Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOHN L. DEORNELLAS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: Mr. DeOrnellas was unable to edit his interview prior to his death.]

Q: Okay, today is December 13, 2002. This is an interview with John L. DeOrnellas. This is being done by The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by John?

DEORNELLAS: Yes.

Q: Okay. Let's start kind of at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and a little about your family?

DEORNELLAS: Okay, I was born April the 28th, 1921, in Mobile, Alabama. Both my parents had lived there for some years and my father was born there. And I lived there for the first 21 years of my life, went to a little Jesuit college there called Spring Hill.

Q: I'd like to go back a bit. What was the background of your father? Where did he-

DEORNELLAS: My father was half Portuguese from his father - it's a Portuguese name, DeOrnellas - and that his father died in 1899 and he had to go out and work as a small child, actually. His formal schooling ended at age 11, but his sisters persisted in school and they helped him and he took night courses at the Young Men's Christian Association and correspondence courses and so forth, and he became a railroad accounting executive, actually. My mother went to normal school up in north Alabama, where she had been born, and she taught school for some years in Mobile and then during my childhood she left school teaching and returned to it later and was still teaching when she died at age 55 in 1943.

Q: Well, now, do you have brothers and sisters?

DEORNELLAS: No, I was an only child.

Q: So you went to school. Was your family Catholic?

DEORNELLAS: Yes, I went to public school, actually.

Q: Yes.

DEORNELLAS: But probably for economic reasons, and probably because my family thought I was a little immature, they refused to let me accept a tuition scholarship to Tulane and they wanted me stay home and I went to Spring Hill as a day student, actually.

Q: While you were at public school, did you go through public school through the 12 grades?

DEORNELLAS: Well, Mobile had 11 grades, actually. That's what they had at that time.

Q: Any subjects that you were particularly interested in while you were going there?

DEORNELLAS: Oh, I think I was interested in everything, to tell you the truth at that time (laughs). Since it was a port city, I always had a bit more interest in international things, I suppose. That is true of many Americans. I actually loved to go down to the port and look at the ships and that sort of thing and I actually liked foreign languages. I took a lot of Latin as it was still traditional for many people, even in public school at that time. And then I took Spanish in high school and I enjoyed that. No one in the family spoke anything but English. But my mother's people were all Protestant, white Anglo-Saxon, so to speak. Ultimately, there was a little Irish, way in the background. At any rate, there was no reason for them to speak anything else, and my father's father had long since died, and his mother was very fluent in English and though she was of French immigrant stock, born in the States, she had never had occasion to speak French to me and she did not.

Q: At school, any teachers stand out, or that you particularly -

DEORNELLAS: Well, I liked a number of teachers, I don't remember the elementary school teachers, particularly, but in high school, I had a section, a "room mother" so to speak, a home teacher, what do they call a home teacher?

Q: Homeroom teacher.

DEORNELLAS: Homeroom teacher, who was very friendly with my aunt. My father had three sisters, all of whom did get to finish high school, and they all went into teaching and eventually, they all got college degrees. But in any event, this homeroom teacher was an English literature teacher, and I particularly admired her, to some extent because of friendship with one of my aunts. I continued to be in touch with her somewhat over the years. The man that in a sense impressed me the most as a teacher, I suppose, in a way, I never had any contact with later. He was teaching physics in high school and he had actually, I think, gotten a Master's degree in physics and worked in research somewhere in the north, as we'd say down yonder. And when the Depression came along, he had retreated to Mobile and resorted to teaching, and it wasn't exactly, I suppose, his initial objective, as I say, but he worked at the job. He was a fascinating guy and I really, I guess, my interest in science was largely stimulated by him.

Q: What about reading? Do you recall any type of book or books that particularly -

DEORNELLAS: I was very much of a reader. I didn't read books, per se, all that much, though I read some, of course, and I was a faithful student of public affairs, current affairs. We had Time magazine and we had the Mobile Register, the daily paper, of course, and as a matter of fact, when the old thing existed, we had the old Literary Digest.

Q: Oh, yes.

DEORNELLAS: There's probably no one left that remembers that.

Q: Well, everybody knows about the mistaken poll they did, back in the '32 election-

DEORNELLAS: Actually, the '36 election.

Q: '36 election.

DEORNELLAS: Yes, '36 election. Actually, that Mobile Register was very hostile to the New Deal and they had influenced my thinking to the extent that, I suppose, really, it's hard for me to remember now, but in '36, I suppose I really was rather hostile to Roosevelt's election, but I don't remember getting too excited about it. But I do remember the newspaper's editorials were extremely hostile to the whole Roosevelt thing.

Q: What was the city of Mobile like as a kid?

DEORNELLAS: Well, Mobile is a very old city by American standards, certainly. Literally, it's 300 years old, celebrating their tercentenary this year. Founded by the French at the same time the French founded New Orleans and Biloxi, Mississippi, all three settlements go back to about the same time. And it had been under several flags over the years, the English flag at times, more particularly the French and the Spanish flags, and it became part of the United States, I believe in 1819, about the same time that Alabama, I believe, entered the Union. But it was always rather different in the interior. It was very much a port city, and in my experience in school, for instance, I remember many people who were not "WASPs" [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants] so to speak, German, Italian, Slavic, and so forth, actually. And in that time, Mobile, for a southern city, was rather heavily Catholic. It probably had a higher percentage of Catholics then than it does now because World War II days so many people moved in to Mobile and stayed, from the hinterland, which was not Catholic at all, so to speak. But in any event, it was a relatively tolerant place, and it had a few of the traditions that people associate with New Orleans, such as particularly Mardi Gras, but also a bit of drinking and even informal gambling and so forth. In any event, it was not typical of Alabama, it was more Gulf Coast, a little bit like New Orleans.

Q: Well, how about in this period, before the war, race relations?

DEORNELLAS: Well, Mobile didn't have lynchings, and that sort of thing. I don't think the Ku Klux Klan amounted to much, but the - at anytime - but it had very rigid segregation. In my youth, I did have an experience that I occasionally thought was important. There was a postman on the route serving the area where my family and I lived, residential area, who was black and he spoke very carefully, he was always very dignified and he paid some attention to us kids. And some people in the neighborhood referred to him as "The Professor." They thought he was a little pretentious, I suppose, but he was obviously colored. And he did certainly influence me, in a certain degree, that is he was a different type of black person, as it were, than many people in the deep south got to know in childhood, different from servants and whatnot, sort of thing. I didn't really stay in regular touch with him, but after the war, I was in law school up here at Georgetown, I went back on one occasion and went to a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People meeting actually with him in Mobile. Never told my father, my aunts were a little worried about it, but [laughs] nothing untoward happened, so to speak.

Q: In a way, was the racial segregation, the racial division, was this very apparent to you, uh, I mean, did this intrude at all?

DEORNELLAS: No, I don't think it had any negative impact on me, I was somewhat sensitive to the fact that it tended to deprive some people, blacks of course, of opportunities. I was aware of that, in a way. All the schools were strictly segregated, I never had any black associates at school, this kind of thing. I do remember that during World War II, I was sent to the Army - the Air Force, to study meteorology at New York University. And while I was up there, I was a guest at a house of a professor at

Community College of New York, who had known my family in Mobile when he was a young man from that area. He had a son who was a Community College of New York student who invited me to a "smoker," I guess they called it then, a fraternity, they didn't have a house, but at any rate, and they were a little bothered I think maybe over the fact that I was in uniform, they were not. This was during war. But in any event, some of them started giving me a very hard time about the backwardness and some of the shameful conditions of the south. I remember defending it in terms of very limited income so we couldn't build so many paved roads or fancy schools or whatever as much as the rest of the city. After a little while, one of them, I guess, supposedly, trying to be nice to me, as it were, said, literally, "Well, one thing I'll give you, son, is you sure do know how to treat the niggers." I said to him, to his amazement, "That's the one thing about the south that I will not defend." So I remember that feeling about it then, as a matter of fact.

Q: Well, you graduated from high school, I guess, it would be '39?

DEORNELLAS: '38, yes.

Q: '38. What did you do then?

DEORNELLAS: I went directly to the Jesuit college up on the hill, Spring Hill.

Q: How did you find the Jesuit training there?

