians taken from their shores. But they were afraid that if they come to Mexico the Mexicans might just grab them as counter hostages. But they wanted to visit these people who have been kidnapped from U.S. soil. So they proposed that be the intermediary and meet them at the middle of the bridge with the Mexican authorities coming up to the middle from their side. I would then lead them along with the Mexican officials to visit the men's prison and the woman's prison and see these two poor victims. So I said, "Sure." It was all arranged. My driver is on vacation so I have to drive myself. So I drive my office sedan it was two o'clock in the afternoon, maybe closer to three, anyway late afternoon, to the middle of the bridge; it is a free bridge that's no toll on either side. I park in the middle of the bridge, nobody is there, just me, it is Thanksgiving. I find the Washington Redskins game on the football - they are playing Dallas, Dallas is a big time football-wise in Tijuana and Juarez. So I'm sitting on the bridge listening to the football game. Up comes a cavalcade of Mexican cars, these gentlemen were the federal prosecutor for the state of Chihuahua, the police chief and three cars of other Mexican officials all in their Sunday best. So I said, "Well, while we are waiting..." and I switched the Redskins game to the Spanish station, so we are listening to the Redskins-Dallas game. I'm rooting at this point very discretely for Washington, because but they are all rooting for Dallas because Texas and Chihuahua are really strong Dallas fans.... Well a little bit later another cavalcade of cars come the other direction and we all shake hands and we all go. I'm the sort of the guarantee for the Americans to make that the Mexicans are not going to grab any of them because we had grabbed two of theirs. I don't think it would have happened anyway, but the Americans were really nervous.

So we go first to the men's prison. This guy is the biggest scumbag of scumbags. I mean a cold-stone killer. This guy had a rap sheet, which made Charlie Manson go pale. I mean this guy was really a bad guy and you see the light beginning to dawn on the American officials, because they are coming to see about the "kidnapped victims". So then we go to the woman's prison; she is an equally hard person. And we see her rap sheet, not a nice person. It was occurring to these Americans that if the Mexicans do surrender these people and we take them back they are not really guilty of anything in the States. They

would be essentially paroled in the United States and we will be taking back killers. So it was not articulated but you can just see the wheels beginning to turn, everybody... thinking hmm. So then we have to come up with some way to sort this thing out. So we decide that we will use the mechanism of the border liaison mechanism, which was the system whereby the local officials, state officials and federal officials on both sides meet regularly to discuss issues or they can meet specially for an issue. So we set up this border affairs liaison, and we schedule it in a place on the U.S. side because the U.S. officials still are afraid to go to Mexico still and somewhere the press can't find us. We decide that we will have pre meetings; we will have an American pre meeting and a Mexican pre meeting. This is all worked out between the Mexican consul general and me and a couple other people who are prepared to play.

So in the American meeting the Americans all vent and complain. We are going to do this to them and we are going to do this and we've got them by the short and curlies and so on and so forth. The same thing is happening in the Mexico meeting. So the Mexican consul general and I sort of meet between and during these meetings and so then we go to people on both sides who are a little more reasonable and we say, "Let's just find a way to make this go away." So the senior FBI agent, the agent in charge of El Paso at that time, we've already talked. He said to the group, "You know we can really make them pay but if we do what do we get out of it? Do we lose cooperation here, we lose cooperation there and all we get is a couple of Mexican policemen in jail for a week, a month, two years and so what, they were just chasing two bad guys. Besides the Mexicans might respond by saying yeah and we'll give you the two people that you want back and we don't really want them back do we?" So they agreed that the Mexican policemen would be released from jail, and they won't be allowed to come across the border and shop at Wal-Mart or Costco, a joke, but they won't be allowed to come across the border for X number of weeks and they'll be on probation for X period of time. The two bad guys can stay in Mexico and it all went away.

So we worked this thing all out and it was all worked out. So then I go back to the consulate and I pick up the phone and I call the ambassador and I say, "Well, it's all gone." He said, "Well what is the arrangement? I told him the details in a general way. Did you clear this with Washington? Or with us?", he asked. I said, "Of course not." There is this long pause. He said, "By the way we are still trying to get language cleared for our diplomatic note of protest." Actually it was a real coup. The consul general of Mexico and I because we got along well and the fact that each of us knew the officials on both sides were able to solve a problem locally which had a real potential for being a public relations nightmare and it just went away. We didn't, at any time during the process; check with Mexico City or with Washington. I think wisely so.

Q: Groovy. What did you gather, what was your impression of the authorities in Chihuahua?

COLBERT: I could always work them and as long as what we were doing wasn't putting them in danger or going counter to their interests – governmental or personal. But I dealt basically on local issues, I had really nothing to do with preventing drug smuggling, I'm

sure some of the people that I worked with probably were one way or the other corrupt, I'm sure some of them were. I had some really wonderful experiences.