DEORNELLAS: Well, the intellectual level of the school was not very high, really, in general, though I had a few friends among the day students, particularly, who were very bright and very dedicated students. The majority of the people there were boarders who were typically not that intellectually oriented. But there were some Jesuit members of the faculty who were rather impressive. At that time, the New Orleans province, or southern province of the Jesuits, was training its seminarian candidates or whatnot, for the level known as the philosophy, at Spring Hill. In other words, they would take some college work but they didn't have college degrees, but they would also take the special philosophy training that the Jesuits gave their candidates. And to serve that purpose, they had several mature Jesuit priests who were in the philosophy and, to some extent, theology field, but particularly philosophy who also taught some classes to us ordinary students. And I had particularly a very impressive student, uh, professor of ethics there who did impress me very much. And some of the Jesuits in training, scholastics, that were also teaching there, they were more advanced level than the philosophy, were very impressive in terms of their very disciplined approach to life, very hard working attitude, who appreciated students like me that were interested in responding, so to speak.

Q: Were you pointed towards anything when you started going there?

DEORNELLAS: Well, my father always kind of thought it would be nice if I'd be a lawyer. I think in a sense, he was like a frustrated lawyer, in a way, he said he had very limited formal educational opportunities. He was an accountant and he worked a lot with

lawyers in terms of hearings and so forth on behalf of the railroads' relations with various state governments and the federal government and that sort of thing. So he had always thought it would be nice if I did the law work. I had been rather interested in science. Some of my good friends there were pre-meds, particularly. And I actually aimed for a major in chemistry, but at the end of my junior year, I decided I really didn't want to spend my life in a laboratory. It wasn't my biggest interest in life, so in order to graduate on time, we saw the war coming on, in order to graduate on time, I took an easy, non-science major in the form of philosophy because I had so many philosophy credits, mandatory credits, anyway, that it was actually a little bit easier for me to do that than to do something else. And the curriculum was rather weak in social studies.

Q: So you graduated in 1942, and the war had just started. What happened to you?

DEORNELLAS: Well, I tried to enlist in the Navy program for officer trainees that a lot of my associates at Spring Hill were enlisting in, and they wouldn't hear of my going anything like that because of my nearsightedness. I was corrected with glasses, but my basic sight was very limited and I registered, of course, for the draft, everybody did. Somehow, I heard about a program that the Army/Air Force had, what they called a "Ground Cadet Program." There were several specialties, one in mechanics, and one in armaments, and some things like that. And there was a specialty in meteorology, and I had always been rather interested in that, never had any courses or anything like that. So I tried to enlist in that, and actually I was turned down on vision situation for that. And I mentioned it to my father, and to cut the story short, my father had a friend who had some acquaintance with somebody who was a real friend of Senator Lester Hill of Alabama. And they inquired about the situation and found out that the Air Force was giving waivers for various things such as sight because the requirement for the program that you have, kind of had to have college mathematics through calculus and college physics, was hard to meet since so many people with those requirements were in war industry or whatnot. So they gave me a waiver for the sight, and accepted me, and they sent me to New York University for this program.

Q: How did you find meteorology as a subject?

DEORNELLAS: Well, we got a very bookish, I might say academic, training, really, which I thought was largely wasted, really, because we certainly didn't use it once we went abroad and started running weather stations and whatnot. But it kept their teachers from physics and mathematics busy, I suppose, to be a little cynical about it. And I certainly had to work hard to get past the darn tests, it's just that I didn't find any of it all that pertinent to really functioning as a Weather Officer kind of thing. But it was challenging, I thoroughly enjoyed what little free time I had in New York city. And we were free from, say, about sunset on Saturday till more or less midnight on Sunday.

Q: Well, New York was a great place in those days.

DEORNELLAS: Indeed it was.

Q: What did they do with you, in the Air Force?

DEORNELLAS: Well, the Air Force, well I got assigned to Britain, the United Kingdom, as we call it in those days and I was actually initially at General LeMay's headquarters. He wasn't quite as famous then as he became later, of course, when he was silly enough to run as Vice-President with Wallace, you know, for the presidency, and whatnot. But - George Wallace, not Andrew [laughs.] But in any event, I never met LeMay. Most of the time I was at the headquarters, he was actually off in the States being briefed to take on the B-29s in the Pacific to bomb Japan. But in any event, it was an interesting organization in that LeMay was a very tough taskmaster for achievement, but he was not a spit-and-polish type of commander.

Q: How long were you in England?

DEORNELLAS: I was in England for about 2 years.

Q: I imagine that, if nothing else, you had a lot of weather changes.

DEORNELLAS: Yes, well, I worked in the weather station and then they found out they had a lot more Weather Officers than they really needed, so I worked as a staff officer in our wing headquarters for a while. During that period, I had an experience that made me feel I definitely did not want to have a career in the military. Namely, I was a duty officer overnight the night we got instructions to set up the saturation bombing of Dresden. The American Air Force had never done saturation bombing before. We always at least aimed at strictly military targets. We used to miss, we as an organization, but that's what we briefed people for. In any event, this thing came in and I couldn't believe we - well, the thing came in on the teleprinter, just as numbers, and when we got out the charts and whatnot, I couldn't believe the main point of impact was right smack in the middle of Dresden. I asked the commanding - well, the more senior officer, I was a first lieutenant by that time - in any event, if he objected to my calling the duty officer at 8th Air Force headquarters to try to verify it. "Oh, you want to do it? Fine." So I called up and told the man - this was a scrambled phone - you know, what I was concerned about, and I said, you know, "We didn't have a brief for this kind of thing before." He checked and he said, "Yes, that's what your wing is supposed to be doing." He didn't say everybody's doing it, but he kind of said that, more or less, in not so many words. And I remember saying to the man, I had just been promoted to first lieutenant, I remember saying to the man something like, "Well, why are we doing that? You know, we've never done it before." And he said, "Actually, we're running sort of short of targets." This was by early February, I guess, of '45. And I said, "Well, does Dresden have any military significance at all?" "Well, it's kind of a communications hub, and you know, if we mess up that sort of thing it'll probably facilitate the Russian's advance." It was right on the tip of my tongue to say, "Do we really want the Russians to take over Germany before we do?" And perhaps fortunately, the guy cut me off, he was a Major, as I recall, he was the

headquarters duty officer. He said, "Lieutenant, you have your orders. Go ahead and take off."

Q: Yes. It's one of the black spots to me. From all accounts one gets, the bombing of Dresden really was, well, "We got a lot of airplanes and let's use them somewhere."

DEORNELLAS: And unfortunately, that's about what the guy sort of said.

Q: And Dresden was chock full of refugees.

DEORNELLAS: And we got roped into it probably by bomber Harris, the Royal Air Force Bomber command guy. The British clobbered them at night, and we clobbered them by daytime. It was a more or less 24 hour operation. It's one reason that civilians were hit. I literally at that point volunteered to go on airborne reconnaissance. The simple observations at stations was done by non-commissioned people, but on the airborne reconnaissance that crossed over the North Atlantic, they used B-17s or B-24s with extra gas tanks and to make sure the lone weather observer really understood the significance of things and used the limited coding communication to get the more significant story in, they used forecasters. Trained forecasters, mostly officers, as the observer on these Marine flights across the North Atlantic. We flew over the North Atlantic, we didn't fly all the way to the United States, we flew to the Azores and back on the shuttle.

Q: At the end of the war, at least in Europe, what happened to you then?

DEORNELLAS: Came back and came back to Mobile. My mother had died during the war. I discovered that my father was likely to marry his secretary and that didn't bother me too much but it made me a little uncomfortable being around the house. And I didn't – I got ambitions to move on from Mobile, in general, I suppose, for that matter. So I wrote both Yale and Harvard Law schools about admission. Yale told me they were limiting consideration to people who would come to New Haven for personal interviews. And I thought that was a bit stuffy. Harvard wrote back and said, "Well, your transcript looks wonderful, but we don't really know much about Spring Hill's standards. So would you please take the Graduate Record exam that can indicate where they're at." Well, there was a Jesuit at Spring Hill who was a long-timer there, and was the Dean, and I had had a very memorable course with him in Shakespeare. English literature Doctorate from the University of Chicago. And he was very cooperative, he wasn't busy, particularly, at that point. This was the fall of '45. So he administered the Graduate Record exam to me, and we sent it off, and I heard nothing from Harvard. And when my father's wedding was imminent, I went back to him and said, "Could you get me into Georgetown Law school for the second semester?" and he said, well, he thought he could. So I came up to Washington to start law school. A month or so later, I got a communication with Harvard that said if I was still interested, I could come in the following September, to the law school. But I decided to stick with Georgetown Law school.

Q: So you went to Georgetown Law from when to when?

DEORNELLAS: ’46 to ’49.

Q: How did you find law?

DEORNELLAS: I never really practiced law in private life. I got a rather bad taste in my mouth from the law school. There were a few decent people around in law school. The Jesuit rector was a very nice guy, but the lower professors, did not, in general, appeal to me. And it was really a rather, I don’t know, shall I say, dry and undisciplined place. I think it has changed vastly. My impression is that it has. Of course, they take women now, for one thing. And it’s a whole new different plant. They have clinics and things like that. It was a very kind of bookish, standardized routine place. They were kind of cranky people too, you know, by that time the GI Bill was in force, which I was on, as a matter of fact. And so forth, and it kind of gave me a bad taste. I did go to work in the government after that, in a legal position with the Civil Aeronautics Board for a while. But I’d kind of dreamed up the idea of maybe going into the diplomatic field and I do remember one of my best friends from Mobile asked me, way back in college, he was kind of being shoved into medical school by his father. He became a very successful neurosurgeon. He really would have rather done something like botany, or something like that, or research work. But in any event, he asked me what I would really like to do if I could do almost anything. I remember saying, way back then, in about ’42 or ’41, I think maybe if I thought it was feasible, I’d really kind of like to go into diplomatic work. I said I think the idea of maybe helping people work out their difficulties and differences and understanding one another might be an interesting thing to do at that level. At that time, I frankly had in mind, kind of the notion that, well, you don’t go from a place like Spring Hill in Mobile, Alabama, to hard studies, you know. I was saying to him “You know, you asked me what I might do if I thought, but I don’t particularly think…” At any rate, I did begin to get interested in it after a while. And I did take the written exam in ’51, which I passed. I didn’t pass the written part of the foreign language exam. At that time, it was a 3 ½ day exam. In fact, I passed the 3 day exam, I didn’t pass the half day written foreign language thing. And apparently, a number of people at that time, who did well on the 3-day exam, didn’t pass the language exam. So they decided to give some of us language probationary status, which is what about one-third, I think, at least, or half of the 20 people at my basic class, in ’53, had done, actually. In any event, there was a stall while they gave us a second language and so forth. So I didn’t take the oral exam until ’52. I did take the oral exam in August of ’52.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions in the early exams?

DEORNELLAS: Oh, yes. I was just talking to young Engel about this. But in any event, yes, after a few qualification questions like your name and where you grew up and whatnot, the questioner rather calmly said, “And you’re not married, are you?” I was 31 at that time, and I wasn’t. And I had been told by one of the young women that I know, not all that well, but I knew her, that of course they were asking that sort of thing because Joe McCarthy was already on the scene and so forth. So I was kind of prepped for it. And I

told him, truthfully, "Well, up to now, I haven't settled on anything that I thought of as a lifetime career, and I'm a little bit old-fashioned and I'm a practicing Roman Catholic, and I figured that if I was going to get married, I'd probably have some children and I'd need to be able to support my spouse and children, and," I said, "more particularly, for some years, I have thought about possibly pursuing a religious vocation, particularly the Jesuits, and I only recently dropped that." And I said, "During that circumstance, I would immediately be celibate." At the end of something like that, I said, "Would you like to ask me further questions?" And the guy sort of sighed and said, "No, I think not." [laughter]

At any rate, the other thing that happened that I thought was particularly interesting, especially now, when I gather it's quite different in various ways. At that time, not only the Labor Department and the Commerce Department were participating in the Unified Foreign Service, so was the Agriculture Department, at that point. And the outside member of the panel, for the panel I had, was a man from Agriculture. Well, he hit me with some question about some farming area, the name of it, out in, I think, Eastern Washington state, and I just honestly said, "No, I don't know of that name, I don't know where that is." So I didn't pretend. But somewhere in the course of the general exam about socialism, communism and so forth, I said something about land reform, which I had read about in, of all places, the Saturday Evening Post, as being rather successful in Japan and Korea and Taiwan, or Formosa, as it was sometimes called then. In any event, apparently, that rattled the gentleman from the Agriculture Department because at the end of the exam - scorching hot day in the summer of '52, non-air-conditioned room, I don't even remember a fan - in any event, everybody's about ready to leave, obviously, and the Agriculture Department man says, "I'd like to ask Mr. DeOrnellas another question. I want to know does he believe in private property?" And I sort of swallowed for a moment, and you know, this was the McCarthy era and so forth, and some gentleman on the panel from State saved me. He said, "I think Mr. DeOrnellas believes in private property, he just wants more people to have some." And I said, "Sir, you have said it so eloquently, far better than I could, and that is exactly how I feel about it." So at that point, everybody jumped up before the Agriculture guy could say anything more and left.

Q: So you came into the Foreign Service when?

DEORNELLAS: Well, in '52, I think possibly I could have gotten an appointment in the Fall of '52, but I was fiddling around trying to get a Master's degree at Catholic University, of all places, and they required a dissertation, and so forth, even for a Master's degree. So I said, "Well, would it be feasible for me to keep the right to join, but postpone it till the next class?" And they said yes, so the class that I came in with was March of '53 and we all came in on schedule in mid-March, and we did go on the payroll, but in the meantime, of course, Eisenhower and Dulles, whatnot, had taken over, and Dulles had brought in a gentleman named Pat McCloud as the new security man, and he wasn't accepting any security clearances that came out of the Truman era, and whatnot. So we all had to have another security check. So we were all brought on the staff, on the payroll as staff people, and nobody's name went to the Senate. But we did go to the regular

curriculum and along the way one or two people ran into some sort of problem. One guy was even dropped for a while, but he persisted and eventually came back. But in any event, we were all on sort of tenterhooks on the notion of well, do we have a job or do we not have a job? I mean, we're getting payroll paychecks, that's nice. In any event, some of us came up with tentative assignments, and we still weren't cleared, you know. And one or two people got stuck for a couple of years while things got dragged out. In any event, that was what was going on in '53. Eventually, all 20 came on the payroll.

Q: Who were some of the people in your class of 20?

DEORNELLAS: Well, interestingly enough, one of the press men that had – they were all of them, 19 were males, one woman – and one of the men had the most successful career, was one that got dragged out particularly on the security thing. He was given an assignment in the Department for a while and he was still in some problem when I went off to Mexico City. In any event, he had just finished his Doctorate at Princeton, and dealing with, I believe, something about triangular relationships between Argentina, the U.S. and Great Britain. But in any event, he wound up as kind of a specialist in Africa, as Africa opened up, and he became an ambassador to a couple of countries there. Don was the first name, and I'm 81 years old, I have a little trouble remembering now. But he was a very successful ambassador to Nigeria after Henry Kissinger decided he did not want Don as Assistant Secretary for Africa. He had brought him in as Assistant Secretary for Africa and they didn't mesh, so Don went back out to Africa as ambassador to Nigeria. That wasn't too long ago, but I'm having trouble with -

Q: That's all right, we should fill this in. Were there any minorities in your group?

DEORNELLAS: Oh, no, no. I do remember one thing did come up. There was sort of two officers who were running the group. And the second one of the two was very much a southern gentleman type, he was very gentlemanly and he was very southern and he had the assignment, or maybe he just did it, of inviting the people in the class, in small groups to a formal dinner party at his residence in Georgetown. And he was a very refined person. In any event, at some point, something came about the question of having to get your – if you were unmarried when you came in, if you wanted to get married in the service, you needed to get approval to marry the particular candidate, you know? And one member of the class, who was already quite fascinated with East Asia, he'd actually been with the Marine contingent at, I believe, the old Peking whatever, but in any event, the guy was unmarried, and thinking of an Asiatic wife. He actually asked the question, "Is there a policy against marrying other races than the Caucasian race?" The person presiding was kind of shocked, I think he was thinking, maybe even then, this was '53, but maybe even thinking then of African-Americans. And he said something like, "Well, I think it may be academic because I believe it's against the law in the U.S. to marry other races." Well, I had passed the DC bar exam, and I was kind of reform-minded at that time, I may have mentioned it, and I was sort of nervous, so I stuck my hand up. The guy looks at me and I said, "Well, sir, it may well be against the law for whites and blacks to marry in Virginia and a few other places, but not in the District of Columbia." And he

looked really shocked, and it really shocked this southern gentleman guy that was the deputy of the class. I think it was after he had had me out to dinner. We were not invited to bring anybody else, we were supposed to come alone. I'm not quite sure what happened to those who had wives. A number of us didn't, but in any event, he kind of took me aside and said, "Now you see what your life in the Foreign Service where you couldn't marry a black because people just couldn't receive her in their homes." I sort of let it go, but, in any event that was the prevailing attitude in '53. I had actually, along the way, through a Jesuit contact, not a teacher, but someone I met a little bit through law school and I met more in extracurricular activities, Robert Dryden, who at one time became a member of Congress, in about '70 or '80. He had, after I told him about my interest in race relations, he had referred me to a group in Washington of laypeople that, approved by the Bishop, which was officially known as St. Peter Klayva Center, after one of the earliest Jesuits who had worked with slaves among other people in what became the republic of Columbia, back in the days when it was a Spanish colony. And, for some years, I had been active with them, they were to promote more contact between blacks and whites and better understanding and they had a publication that I used to pass out at Catholic churches after Mass on Sunday, my special artillery for them. I still remember that when I had my initial interview for clearance under Truman, I had mentioned to the man about it. I said, "You know, I want to tell you what I'm really up to," and whatnot, and I had mentioned this, and the guy said, "Well, it's a Catholic outfit, you said, didn't you?" And I said yes, "Well, it's probably all right." [laughs] He sort of let it go, I guess. At any rate, it was there that I met various people that I kept up with and actually, I met my wife there, and she's quite Caucasian, but she's Italian-American. In any event, that had a kind of lasting influence on me, and actually, the godmother of our oldest daughter is one of the black women we met at the Peter Klayva Center. In any event, I realize that the idea of blacks socializing in the Foreign Service would shock people. I wasn't too amazed that this man was shocked, but I just couldn't really concur.