One thing I had nothing to do with at all was the first PAN mayor; he was already in office when I was there and there are...

Q: A pawn is P-A...

COLBERT: PAN ...The mayor set up tollbooths in front of the federal tollbooths. So citizens paid the sort of in advance and went they got to the federal booths and they said we already paid. The city had tried for years to get a better share of the bridge, the bulk of which went to Mexico City, unlike El Paso which got 100%. The federal government did not like this at all; there was still at this time a PRE government in Mexico City and they said, "If you don't stop we'll arrest you." The mayor said, "Come get me." In fact, everybody knew that he was independently wealthy, that he had terminal cancer and he had come back from a very nice life in Europe in France after his wife died to be mayor of the city. He was a beloved figure so they take him to jail.

Well it wasn't the mayor that was in jail it was the federal government that was in jail. The longer he stayed in jail the more ridiculous the federal government looked. They put the mayor of the city, who is dying of cancer, in jail because he wants a better shake for the city and everybody in the city says, even the people of the other party, everybody is for the mayor. I couldn't go visit him because that would be a political statement – interference in the affairs of the host country, it would really have been an inappropriate thing for a foreign diplomat to do, but I certainly knew him and I wished him well. But every other person including people, even including the mayor of El Paso came to see him, everybody brought him food, and he was visited regularly by a nurse and doctor and on it went. The federal government wanted him simply to leave jail but he said, "No, you arrested me." So in the end they had to drop it, charges dropped, and Juarez got a better break for the tolls. It was really fun to watch. It was a case of the mouse in the trap being the trap. I liked that.

Q: How did you find the American authorities? They don't live together for a long time hadn't they? I mean it was the Mexicans, I mean...

COLBERT: I mean, first of all, in federal law enforcement people want ultimately to come back from where they are from. So you will find that the head of the border control certainly is from Texas and probably from the El Paso area. The head of what was called the immigration service then and now is called I don't know there are so many different branches but all those people were then and are now Hispanic Americans primarily but certainly people from the area. They often have relatives on the other side. They speak very good Spanish; they understand the area very, very well. There was an obviously tension between organizations because they have different agenda and part of your job, as consul general, is to make sure that the Americans play well in the sandbox together with each other and also to encourage cross-border communications.

I would give receptions and I made a point of inviting people from both sides of the border, and when I had dinner parties I would invite people from both sides of the border. I know once the Bishop of Juarez called me up and said, "When are you going to give another cocktail party I've got some things I want to accomplish with the mayor and I can't see the mayor because of separation of church and state which is so finite there. But if he comes to your house he will come to your house because you are the consul general, I will come because I am the Bishop and I can do my thing at your house."

One thing that I did which was very successful was I used a large chunk of representation money to take over a private dining room of the Juarez Country Club, it is not luxurious by any means - it is an old country club- and invited the U.S. attorney, the state of Texas attorney for the El Paso area, the police chief, the head of the FBI and their Mexican counterparts and had a dinner planned where everybody had to sit Mexican-American-Mexican-American. I said everybody has to come with a driver and when they came in I gave them a shot of tequila, everybody got one shot of tequila except for this one woman who wouldn't take it. After that shot of tequila we had steaks, large steaks, lots of wine, lots of "Ambrosos" that is to say patting each other on the back and everybody had to exchange their business card and telephone numbers. It turned out on a couple occasions thereafter these people were in direct communications, which they hadn't been before and they were bosom buddies and it was a good set up. That was my job.

Q: Well then how did you find your support on problems from Washington, consular affairs and that?

COLBERT: I think they were very good at second guessing you. No I mean on the visa side excellent, on the OCS side we pretty much solved our problems and then told them about it. We didn't really have any big problems. Basically I found the best way to deal with them was to just flood them with information, and then continue working the problem. I think one of the greatest consular officers of all times in my view was Lou Goelz. Lou Goelz always believed that "don't ask, don't tell" was a good way to operate. Don't ask unless you know the answer and certainly don't tell them any more than you have to.

Q: I think I mentioned before Lou succeeded me both in Seoul and in Naples.

COLBERT: I think we basically tried to solve the problems and keep them informed and if we needed something we asked for it. While I was there the law changed and people were allowed to adjust in the States, even if they had been in the states illegally. There was a payment of a modest fine and that was that, but it meant that our workload dropped a great deal because in the past if you had been illegal you had leave the country to get a visa, an immigrant visa. We had to then downsize by about two-thirds and it was very traumatic particularly for the Mexican employees who thought that they lost their jobs. So we had to come up with an equitable way of doing it. We made liberal use of special immigrant visas, we let people volunteer to be terminated, we paid severance, and we found all kinds of ways to do it so that it wasn't as traumatic. But then a couple years later that procedure lapsed and we had to build back up again.

Q: You've got twenty-five officers on the line, how did you deal with that? This has to be pretty; it had to be a real problem particularly for the younger officers.