Q: Did you have any idea where you wanted to go?

DEORNELLAS: Well, the only foreign language that I really knew at all, I had taken a French exam to qualify for a Master's degree or something, but the only one I really knew at all was Spanish. And I was quite interested in Latin America, so I indicated yes. The assignment to Mexico City was rather welcome.

Q: You were in Mexico City from what, '51?

DEORNELLAS: '53 to '56. We stayed a little longer, I think, than a first assignee might ordinarily because we had two children there, and I guess the second child was born at about the time that we might had ordinarily have finished a two-year assignment, so we stayed a little bit longer, but we were there about three years.

Q: And what were you doing in Mexico City?

DEORNELLAS: Strictly consular work, and very limited. I got no experience at all in citizenship, notarials, whatnot. Even when I went out on substitute duty at the Consulates, the Consulates where I went didn't issue passports and I think I may have done one notarial over in Merida, or something like that. But in any event, I did brief duty in Merida and also longer relief duty at Matamoros up on the border. In any event, I really didn't get any citizenship work. I started out in Protection and Welfare and I was considered, understandably, a little deficient there because my language was not as fluent as it might be. I didn't really know the situation in Mexico nearly as well as the man that I replaced. Mexico, at the time, and I think in common with some other embassies, particularly Europe, had a lot of Americans employed there who really never expected to serve in any other country than the one where they had signed on, and they were not Foreign Service Officers, so to speak, but at any rate, they were American citizens. The guy that was in the assistant job at Protection and Welfare, under a veteran man who had been born and brought up in Mexico, an American citizen, interesting name of Rockefeller. He was dropped in the big reduction in force that did occur under Eisenhower. He was supposedly dropped because he said he didn't want to serve any place else in Mexico. So in any event, he had been a mainstay in Protection and Welfare work, he knew the place backwards and forwards. And I'm stuck in to replace him which I just didn't fill those shoes, in a way. But in any event, I did it for about 9 months and then they switched me to Visa unit, where I did non-immigrant visas for about a year and then immigrant visas for about a year.

Q: What about Protection and Welfare work? What sort of things were you doing?

DEORNELLAS: Well, a lot of it was simply dealing with relatively simple things like tourists who tried to leave by plane at the airport without showing their tourist card. Almost nobody, I guess, Americans who were traveling there on passports, but they were getting tourist cards from Mexican consulates and whatnot. And I think a lot of them knew they were - well, a lot knew they were supposed to show them on the way in - I think a lot of them didn't realize they were supposed to show them on the way out. In any event, they used to get held up typically because they didn't have to show, maybe, their consulate card. That was about the simplest thing, you know, that we did. We'd go over to *Immigracion* and sort of explain it and in fact identify them as Americans who weren't up to anything nefarious as far as we knew. The ones that I disliked particularly were the death cases. I never liked dealing with the death cases and very early in the game I realized you could get complaints when the relatives figured that something the deceased had owned that was not shipped back, so I got to search the corpse before it was turned over to anybody else and that part I didn't go for at all, which is one reason I tried to get out of consular work. Then there's the guy that you, the old boy you maybe save his life by getting an ambulance to take him to the American/British hospital and he claims he doesn't have the money to pay the bill. [laughs] But it had its frustrating aspects, it really did.

Q: Yes, you were saying one night -

DEORNELLAS: One night I was there after work by myself and the Marine guard said he had these two women there that supposedly had broken [something] and had to replace it and could I see them and whatnot. So I had them come up. I knew one was older than the other, but it never occurred to me that the other one was actually legally a minor, she didn't seem that young to me. In any event, they had been wandering around and they were broke and so forth. Fortunately, there was in Mexico City an outfit known as the American Benevolent Society, supported mostly by the local American community. And there was an old lady, Mrs. Crump, who was very helpful. She was our resort for getting second-class bus tickets to the border to ship them out. Sometimes she'd pay for a funeral if there was no way to do anything with the corpse. We usually managed to ship those to relatives, but in any event, she was going to be around tonight, so I took these two women to a not-very-expensive hotel and actually put up the money to put them up overnight. I was very late getting home to dinner with my wife who wasn't very happy about any of it, and I wasn't either, particularly [laughs.] The next day they came in, we arranged to ship them out but the next day they brought in there their pet iguana, which got out of the cage and made a mess all over the floor, I still remember. But in any event, so we shipped them out and so forth. About 2 weeks later, we got a letter from somebody, probably telling the truth, I don't know. Supposedly, the parent of the young woman, who wanted to know if we knew anything about them or whatnot, supposedly the young woman was a minor, who was – had been enthralled, or whatever, by a homosexual woman. And could we do anything about saving them, or whatnot. I must admit I was so naive, I suppose, that relationship situation had not even occurred to me, not quite sure what I would have done about it, in any event. Then there was the day that I got motivated to run out somewhere about an American woman who was supposedly threatening to kill herself and I walked in there and I began to suspect, despite being a bit naive too on that, where I was, apparently, I was in a whorehouse, actually. She was in a whorehouse. I had my own car parked outside because the Embassy didn't have any cars for us and I deliberately took my car rather than try to take a taxi.

Q: Well, I realize you were at the bottom of the totem pole at the Embassy, but from your experience, how were relations with the Mexican authorities?

DEORNELLAS: Well, I'd say this *immigracion* situation was pretty decent. I didn't have any great trouble with the authorities, if I'd been more fluent and more aware, I guess, it would have been easier, but I didn't have any great trouble. When I was doing the substitute work up at Matamoros, I was very impressed with really the excellent relationships, as far as I could see, I was up there about two-and-a-half months, between the Mexican and American sides of the river. It's a great tribute to the consular officer who was there, had been there for some years. He was a great guy. In any event, that I do remember as a particularly good situation there.

Q: In the Embassy, as a consular officer, did you feel sort of off to one side?

DEORNELLAS: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely, and I was really betwixt and between because it was a period when they did have this reduction in force going on and they were zeroing in

on sort of who they could get rid of, in a way. And they were making a to-do about the Americans who were there who didn't really want to go anyplace else. And some would agree to go, but you know, they were unhappy about it. And others wouldn't, and they'd get dropped. There was a great deal of sensitivity between those of us who were labeled FSOs [Foreign Service Officers] by that time, and those who were labeled FSS [Foreign Service Staff], and so forth. Actually, I went as an FSR [Foreign Service Reserve], I went through an interesting bunch of transformations, none of which would have applied except for that second security check thing. I went originally on the payroll as FSS, then to go abroad on a diplomatic passport, they arranged to give us FSR status, and only later, when everything got sort of cleared up and the name went to the Senate to become FSOs. So the result was that part of the time, I was not on the diplomatic list in Mexico. I was versus these FSS people that felt that they were kind of being discriminated against. Because, you see, it was the period when the Western immigration program was coming up. Everybody was kind of unhappy about it. The guy that I was working for in Protection and Welfare in Mexico, an old gentleman that had been born and brought up in Mexico, when he found out particularly that I had a law degree, somehow he got very apprehensive that I had been sent down to replace him. And so, that made him unhappy about me, too. So it was kind of an uncomfortable situation all around, and because I was not on the diplomatic list, and there was a political appointee ambassador that we never said "boo" to, but the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] on duty when I got there was a bachelor and he taught me that since I wasn't on the diplomatic list, there wasn't any point in my wife calling on people. So she didn't, and that was resented by some people who didn't realize why she wasn't doing it. Later on, we had some people that were quite decent all around. The man in charge of the Visa unit, Warren Stewart, an old FSS or whatnot from way back, consular, specialist. A great guy, really, when I got to know him. That was good, and we had a supervising consul general for a while that was a good man all around, helpful.