COLBERT: First of all by the time I got there well more than half of the officers doing immigrant visas, well more than half of the officers were civil service. They had been hired initially with expectation that it would be only be for five years and the surge would go away and, of course, surges never go away and so the problem continued. How to get them a career path so that they could go beyond CS seven to nine, eleven so on was one challenge. To alleviate the tensions which developed between the FSOs and the GS because FSOs got housing, educational allowance, they had to pull duty, they were available twenty-four hours a day and the civil service people went home, there were all kinds of problems we had to deal with so you had to have an open line of communication. That was a real challenge and then you had to get Washington to understand that these people had to be treated equitably, something I hope that we succeeded in.

Little things. When I arrived there we had maybe 100 FSNs maybe more, and then certainly we had maybe 125 FSNs and perhaps 30 officers, 30 Americans and we didn't have a cafeteria. We had people eating at their desks. Can you imagine the problems with people working and then eating at their desks in such confined space? So we created a lunchroom and that was a big thing. I mean it sounds...a lunchroom...

Q: Oh no.

COLBERT: It was a big morale thing. The OBO, whatever it's called now, Office of Buildings had really seriously miscalculated how many restrooms we needed. So we and all around us people would queue up very early in the morning to come in to get their immigrant visas or non-immigrant visas, passport and so on. But if you wanted to use a restroom any where around there outside the consulate you had to pay, most people had very modest needs and many of the restaurants you couldn't pee unless you bought something. So, and you are talking 1,600 people a day coming in for one kind of service or another.

One of the challenges was to get more rest rooms and the embassy wasn't going to spend money to build more restrooms; they couldn't see that as a priority. That wasn't every put into the embassy budget. EUR didn't see it as a problem, CA and the bureau of consular affairs didn't do restrooms, and OBO wasn't interested in this problem. So what you had is basically every morning a stampede of people coming in to use our restrooms and then long lines during the day. I could get nobody to focus on this problem, no one wanted to...I couldn't use this money for that I couldn't use this money for that, they wouldn't give me any money.

I got really fed up so we had the inspectors coming. Normally we let people in at seven o'clock and start at eight o'clock or something like that. So I said, "OK, as long as the inspectors are here we don't let the public in until after the inspectors arrive. When the inspectors arrive then let the public in. Simultaneously." Now obviously they are coming

through a different gate but they were swamped. I mean you've got a thousand people trying to get to these couple of restrooms. The chief inspector comes in to see me and says, "What, what are...?" "Oh those are the people trying to use the restrooms." He said, "Why don't you do something about that?" I said, "Well do you think it's a problem? Well what do you suggest?" "Well I think you should build more restrooms." I said, "Put it in the report." So they did and we got more restrooms.

Q: Well then I think this is time to call...

COLBERT: Call it a day?

Q: Yes. Where did you go in '97 I guess? Where did you go?

COLBERT: Ah, to my last assignment in Paris. You are going to be rid of me pretty soon.

Q: OK, well we will pick it up there but think over the time about personnel problems because you had so bloody many people.

COLBERT: You mean about Juarez, you are talking about Juarez?

Q: Yes, about Juarez, the problems of initial officers coming and all of a sudden being hit by something like this. This isn't something what they got in the Foreign Service for. I mean that sort of thing.

COLBERT: It sounds like a first tour officer in perhaps in Seoul right?

Q: Yeah.

Larry, do you want to talk a little about your last post, which was Ciudad Juarez?

COLBERT: Uh huh.

Q: What about dealing with the young offices and all, particularly the younger officers going there?

COLBERT: It was a particular challenge for two reasons. One, that you alluded to earlier that the problem of how people come in to be diplomats with all sort of intellectual baggage as to what it is to be a diplomat: they are going to make policy, they are going to make foreign policy, they are going to be a key player in substantive issues and so on. They may be told that the chances are virtually 100 percent that they are going to be doing either admin work at a very basic level as a general services officer or even more likely they are going to be doing visas and ACS work, American Citizen Services work, for at least their first and perhaps their second tour. Some people adjust very well to this reality and others have a feeling this is not really what they came in to do, this is not foreign policy, this is sort of somewhere between social welfare work and being a cop in

southeast Washington. It's not that but that's somehow how people see it. So you have a problem of matching the reality of the job that they have with the idea they have in their head when they arrive to do it. I think it's probably less of a problem in Juarez than say it would be in Seoul where you would then or say Manila because there at least they are going "overseas," they are going to a real embassy whereas Juarez they know is a border post and they should know by the time they get there that it's a consular border post.