Q: Well, we're talking about '56, when did you leave Mexico?

DEORNELLAS: Yes, summer of '56.

Q: Where did you go then?

DEORNELLAS: Well, since I had asked for a chance to do economic work, they kind of looked for a place for me to do that. And after they figured out what the budget was going to be, they found out there was a new job opening in, kind of a commercial job more than an economic job, at any rate, in Asuncion, Paraguay. They suggested that, and I wasn't exactly thrilled, but after all, I'd asked for getting economic work in Latin America and so forth. So at any rate, I went. It was of course a huge change from Mexico, a very backward kind of place, you name it. Paraguay was backward, period, in those days. They had a military dictatorship for a government and no water system, nothing you could call a hospital, et cetera, et cetera, really primitive. You couldn't make a phone call outside of Paraguay to any place else, you could hardly make a phone call in anywhere but Asuncion to any country. My wife was expecting another child, and threatened with a miscarriage,

so she didn't go with me. I got there, I immediately wrote a note, figured I'd come into this place until after that child was born. If I lasted that long. Well, you know, the mail was very slow, and so forth. There was no really other satisfactory way to communicate, so for a while it was a rather unpleasant post, but the funny part was that eventually that gentleman showed up that I told you was originally from Tennessee, retired in Texas. He was a really wonderful guy and he helped. I think, essentially, I got two promotions out of two and a half years in Paraguay.

Q: You were there from '56 to the end of when?

DEORNELLAS: The end of '56 till early '59, April '59.

Q: Was Stroessner the head?

DEORNELLAS: Stroessner was the military guy that was the head of the government. I'm not sure whether he was the real power or not, I don't remember that he worked that hard at the job, he was a drunk and a lecher, and so on like that, really. They had a minister of the interior, using "interior" as the French do, or like the British would say the "Home Office." He was a sinister so-and-so. You could look at him and wonder if he was a Nazi fled to South America [laughs.] But he was a Paraguayan, ultimately, a Spanish name. You know, a sinister so-and-so. The Paraguayan people, I loved them, they were wonderful people, but the government was really awful. The place was just so darn primitive. Fortunately, we didn't have any serious medical problems there. We didn't have any children old enough to need real schooling, a couple of them went to kind of a preschool which wasn't too bad. Careerwise, it was a better post than Mexico, I guess. It was culture shock, all Latin America, the culture shock being so vastly different than Mexico City.

Q: You were an Economics officer.

DEORNELLAS: Yes, I did a lot of commercial stuff.

Q: What were our commercial relations with Paraguay?

DEORNELLAS: Well, actually, it was a much more interesting assignment than anybody would have expected, I suppose including me. When I got there, because the international – two things happened in the international organizations – they were both interesting. One I played only a minor role in. The World Bank did its first refinancing, the first threatened default of World Bank loans occurred in Paraguay when I was there. So I worked a little bit on that with people from the World Bank. That got smoothed over with agricultural equipment which had wound up in Argentina and Brazil; it was a little too sophisticated for the Paraguayans. Just a corrupt military dealer who didn't have the import licenses and whatnot, and simply sold the stuff off to other countries. But what was continuing and very interesting was the relationship with the International Monetary Fund, which had decided to try to use Paraguay as a kind of pilot project for liberalization of trade and

exchange in Latin America in general. In '56, along in there, there was still a lot of this blocked bi-lateral trading stuff going on and very rigid exchange rates and so on. Well, the Monetary Fund, in the form of some Chileans working for them, dreamed up the idea of using Paraguay as a test or demonstration for relatively free trade and flexible exchange rates. We participated in that, it was a kind of secret treasury backup to the stabilization fund of the Monetary Fund. So we had a lot of involvement in that. For instance, there was a Turk who came down there as a resident from the Monetary Fund for about a year, who was a very sharp [economist], Doctorate degree from the London School of Economics, and he had actually been Treasurer of Turkey. He got in trouble with the Turkish regime, not so much I think because he was Kurdish, ultimately, but because he exposed some dishonesty. To inflate the paper currency, they were actually running the serial numbers in duplicate. He was very sharp and very dedicated, but he didn't know Spanish, so he relied on us quite a bit to help him with language and familiarity with this and that. But one thing that this gentleman I mentioned, that wound up in Texas, appreciated was I got this [idea] that the Paraguayan government was willing to make that deal with the military friend. A lot of people thought they wouldn't do it because it was going to deprive the military of its racketing import permits that they had been using. Well, what they did was, of course, we didn't know for sure how they were going to do it but I got the feeling they were going to do it. What they did was give the military the smuggling rights, meaning not so much to bring the stuff into Paraguay, per se, which they didn't have to smuggle now that they had the new import permits, but they got the rights to be the people to pass it on, as they had done in effect with the agricultural equipment. They were doing all kind of stuff: silk stockings, and so forth, would get consigned from Europe or the United States, or whatnot, to Paraguay, and then the Paraguayan military would arrange to smuggle the stuff into Brazil and Argentina. And that's how they got their payoff, ultimately, was from doing that. But in the meantime, the Monetary Fund got the demonstrators [convinced that] it wasn't a complete disaster to free up trade and exchange.

Q: Was there much commercial interest in Paraguay on the part of the United States?

DEORNELLAS: Not much, no. A little more than you might think in some fields. They were still using American automobiles, actually. I remember sending a trade list in once about tobacco products, reporting that there didn't seem to be any representatives of American tobacco products there. Later we heard that the American outfits were selling a lot of tobacco in Paraguay, I wasn't much of a smoker and I wasn't buying stuff on the market anyway, but in any event, it turned a lot of it was coming in indirectly. It was a very strange, backward place when I first got there. The fellow I went to work with, deliberately, I think, asked me on my first exploratory trip downtown, to pick him up some razor blades. So naturally, I went into a pharmacy, and asked for razor blades. "Sorry, don't have any." Went to two other pharmacies, don't have any. Finally, one of the guys said, "The place to find them, you deal with these guys out on the corner with the bags." It turned out that these guys who used to smuggle stuff from Argentina had these little posts out on the corner. You could buy razor blades out there, not in the regular stores. But that changed with this Monetary fund program.

Q: What was the read on Stroessner from the Embassy?

DEORNELLAS: Well, I'm not sure anybody admired him, by any means. We had a military attaché who was a very hard working guy, very successful fellow, he even picked up a little Guaranee, the indigenous language. And he actually used to go and see Stroessner, he had rented a house across the street from Stroessner's mansion. He kind of got to know Stroessner personally, I guess. The rest of us, of course, didn't have any contact with him. I don't have any reason to assess the guy positively, frankly.

Q: I mean, I've heard people say Stroessner was the only man who really worked in the government, practically.

DEORNELLAS: Well, I'm not sure Stroessner was calling the tune, frankly, I think he had various people who think and do for him, would be my guess. These were people who thought the authoritarian regime was more successful than other regimes.

Q: I think so, well, I mean, it wasn't that it was that successful, but it just was that he was sort of dramatic and would show up on time and try to get things done. This was just -

DEORNELLAS: Well, the funny part is the man was probably at least as swarthy as the average Paraguayan. His mother was Paraguayan and, you know, *Mestizo.* He had the German name from his father, but he was a pretty swarthy guy. I mean, there was some real Germans there. The hotel that I stayed at for quite some time was run by some blondish types that really were German. And there was a German school there, I mean, they taught classes in German, actually. Private, but at any rate… But Stroessner himself, I think it's a little bit odd to call him Germanic, he was a bit of a tyrant, but maybe more in a Latin American sense of "tyrant" than Germanic. He used to import girls from abroad for his sexual interests. I thought of him much more as a goof-off than a worker, what I was aware of.

Q: Well, no, I mean, this was one person observing this. What about, did we have any feeling about smuggling, or is this just not our business?