But you still had the problem with people who want to do I hate the word but 'substantive work'. I hate that word which implies that anything other than that work is not important. But they want to do economic reporting, they want to do political reporting, they want to make foreign policy. How you deal with that I think is to find out if there are those that are among this pool of officers that you have people who are prepared to do other things in addition to their regular job and then get them to volunteer to follow a particular subject and write on it. That subject could be environmental issues because there are a lot of those along the border. It could be provincial politics, which are singularly unimportant, nobody really cares about them but you can still write about them. Any number of things you can find for them to do they get some satisfaction, it gives you a chance for you to write or their rater and you are going to be the reviewer in the rating process to write about something in their work other than they did this many visas or they did this many ACS cases. That works important and that is what they are there for but you give them some other opportunity. Another thing you can do is work out an exchange program so that an officer can get off the visa line or the ACS branch in Mexico City or Guadalajara and you can do an exchange for a period of time. The challenge there is bureaucracy versus reality. If you can get the officers to agree to exchange housing and to just take the part of per diem which covers living expenses other than housing then you can stretch your travel budget a bit to do this. The problem often is that the bean counters say no, the officers have to get full per diem and at that point then you run into a problem because each constituent post has a very finite amount of money for travel and if you start using it for this sort of purpose then it cuts into other things you can do. But that is another thing you can do, with a little bit of imagination you can get the young officers to do other things other than what they are assigned to do so they get more job satisfaction and a richer experience.

Another thing you can do which we did a lot of is volunteer our junior officers for TDY, temporary duty, where there is a crunch. When I was in Juarez we were sending people to Cuba virtually all the time. There is always a shortage of officers for Cuba and that was one way you could enrich their environment. You could take the officers with you to meetings, you could have them fill in for you at meetings because you couldn't be everywhere, if there was an event which required representation from the consulate you could send a junior officer and so on. We had to explain to them that yes, Sam here is going to go off and do this and he's not going to be doing visas with you and there will be more visas for you to do because he is gone but the next time around it will be you Mary, so please understand why Sam is going. If you get people to understand that we are going to be equitable about this and everybody was going to get a shot at doing something different, then it worked well.

And one thing you could do which I think we did very successfully is get the consumer on the other end to acknowledge that the information that these junior officers were providing. Embassy's can never have enough reporting but in point of fact they don't really care what the constituent posts send in and they really rarely read it and probably the same is true in Washington. The political officer thinks his opus on party X is going to get read with great interest but because of the sheer volume of information coming into Washington from the embassies it doesn't get read but that's doubly true for information sent by constituent posts. Please send us more but they really don't read it.

So what you have to do is say not only do we want you to read it we want you to come back and acknowledge that you got it and if you see something that you like or that we have called to your attention which is useful please send back a cable and say the report done by junior officer Sam Jones was really on point. That's a kudo for them; it can go on their report, the end of the year report. But we took it a little bit further than that. We found that some of the reporting that we were doing was of more interest to people in Washington than it was to the embassy and certainly more interest to other agencies, the CIA, the environmental protection agency, and such, Department of Labor, and the Department of Transportation so that we would find out who the end consumer was at the working level. We would then say, "What would you like to know, what do you want to know about pollution in the New River? What do you want to know about the impact of Maquiadora or waste generation? What particular kind of wastes are you concerned about?" Then we would convince the junior officer to take this on as a project. Then after we had prepared the report we'd make sure that the other agency got on distribution and we'd call them up and say did you like that? Sometimes we actually generate messages back acknowledging, bypassing the State Department that another agency got some information that they would otherwise not gotten. I know that is sort of Machiavellian but it was a way to pump up the junior officers and to encourage them and also get some good work.

One of our junior officers who is now, I think, an FS-1 tells you how long I've been doing this, got a superior honor award from the Department of Labor for reporting he did. They actually wrote recognition for a junior officer, first tour officer, on his reporting and it came as a complete shock to the Department of State personnel system. They didn't quite know how to deal with the fact that another agency was recognizing a junior officer. So you can do these things.

Pardon me for going on for so long on your question.

Q: Well did you run across...I was in personnel, this was back in the late '60s and I was doing consular personnel. We realized that overstaffing posts such as London, the Canadian posts and the Mexican border posts with April 1 who were problems. They may have been alcoholics, they may have been real personality problems or there was a superfluity of elderly former secretaries who made vice consul who had mothers or fathers and they had to have them there and this was not a very promising group to deal with. It was sort of a downer for young, eager officers to be working next to somebody who is really burned out and had very little interest.

COLBERT: Both in Tijuana, when I was consul general in Tijuana and in Juarez I think I was blessed in that there had been cases like that before me. I had heard about people. I heard about a lady who had been assigned to Juarez because her elderly mother was sick and she was aloud to stay in Juarez well past the normal limit of four years, almost until she retired. Luckily I didn't have that problem. Had I gone to Montreal as I, we'd talked about my chance to go to Montreal as principal officer, in a sense I managed to avoid inheriting what was a terrible mess because of that sort of situation. They had more walking wounded there than I think you would find in Walter Reed after this particular war, people who really weren't up to the job but had been assigned there because it was a "large post" and they could take it. There is a tendency I think, in the State Department to put people who are assignment challenges in large posts such as London, perhaps they have no aptitude for language or in one case I'm told they sent a person to London who had come in under a law suit which said we had to take blind officers and this particular officer was blind but he had grown up and lived in London and he insisted on being assigned to London because since he was blind he knew his way around London. So he could only be assigned to London, which is sort of contrary to the entire worldwide availability idea that we have in the Foreign Service, if in fact it works any more.

But I didn't have those problems in Juarez luckily. The problem that I did have was meshing the junior officers and more senior Foreign Service officers with the predominantly civil service working staff that I had. The civil servant had been hired maybe ten years before what was supposed to be for a five-year period to cover a surge of immigrant visa work. The surge never really went away, the State Department's best laid plans of mice and men they found themselves with people they were hoping to have for five years who were still there now when I arrived. There was tension between the civil service who were under paid and under appreciated and under the Foreign Service. It reminds me of that story the Brits used to say about the Americans in Great Britain, they were over paid, over sexed and over here. The Americans used to respond that the British were under paid, under sexed and under Eisenhower. Well, there was a bit of this tension. The Foreign Service got free housing because they were assigned overseas, they got educational allowance for their children, that is to say the children were bussed across and the children because they got education allowance were actually going for the most part to a private school. The girls were going to Loretta College, which was a Catholic private school, very expensive, very good school but the... I don't remember where the boys went but they could go to public or private school.

One of the anomalies was out of state tuition for public school was comparable to the price of going to a private school. So in a very poor city, El Paso which was a very problematic public school system the children of the Foreign Service families were being bussed across the border to go to private school whereas the civil servants children were going to public school. So there were tensions that were built into the way the thing had been designed. There was really no way we could pay the tuition for the civil service children because the civil service families lived in El Paso and they were commuting across the border.

Anyway there were these tensions so one of the challenges was to do everything humanly possible to look after the civil service employees, nurture them, encourage them, get them salary increases, make sure that they were appreciated and to also deal with the jealousies and unhappiness on the other side why do these civil service people leave precisely at 4:30 every evening, why don't they work during emergencies, why aren't they here on weekends, etc., etc., etc. So that was a real challenge. I think we had some success there, certainly a lot of time invested in it.

Once a month I had a meeting with all the civil service employees. They didn't all come but they were all welcome to come, to hear what they had to say. Once a month I had a meeting with the representatives of the Mexican employees, there were probably close to 200 of those, to hear their concerns. Strangely some things are so simple but you don't know that you have a problem until people feel comfortable to come and talk to you about their concerns. One of the first things I was asked when I had a meeting with the Mexican employees was why didn't we have those little things you put on toilet seats, those little paper things that you pull out, what do you call them. You know, you pull out and put them on the toilet seat.

Q: Yeah, covers.

COLBERT: Yeah, paper covers. They said they just couldn't understand why we didn't have these because we had a lot of people working here and it was a good thing. I said, "We can have them." So we just went out to...we didn't go back to the embassy for Gods sake...we simply used our own post funds and simply went to COSCO or some equivalent and bought the dispensers and in two or three days all the facilities had them. It was a small thing but it would not have occurred to me this was an issue until they brought it to my attention. So sometimes you can solve little issues, which are big issues in the eyes of the people who are concerned.

So we did have lots and lots of those kinds of problems. I've probably talked too much about this, I'm sorry.

Q: I think these are interesting things to put in and pass on. OK you are in Paris. You went to Paris from when to when?

COLBERT: From '97 to 2001. I think let's talk about how I got to Paris.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: I think that's important to understand how the system works in reality in terms of assignments. The more senior the officer, the more the assignments are decided outside the system but by the system. That's to say that you have to request a position or you have to...it is rare that you're called blindly and said, "Take this job." Maybe if you are Negroponte and they want you to go to Iraq or something but for the most part when you are in the system you look around to see what's available at your grade and then when you are leaving, when the job will become open and so on.

In the case of Paris I had had my eye on Paris as a possible final assignment because of timing issues. I knew when I would be leaving Juarez, and I knew when Paris would be opening because I knew the person who was there, Jim Ward would be leaving after four years and our timing would be probably matched. But another officer had been promised the job I found out even before Jim Ward arrived to take on the job, that's really unusual that a job should be promised to somebody three or four years ahead of it becoming open. So I knew that Paris wasn't going to be a possibility for me. I had French and I had been I think a fairly well regarded professional in my field so I thought well, it's possible but if this other person had the job locked then why...you can't really fight the Bureau of Consular Affairs front office.

Q: Who was this?

COLBERT: Maura Hardy.

Q: Uh huh.