DEORNELLAS: Well, when we set up this Monetary Fund, theoretically, that was going to remove the need for smuggling, theoretically. What I talked about really developed a little bit further down the line, I guess, as a way of kind of paying off the military. I don't think there was that much ferment going on. The Paraguayan people were very stoic by and large, they weren't used to really having representative government, rights, and so on. So I'm not saying an awful lot of tyranny was necessary, but Stroessner was really a creation of the military. He depended on the military to really stay in power. So he needed some way to pay them off and even after I got the scoop that they were going to make the deal, some people in the embassy couldn't believe it because they said the military just won't permit it probably, they were going to lose their - what amounted to kind of like a smuggling racket or import permit on a favoritism basis - they were going to lose that sort

of thing. It did go through. There was a gentleman who was of Germanic orientation, you might say, or whatnot, in a good sense, that ran the Central Bank there. We kind of relied on him quite a bit. Used to worry about whether he could manage to stay in power, but he did, through the time that I was there. He was a big asset to us and the Monetary Fund both. The only thing that bothered me about my relationship with him, and I wasn't in his office that often, but on occasion I was, he had a private elevator. Elevators were very rare in Asuncion and I'd been stuck in elevators in Mexico City and I didn't relish that. Especially in a backwards place where I wondered when and if they'd ever repair the elevator. But it was a little sticky, you know, you'd give business to Storm, his surname was Storm, actually. And he'd usher you to his private elevator to leave the building. [laughs] I used to get in the thing and sort of pray that it wouldn't go bad on the way - I never arrived by elevator, I'd come up other ways.

Q: How were relations during that period between Argentina and Paraguay?

DEORNELLAS: Well, interesting you should bring that up. They had a bilateral trading agreement which supposedly was, you know, blocks. The Paraguayans thought they were being taken advantage of, maybe they were, for generations, I guess, all of their history. The route to the outside world really lay through Argentina, take the river down through Argentina. They felt like they were involuntarily sort of a satellite of Argentina and there was certainly some truth to it. The Brazilians were making a point of cultivating the Paraguayans and they were helping to build their highway from Brazil into Paraguay, actually a bridge, as I mentioned, it goes over the Parana river. But in any event, the block trading agreement was probably not as disadvantageous as they sometimes thought, but the one thing that got me in trouble there, and fortunately the embassy didn't hold it against me, they said I was appreciated in the embassy, but the Paraguayan government got very annoyed with me because they were trying for a PL480 deal to get American flour in there so that they could raise some money. The PL480 deal, you know, they only had to come up with local currency, you know, for an exchange, and they can sell the stuff and generate the money for their purchases. So, in any event, they were pressing us for a PL480 agreement, and I happened to know on the block trading agreement with Argentina, they had a huge surplus which they weren't using. The flour from Argentina was cheaper than any flour from the States. So I made that point to the Ambassador, he was a non-career man, and he didn't handle it very tactfully. They found out that I was the guy that had demonstrated to the Ambassador that their Foreign Minister was lying to him about the situation, claiming they were short on money. So they didn't quite get around to shipping me out, but there were some people in the government who weren't that happy about, but you know a lot of the time, it was my job to take care of the Ambassador from the U.S. But the people, really, were a remarkably stoic people and I hope things are improving now somewhat. I think they are, they did get rid of the Stroessner regime eventually, and I think things have picked up. It almost couldn't have gotten any worse [laughs.] But I think it has gotten somewhat better.

Q: Now, there were some that said you had to be careful at night because there were packs of wild dogs around.

DEORNELLAS: Well, I didn't have trouble with the dogs, fortunately, in our time, but they had cattle wandering around all over the place. The joke was that there were far more cattle in Paraguay than people. Unlike so many places, it was not overpopulated. Partly because they had that Chaco war. It really wasn't seriously, if at all, overpopulated. The had very limited resources, but all right, there weren't that huge numbers of people. One night that I was there - I had never owned a full dress suit, actually, of my own. One night I was there, the protocol officer was out of town and he dubbed me his backup, kind of thing. I think he had arranged this before I had even heard about it, and I didn't think of myself in that regard at all, certainly. But in any event, I had, I thought, an excuse, I said, "Murray, I don't even own a full dress suit." "Oh, John, I'll leave mine here." He was going to leave the country for a few days, vacation. "You can use mine." So in any event, I get all decked and the blasted full dress suit was a reception at the main club in town for the visiting President of Chile, who was a general at that time. In any event, it was pouring, there are no storm sewers, by the way, no sanitary sewers, no storm sewers. So the car was parked in the street really. I had to wade through the water to get in the car in my full dress suit. I start out, and just as I'm turning the corner, the lights finally swing around, you know, in the car. All of a sudden I see this cow wandering in the street. I just managed to dodge this cow. I'm thinking man, this is great, it's the capital city all right, and I'm decked out in this full dress suit for this reception. I've got to wade through the water, dodge cow in the street getting there. So I get there, I got to the dinner, I don't know a darn thing about protocol. And I get there, and I find out that the chief of the American military - he was a full colonel, a chicken colonel, as they used to say - is upset because his place is not at the main table, whereas the lieutenant colonel, who was the attaché and knew of course [Spanish] and all that, was at the head table. So the chicken colonel is telling me I'm the protocol officer, "You've got to get this changed, can't have this light colonel outranking a chicken colonel, that's not how this works." I'm thinking my god, what the hell do I do now? It suddenly dawned on me that I'd heard somewhere that under the agreement between the Defense Department and the State Department, the attaché, whoever is the senior military attaché - we only had one - whoever is the attaché, protocol-wise, ranks right behind the DCM, and I thought that was true, I don't know where I'd even heard it. At any rate, I told that to the guy, in other words, my point is he might have a point in a sense, but on the other hand, you've got an agreement between the Defense Department and the State Department against you here. I didn't dare into the notion that, "Well, Tom knows the President far better than you do." I mean, there were reasons for it. But I didn't want to do that. But in any event, I came out of this one.

Q: You left there in - what year did you leave Paraguay?

DEORNELLAS: April '59. I went to work at the Department in a little thing called the foreign reporting staff. We were evaluating economic reporting from various countries.

Q: How long did you do that?

DEORNELLAS: I did that for about two years, from the summer of ’59 till the summer of ’61. Then I went into the Labor Rotational Training Program. Agriculture had of course pulled out of the Unified Foreign Service way back under Eisenhower, but Labor and Commerce were both still with it at that point. They had set up this training to kind of convey, as it were, qualified Foreign Service Officers to be Labor attachés. So I went to the Labor Rotational Training Program for well, it was about a year I guess, it was an academic year, this made it more like a calendar year. I wound up my foreign tour with that. We were supposed to go to New Zealand and that was the only time we, my wife and I, both went to the New Zealand embassy to make the proper call on, kind of thing. That had never come up for Paraguay, nor Mexico even. At any rate, and then, by golly, about two weeks before we’re supposed to leave, we’ve got the house sold and all that stuff, they tell me, “No, not going to New Zealand, you’re going to Ceylon,” which is now called Sri Lanka, as you probably know. A big switch, man. British Commonwealths, if you like, but different climate completely, different society and so forth. The first thing I said was, “Well, I don’t know any language for Ceylon.” The guy says, “Oh, anybody that counts in Ceylon speaks English.” That, of course, was not really true, there was a little truth to it, but not for the guy going to do a Labor attaché. Well, the embassy never accepted it, they claimed, as an attaché job, I was kind of betwixt and between on that one to start with because the Labor Department thought of it as a specialized job, in fact, that’s kind of how I wound up in the job. I was even the third or the fourth person named for the blasted job because most of the people named before me weren’t considered interested enough in labor affairs to be acceptable to the Labor Department. The last guy before me was too much of a Labor attaché to be accepted by the Ambassador. The Ambassador was Frances Willis, the first career woman ambassador, very hard set lady. In any event, so Labor Department really wanted to hold on to that job as a specialized job and they were willing to give up the job in New Zealand, at any rate, for the time being, in order to hold on to the job in Ceylon. But the embassy didn’t really think of it as that specialized a job, so I was in the political section and I was supposed to keep track of the left side of the political spectrum, which I did. There was a reason for that, it’s quite an overlap. Far and away the major part of the Labor movement there was, shall we say, Marxist, theoretically. Most of it was independent Marxist, and quite a bit of it was Communist, actually. In any event, that was understandable, but it kind of meant that I’m betwixt and between in terms of the Labor Department and the Embassy. The situation there was that I also got a scoop there, in connection with political developments, but I was never appreciated by the Embassy and was never put in any efficiency report that they sent in on me. What actually happened there was that - one of the most notable things that happened during that time - they started their Socialist orientation. They had decided to expropriate the petroleum marketing business there. There was no petroleum production, no prospects for petroleum production. But there was some marketing business, not a lot. Shell was there, and from the U.S. side, both Caltex and blend of Standard of California and Texaco that applied to most of the Eastern Hemisphere, actually, not in Latin America. Caltex was there and Esso was there. Mobil had once been there but it had sold out to Esso. In any event, so the stakes were not that big, it wasn’t production or anything like that, it was just merchandising. But at the same time, the oil companies were worried about Sukarno in