COLBERT: Whom at that point I think was deputy assistant secretary. She wasn't an assistant secretary, maybe at that point she was not at that point deputy assistant secretary but she was certainly...I was reliably informed had been promised the job by Mary Ryan, Assistant Secretary. I'm minding my own business and the phone rings and Jim Ward calls me from Paris and said, "Are you still interested in coming here as consul general?" I said, "Is the Pope Polish?" He said, "Well, the job is now in play because Maura is going to be ambassador to, it turned out, Paraguay, somewhere. So would you like me to have a word with Ambassador Harriman and recommend you?" I said, "Ah yes, please do that." He said, "Well, I'll be happy to do that. Ambassador Harriman and I are on very good terms, but you are going to have to sell me yourself. What can you do?" I said, "Well, I'll call down to Ambassador Jones and..."

Q: Jimmy Jones in Mexico City.

COLBERT: He was the ambassador in Mexico City, he was a former Congressman, former president of the American stock exchange and probably one of the sharpest ambassadors I have ever worked for.

Q: I interviewed him. He was at a very early age; he was a sort of the gatekeeper for Lyndon Johnson.

COLBERT: He was in Georgetown University when Kennedy was assassinated and I think it was either in law school or in his senior year, I think maybe law school. Johnson just sort of just sucked him out of Georgetown and brought him over. Whether he finished his law degree at that point or not I don't know. He became a wonder kid in the White House, but certainly a really, really sharp guy. So I called up Ambassador Jones and said, "Would you mind contacting Ambassador Pamela Harriman and putting a good word in for me?" He said, "Well Larry, you know the consul generalship down here in

Mexico City is coming open, why don't you come down here and be consul general in Mexico City. You could be supervisory consul general for all the constituent posts, it's a good job, we would love to have you, etc., etc., etc." I said, "Well Ambassador Jones I'm very flattered but I've already done two tours in Mexico and also if my wife found out that I agreed to go to Mexico City at the expense of possibly going to Paris she would probably kill me and then maybe come after you." I said that only jokingly, I don't think my wife would do that but I said, "Seriously, I really would like to go to Paris." So he said, "Well, I'll call Pamela." That was all I ever heard.

Maybe a month later the ambassador called me up on the phone and he said, "Why didn't you return my phone call?" I said, "Your phone call?" I mean I would have returned the ambassador's phone call. He apparently had called me back to tell me that he had spoken with Pamela but my secretary neglected to tell me that he had called. I didn't kill her but I thought evil thoughts at least for one day because he really thought I was very rude and he had gone out of his way for me and I hadn't been polite enough to call him. In point of fact, those things happen and he accepted my apology but it made a difference. Ambassador Harriman wrote a letter to the assistant secretary for the European bureau and wrote a letter to Mary Ryan saying that I was her personal choice. I was Pamela Harriman's personal choice. Pamela Harriman didn't know me from Adam but Jim Ward had said nice things about me and obviously Ambassador Jones had...it turned out Ambassador Jones and Pamela Harriman went way back to Democratic politics so they knew each other.

Anyway I don't know that I was the Bureau of Consular affairs Candidate for the job. I have a feeling that it was probably somebody else, but I was Pamela Harriman's candidate so in that case what the bureau of consular affairs wanted I don't think mattered as much. You can't stand in front of a powerful politically appointed ambassador who really wants something and she was very well connected, as you know. Unfortunately, I never got to work for the lady. She had a heart attack swimming in the pool at the Ritz Hotel and died. She was in her early 70s at the time. One of her regular regimes was to go to the Ritz for exercise in the pool. I mean if you are going to swim in a pool swimming in the Hotel Ritz in Paris is probably the best place to go. It is a lovely pool. I've never been allowed to swim in it myself but I've seen it.

So when I arrived she was already departed and she was replaced by Felix Rohatyn who was a New York financier. He is probably now in his late 70s I would think, a multimillionaire, fundraiser and a very, very competent person. He had fled from Austria I think as a child, because he was Jewish, either just before or just after Hitler occupied the country. He went through I think maybe high school, junior high school, he spent a substantial period of his adolescent life in France, fled again from Marseilles 1940 and the collapse and obviously came to the United States as a very relatively young man and did very well. So I worked for him, obviously not directly because there was a DCM between the ambassador and me.

Q: How would you describe French-American relations at the time you got there?

COLBERT: Well this was under the Clinton administration and the French loved Bill Clinton. They really, really thought that he was a very good president. In terms of day-to-day stuff, if you sit in on the country team meetings, there was always an awful lot of grouching about the French not agreeing with us on that, the French being sticky about this or the French dragging their feet on that. Often I found myself quietly agreeing with the French but of course, you couldn't really do that out loud. On such issues as they had a ban on hormone, beef that had hormones added, you couldn't export to the EU.

Q: Frankenstein Food.

COLBERT: The French are fanatic about their food. They take food issues very, very seriously. I mean it's strange when you think about it, they don't pasteurize their cheese. If you've eaten French cheese in France you know it's quite good but ours is probably healthier because it is pasteurized and is really safer. But they're quite fanatical about their food and we wanted to sell wheat that had been altered or perhaps not altered and they weren't having it. So there was a struggle between the EU and U.S. agriculture as to what could or couldn't be imported into Europe. The French, who are sort of in the forefront of those countries and trying to keep out things that they didn't want in. Part of it was protectionism, I mean they wanted to save their own market, part of it was just their being French and part of it was sincere hysteria. I meant that as it came out, sincere hysteria. But often you had to be sympathetic. They had their own way of doing things.

When I was in France the 35-hour workweek came in.

Q: This was under was it Mitterrand?

COLBERT: Jospin. Chirac was still president but he was advised by his advisors that they should have a snap election and the conservatives would retain control of the national assembly. In fact, the Socialists, the main opposition party at that time, really didn't think they were going to win and they put up a very sort of, how would you describe Jospin, sort of a professorial in the pejorative sense candidate, no charisma, no "je ne sais quoi" (I don't know what). But, whatever it was he didn't have it. But Jospin won and so the Socialists were in charge. One of their campaign promises was that the country would go from 40 to 35 hours. Well I don't think that they thought that they were going to win. But then they won and suddenly France went from 38 hours or 39 hours, down to 35. It was somewhat less than 40, maybe 38 but they went to 35, which was a real challenge for everybody. The idea of the Socialists was that if you reduced the number of hours that people work then businesses would have to employ more people and their unemployment rate, which is always scandalously higher than ours, at that point it was particularly high, would be reduced because people would be working fewer hours so you'd have to employ more people. It doesn't really work out that way.

What happened was the larger companies bought more equipment, people did imaginative scheduling things, but employment did not increase. For me, as a consular manager it was a real challenge as it was for many other people in the embassy because the employees decided that the way they would go from 40 to 35 is they wouldn't work

on Friday afternoons. So the embassy FSNs except for those who were being paid premium overtime pay all went home at 1:00 on Friday, or noon on Friday, whichever it was, I don't remember. So you'd go from having your entire staff to puff nobody, except for the Americans who, of course, had to stay. The Americans, as you are well aware, did not do all the grunt work, they didn't answer the phones, they didn't do the clerical stuff, they didn't do the vouchers and they certainly didn't do all the mechanical things that are involved in doing consular work. So you would find at say 1:00 everybody is gone except for all of you. What do you do to keep busy? Well I'm sure that Washington would say there are lots of things you can do but over time those lots of things become more and more problematical, so it was a real challenge. That was one of the challenges I dealt with and we managed to work it out.

Q: Did you also find that your employees, the French, have these very long vacation periods?

COLBERT: One of the reasons that it is difficult for young people to get employment in France is that if you hire a person after six months they are considered a permanent employee. To terminate them you have to go labor court; witch or bitch depending on what. She was then met by police authorities who attempt to take her into custody and she ends up rolling on the ground with one of them. She resists arrest physically so she is arrested and taken to jail. Of course, we know nothing about this.

Q: how did you find living in France at that time?

COLBERT: Very pleasant. I had only one unpleasant experience with one French person. I think once we had an unpleasant experience in a restaurant in some little town in Provence but no I think people were generally nice, friendly, my French accent is decidedly American and they never made fun of my French. They certainly were very polite, very helpful and either they have changed from their reputation of being unpleasant and surly toward Americans or that was a bad rap that they did not deserve. Certainly I had no bad experiences with any of them.

Q: I must say we've made several trips to France and I speak very little French but I found it very pleasant. This is I think it's a generational thing.

COLBERT: There's a deep, deep connection between the French and the Americans. I think that that relationship goes way back obviously to our revolution but its been enriched, not just by the First World War and the Second World War and all that but by the number of French people who study here, the number of Americans who study there, the mixture in commerce and certainly the mixture in marriage. So many, many prominent French people are married to American women and vice versa. The connections are just so, so intense and one forgets. There are so many organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution; the Sons of the American Revolution have French branches. There is the so-called Cincinnati Society...

Q: Oh yeah?

COLBERT: Which is composed with first sons of Americans whose...

Q: Officers.

COLBERT: Officers, sons of officers, who served under George Washington. There are thirteen chapters to represent the thirteen states, there is a fourteenth chapter and that's composed of officers who served in French regiments in the American Revolution of which there were...

Q: Rochambeau and all.

COLBERT: Rochambeau and all. These organizations and many, many, many others are intertwined to the two societies. One of the most I think emotionally touching things that I experienced similar to visiting the cemetery in Normandy or the many other military cemeteries particularly the one in Normandy. But my last year I was invited to a triennial, every three years the Cincinnati Society has a meeting either in French or in the United States. This is a meeting in France where they inaugurate their new president general for a three year term. It was held in Versailles Palace, which was loaned to this Society by the French government for this occasion. It was a black tie dinner, cocktails in Louis XIV private chapel followed by a ceremony in the Hall of Mirrors in which one French soldier dressed in each regiments colors, representing each regiment that served in France or in the United States during the revolution in their own traditional 18th century uniform. They played the two national anthems and then at a particular point each soldier took three steps forward, presented arms with a musket and they read off the name of the regiment and how many people died, how many people were wounded in that regiment and stepped back. The ceremony lasted a good 20 minutes because there were that many regiments and one has to be impressed with the number of dead and wounded, these are French soldiers serving with Rochambeau and it was very, very moving. Then we had a black tie dinner with representatives from the French government.