Indonesia, where they had a lot of production, Sukarno was throwing his weight around. So the Hickenlooper Amendment was invoked, this was a part of the aid funding program, but it expropriated American businesses and didn't immediately pay satisfactory compensation, so forth. We pulled the aid program out. Well, just about the time I got there, sure enough, the properties had not yet been taken over, but the legislation was going through and so forth. So, by god, Washington wants to invoke the Hickenlooper Amendment, and pull the whole aid thing out. Well, Ambassador Willis tried to keep it from happening, but it did, and the independent Marxists and the Communists who had been at one another's throats, more or less, ever since World War II, because at the beginning of WWII, the whole Marxist movement there, had opposed the war, as an Imperialist war that Ceylon should have nothing to do with. And then when Hitler attacked Russia, by god, the Communists, Stalinists if you will, all of a sudden, it's a noble war. When the independent Marxists didn't change their minds, so they had a fight about that and the Communists arranged to stick some of the independent Marxists in jail. In any event, they had never been close together. And then, by god, when this business of the American government picking on them about the aid program and so forth, the Communists persuaded the independents to form something called the United Left Front. So that gave me some extra hostility, so to speak, to cope with. Complications for a while. Fortunately, I had some contacts, and after about a year, I learned from the contact that Mrs. Bandaranaike, female Prime Minister in the job because her husband had led the revolutionary movement to bring on the indigenous power of Ceylon versus the British government, and then he had been assassinated. In any event, Mrs. Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister and that was one reason, I think, why we had a female ambassador, but in any event, Frances Willis really worked at the job, but she was very European-oriented. In any event, Mr. Bandaranaike had made a deal with the independent Marxists, some of whom were very sophisticated types. The head of the party had a Doctorate from the London School of Economics and the number two guy, the head of the Labor movement, in fact, was a criminal lawyer, who had gotten his law studies in London. Both of them were very British-oriented types, really. So in any event, partly because the people she had in the cabinet were a bunch of clods and these people had some brains, technical qualifications, and partly because she wanted to break up the United Left Front, she had decided to make a fusion government with the independent Marxists, split up the United Left Front. Well, I got the scoop on this, and I thought it made sense. We didn't want the United Left Front, certainly, and I thought we could live with independent Marxists. It wasn't a matter of getting the oil stuff back, that was gone over a dam. So I duly reported to the embassy this was going to happen and it seemed to me we could probably live with it. Nobody else at the embassy knew about this at all. In any event, it made Ambassador Willis kind of uncomfortable because she felt that if people thought that the Leftists and Marxists had come into government on her watch, people in Washington would think she hadn't done the job all that well. I kept trying to emphasize they were independent Marxists, they weren't really Communists, but of course they had been buddied up with the Communists for a year or so, the United Left Front. And the [CIA] station chief's pitch was, "Any Marxist is bad, John, don't start telling me there's a distinction - Marxists are bad." So my neck was a little bit stuck out, some people didn't even want to believe this was going to happen, but it did. It did. And I really got credit for it at all, for

having scooped the situation. Instead, I got into some criticism because I was supposedly too close to these people. So it turned into a problem, for me. Eventually, I did get to see the efficiency report. You probably were around in the days when you didn't get to see the efficiency reports.

Q: Yes.

DEORNELLAS: So I didn't know what they were sending out at the time. Eventually, after they tried to get rid of me, I eventually did see the efficiency reports and nobody had ever given me the slightest bit of credit for my work in that regard, instead they picked on miscellaneous things. Well, the agency just couldn't be trusted on this stuff, because they, well, they didn't have people that understood the clients, the culture or whatnot. One time when the Communist labor movement split actually, between the people that stayed with the Russians, and the people that went with the Chinese, you know, after the Russian-Chinese split. The labor movement there, the Communist part of the Labor movement, split. You could even read in the newspaper about who went with what and tried to separate. Well, I was appalled to find, in reading a report from the station chief - they did let us look at some of the stuff they sent out - he had gotten the names exactly backwards. He had down as the people that went with the Chinese the people who stayed with the Russians and vice-versa. So I just quietly went instead of saying anything to the Ambassador or whatnot, and I said, "Jake, you got this backward here." He said, "Well, that's the way I got it from my source." I said, "But this means I've said one thing works, but you're saying something else. Here's a clipping out of the newspaper so you can see that what I'm saying is what's being reported in, what's really true." "Well, I just sent in what my guy gave me, and I'm not going to change it." That was how badly out of touch he really was. This is the same guy, of course, who kept insisting that no good Marxists, all Marxists were bad, and so forth. But he went back to Washington on leave and sold Washington the idea that we should destabilize the government to precipitate the downfall and bring in the right-wingers, the supposedly conservative party group. I tried to suggest that I didn't think it was necessary or desirable, but in any event, the idea got sold in Washington, and we were supposed to go on with it. I figured well, if they were going to do it, by god, it better succeed! So I didn't scheme against it or anything like that, but I nevertheless was somewhat blamed for the fact that I wasn't enthusiastic about it, I didn't really approve of it, so to speak, even though I had gone along with it. At any rate, the eventual result of this was that I was up for selection out - the board had met in the fall of '64 who had put me on the list. But there's a story there too. Were you a Foreign Service Officer?

Q: Yes, I came in in '55.

DEORNELLAS: Okay. In '64, the board was given a mandate to select out at least 10% of the Foreign Service Officer Corps. And to do so, if necessary, by relying on one year's efficiency report only. They never got such a mandate, I'm told, either before or since. They never were given that high a percentage, if they were given a percentage, and they were never told to do it on the basis of one year only, it always used to be at least two

years. Dean Rusk thought there were too many people in the Foreign Service Officer Corps. He was having trouble with some people protesting about Vietnam, of course. That was the mandate they got, or so I'm told. In any event, I was promoted in '58, '60 and '63 and the board that met in the Fall of '64 had me on the list for selection out. And nobody ever alleged that I had become a drunk, or - well, to the extent that they subtly indicated that I might be a security risk - it was just about the business that I was so damn close to these independent Marxists, whom I was supposed to be close to, you understand? I mean, that was my assignment. It wasn't something I took on as an avocation [laughs.] So I really was upset about the thing. So I come back to Washington, I was talking to various people and it turned out that a very large percentage of the people that the board selected for selection out were people that had come in as "integratees," they had been "Wristonized" and whatnot. And somebody began to think, well, maybe this is snobbery or something going on here, you know, people are still resenting the "Wristonization" process. So they decided to offer those of us who had been FSS, now watch this, I had not been "Wristonized" but I'm in the [stud] book as an FSS because of that second security check, so I have FSS on the history. They decided to offer those of us that had that background, on paper at least, a chance to revert to being a Foreign Service staff, be on the payroll. Well, hell, I had a bunch of kids, I had no independent means- (end of tape)

So it's the Fall of '65 by now. They decided to postpone the selection out for 90 days, while they consider letting us become history, at least, of having been once FSS. You had a different arrangement. And, as I said, I was 45 years old, so I wasn't old enough to get a pension, I'm not sure I even had enough time in, but of course I didn't count the military time in WWII. In any event, and I had a wife and children, and all that. So I decided to accept the idea of "reversion" to Foreign Service Staff and stay on the payroll. Fortunately, a very decent fellow came along, to my rescue, in a sense. Namely John Jova, J-O-V-A. He was ambassador in Honduras. And by golly, again, I was about the third or fourth person named for a job, but the people ahead of me either didn't want or somebody else didn't want them for the labor attaché job. Honduras did have a job that was labeled labor attaché, everybody agreed it was labor attaché. It was a little political work, economic [support] programs. Okay, well Jova, I'm sure, had been apprized of my history, and whatnot, in the sense that I had been up for selection out. In any event, he asked the previous ambassador, whose name eludes me, who was on Washington assignment, to interview me first. I sort of passed the interview with him, I guess. And then Jova came up to Washington on leave, for a consultation or something, and interviewed me. Right off the bat I thought, "This man is not only a gentleman, he's just a decent guy all around." We hit it off rather well. Did you ever know John Jova?

Q: Yes, I did, I've interviewed John.