I was the only American official there but I was there as a guest of the Society not representing the embassy. But I was very impressed with the ceremony. Once a year there is a ceremony in the town of Grasse, where Admiral de Grasse is from. I was privileged to go there, there is always a representative from the consulate in Marseilles because it is in the Marseilles consulate but I was there after I had retired and the official U.S. guest was the General Jones, the head of NATO who came down and made a speech. Admiral de Grasse commanded the fleet, which compelled the surrender of Cornwallis. The ties between the countries are just so, so tremendous.

Then you get these small-minded idiots in this country, like there are small-minded idiots in that country, who for example wanted to rename French fries to freedom fries because the French wouldn't send troops to Iraq too. That same Congressman now is one of the Congressmen who were saying that we made a mistake in going in the first place. This petty name calling on both sides by morons is just disgraceful.

Q: I think Colin Powell summed it up by talking about someone saying to the secretary of state about French-American relations. He said, "Well you know France and the United States have been in marriage counseling for about 200 years now."

COLBERT: Absolutely true but the marriage continues to work. The first leader who called Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis was Charles de Gaul.

Q: Yeah.

COLBERT: We have stood together through thick and thin and we've continued to do so.

Q: Well again in my interviewing one of the strong themes that goes through these interviews is that the French-American connection, the annoyance. One man who was in NATO and an American in Brussels said his kids when young thought there was a nationality known as Those God Damn French because he would come home almost every night and slam his briefcase on the table and say, "Those God damn French." But at the same time you have intelligence in the military side, very close cooperation always.

COLBERT: On the intelligence side the cooperation is total, the mutual respect is very, very high. I knew both station chiefs that served when I was there and they had very, very close relationships with their counterparts. The military cooperate in so many ways and at so many levels and so well. People should be able to say, "Have you considered this or do you think about the circumstances of that." I think the French sometimes represent an anchor to our battleship and I'm talking categorically, slowing us down sometimes even stopping us. The trouble with being the super power and the economic colossus is that we can go charging forward. On occasion perhaps somebody saying no or stop and think about it it is a good thing. I think that recent events would indicate that perhaps more of that would be a good thing.

Q: We are talking about involvement in Iraq.

COLBERT: You understood that did you. I was being so elliptical. The French really believed that what we were about would have consequences about which we wouldn't like, we in the west. I don't have any doubt that with hindsight we would have done things differently or perhaps not at all. So I think the French are good for us.

Q: Did you have any problems with Bill Clinton and his impeachment and his affair with Monica Lewinsky and all that sort of thing?

COLBERT: The French found that whole thing to be totally incomprehensible. I have never met a French person who had any sympathy for the impeachment. Number one, why were we investigating the private life of a president? Consensual sex between adults and even adults who aren't married is not unknown in any country and certainly not unknown in France. They would have pointed out to me had the time been current that the illegitimate child of Mitterrand attended his funeral. They just couldn't understand why people would be asked to testify about their private life, why it was a concern of

anybody other than the principals within the immediate circle, that is to say the spouse, mistress, husband, and why you would spend all this money to investigate something. They thought that Ken Stark was a monster.

Q: Ken Starr, S-T-A-R-R.

COLBERT: The special prosecutor was as far as they were concerned on a children's crusade and they would probably have hoped that he ended up just like the children on the children's crusade ended up. They had no truck with any of it. Basically they liked Clinton, I mean they didn't always agree with our policies but they found him to be a competent, personable leader that they could get along with. I think Chirac and Clinton from my perspective and our perspective that is obviously consul general not political counselor got along very well, communicated very well. To them the whole thing was a joke.

I was not, let's see I left in 2001 so Bush was already president, they did not care for the Bush administration when I was there. The Kyoto issue was part of it, a feeling of not being listened to was part of it. I don't know what more I want to say; maybe you can ask me a question.

Q: Well I can't think of anything more at this point. Did you retire from there or what?

COLBERT: I came back here and went to the retirement course for two months. I retired I think my official date was probably the end of the fiscal year so it would have been 30 December 2001. But I knew already that I was probably going to work part time as an inspector and have done that more or less or since January of 2002 and I think to good effect. I've enjoyed it, there have been some frustrations but I've enjoyed it. I hope I can continue to do it for a while longer.

Q: Well maybe this is a good place to stop.

COLBERT: I've enjoyed this. I hope somebody learns something from it.

Q: Well I think you know that you are passing on knowledge and experience. Great, OK.

End of interview