DEORNELLAS: Well, you know, he spent some of his youth, I believe in Cuba. His parents were Spanish-speaking people from Spain, I guess. He went to Dartmouth himself, I know, but in any event, I guess he was [bilingual]. But actually, on occasion, he lapsed into Spanish when he was really spontaneous, when he was telling us some

humorous thing or something. So, in a way, he might have been a little more at home in Spanish than English. I still remember he was trying to tell me at first that although Honduras was something of a banana republic, that it's not so bad, and he told me that the climate in Tegucigalpa was delicious. He didn't say it was delightful, I still remember thinking "That's interesting." He said it was delicious, and you know, Spanish, "delicioso." In any event, he said it was delicious. Actually, at that time it was a pretty decent climate, it's in the mountains, you know. So I used to spend a lot of time on the North coast with the Labor people and so on. And I was always delighted to get back to Tegucigalpa because you'd leave so much humidity and heat behind down on the coast, when you got up in the mountains of Tegucigalpa. But Jova was just a wonderful fellow, really.

Q: Well, tell me, I think we better end it at this point, I'll pick it up next time. You were talking about Honduras, you were in Honduras from when to when?

DEORNELLAS: It was actually four years. I was there from the summer of '66 to the summer of '70.

Q: Dealing with the labor left wing, did you have any trouble from your headquarters back in the Labor Department? Did you have any dealings with anybody in Labor? Because Jay Lovestone was the intellectual -

DEORNELLAS: Oh, wait a minute! I know who you're talking about. He wasn't at the Labor Department**,** he was with the media. No, I never had any -

Q: He was very much of a figurehead.

DEORNELLAS: That wasn't the problem, though. The problem really was partly CIA and partly just State Department. Look, one of my theories, a quickie, is that - I've used this colorful phrase, excuse me - it seems to me the Foreign Service Officer Corps was largely the group of people that were around during McCarthy's time. They were kind of, in a sense, emasculated. They got to be so afraid of stepping out of line that they couldn't let anybody get to the right of them, so to speak. Some of them were very kind of "old school" folks, anyway, general. I know the man you're talking about. He was Meany's right hand guy on International. I only met him years later, I did meet him once, but it was years later, and he was one of these ex-Communist guys that couldn't see any particular value. The time he spoke with me he was all concerned about Marxist influence in the Roman Catholic Church. He wanted to talk to me about the threat in that regard. No, I didn't really have any problems with the Labor Department. I don't think they quite understood what I was up against until fortunately, some guys came out there to take part in a exhibition, it was something a little bit like a World's Fair, that Ceylon was attempting. They kind of saw what I was up against in the embassy when they were there, and they proved to be quite helpful, they lobbied in my favor, actually, and that's one reason I got the job in Honduras. The main labor movement in Honduras was very close to the American labor movement, but it happened that Mr. Jova was not involved. He was

much more interested in Europe and somewhat Asia, I guess. He wasn't particularly interested in Latin America. In any event - I mean, not intensely and he wasn't particularly concerned about that job. But in any event, the Labor Department really kind of hoped that we'd stay on and some of those guys were quite good. I've known people [over there] that were great. And I never had any knock-down and drag-out with the man in Ceylon. I'm a little bit embarrassed that he gave us a wonderful farewell party and I felt sorry for my wife for what was going on. So I accepted going there, the wives knew one another. And I'm sure there were some people that were invited to that party that, I assume after seeing us there, that I had really been working for the CIA all the time. I knew some people had suspected it, in fact I got word at one point that somebody in the CIA was spreading the word that I was working for them. That is one conversation that I had with the station chief. I went back and I said, "Look, you've got to cut that out. You've got money to keep people working with you. All I've got working for me is the supposed personality and a little bit of Scotch now and then. I'm out of business completely if these people think I'm working for you." Well, I don't know if they ever called off the dogs, but in any event, we didn't have that bad a personal relationship, but he just sincerely thought anybody that was close to Marxists is just mistaken. In the old days, Catholic Church, I guess, if you're friendly with Protestants, you must be a subversive influence. Almost that kind of thing. When I was leaving, he offered to try and get me a job in the agency, at the time it looked like I was out of business. I said, well, "Jake, I appreciate the [offer], but I don't think I'm interested." In any event, that's interesting you bring that up, I had forgotten about that guy. I did meet him some years later but he wasn't in the picture at that time.

Q: I like to put at the end of these things where we left off so we can pick it up. We'll pick this up when you're back in 1966 to '70 in Honduras and John Jova has sponsored you to go to the U.S. Ambassador there.

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Today is the 23rd of December, 2002. Well, okay, in 1969, you were off to Honduras?

DEORNELLAS: Well, it was '66 when I came to Honduras in the first place. The labor movement in Honduras, from the standpoint of the United States particularly, was more significant than most anybody would realize. It had been sort created with the collaboration of the AFL back in the '50s and they stayed on rather close terms with the AFL's Latin American guy who did work under Lovestone, but I don't think Lovestone was that concerned about Latin America at that time. So they had the job work title Labor Attaché and the embassy was willing to, so to speak, accept that title unlike the folks in Ceylon, Sri Lanka now, Colombo. They had had a great guy there for a while who had been in effect trying to replace a fellow named Jack O'Grady. Fortunately, about a year had gone by between Jack's departure and my arrival because two or three people had made in my point of view the mistake of turning down the assignment, actually, and the Labor Department wouldn't, since this wasn't considered a specialized job, the Labor Department wouldn't take just any young FSO that they might want to send there. In any event, the movement was a significant part of the social and economic picture in

Honduras. The things weren't very active politically there, there was in effect a military dictatorship or a much more benign dictatorship than what was going on in Paraguay in my day. There just wasn't much political activity but the government and the labor movement were kind of a reasonably cooperative way. So the main intention that I did get involved in there was the question of land reform. The labor movement was, as I say, considered very respectable by American standards and I think they deserved that name, and I believe the government may have had considerable trust in it. But the landowners, the landholders and so forth in Honduras, were leery of any agrarian reform, so to speak. And they were accusing a Jesuit of being a Communist and generally trying to oppose it as best they could. Well, I will admit this partly because of the attitude of the labor movement, I sort of embraced it a bit and I studied up on the background and found that unlike the stories being told, the agrarian reform law, which had been passed under a previous administration in Honduras, was not drafted by Communists, as they said, but some people said, and all that, so it didn't look that threatening to me. Fortunately, Ambassador Jova, one of his great points, he was open-minded and he wasn't entirely comfortable, I guess, maybe with the standing, as it were, between the landholders and the labor movement, but he was willing to consider the facts. The facts were tending to be basically something that I tried to get over in the Embassy and the Aid Mission, that a lot of the land had not really been titled properly in Honduras and, as far as I know, in other countries. A lot of it had been kind of open as a commons, and the *campesinos* had been farming some of this stuff since - there were no written records to the contrary, as it were. Then, as roads got built and the country began to develop, a bunch of clever guys with money, *comerciantes*, as they used to call them there, business people, were buying up land that in some cases had never been properly titled at all, and they just took the trouble to take title to it, and they would very commonly evict the *campesinos* and put fences around it. If they used it at all, they used it for grazing, even though Honduras was very short of cultivable land. So of course, when the *campesinos* tried to go back on, they'd break the fences and they'd need to talk about breaking up fences and going on private property. I kept trying to get the, at least historical, truth of that across and I'm glad to say that I think ultimately that was pretty well appreciated. At Ambassador Jova's direction, I was very close to the Aid Mission there. The English were funding a program through the AIFLD, American Institute for Free Labor Development, which was tied in with the AFL and I oversaw that contract, and I also sat on the small loans committee that, on behalf of the Ambassador, would do things like that. So it was a rather satisfactory assignment, I felt, all around. The relations, as I said, with Ambassador Jova were really wonderful and the relations with other people in the Embassy in general were quite good. I was in the Political section, and the two chiefs of the Political section were younger than I and maybe a little uncomfortable about that angle. In any event, they were very impressive people and I enjoyed working with them. And I generally enjoyed working with the rest of the setups in Honduras. I was not promoted there because I found out after I'd been recommended for a promotion and passed over, that in effect, I guess, by switching from FSO there to [FSS], I'd been sort of blocked off from any promotion. In any event, I didn't get a promotion out of it, but I got very good reports and so forth and a pretty fair amount of appreciation.

Q: Well, you were there from '66 to when?

DEORNELLAS: To 1970. I was there four years.

Q: Well, tell me, what was the government, you say it was a military government. Were you able to operate with them or work with them?

DEORNELLAS: Let me tell you one quick story to illustrate the situation. The titular head of the government was also the head of the Air Force, that had been his career. Honduras had a fairly respectable Air Force, small but fairly good quality, partly thanks to collaboration with the U.S. Air Force, it was Army/Air Force when I was in it. In any event, he was a bit of a drunk and a lecher and all that, and the government was really, I think, run by civilians behind him, as it were. But nevertheless, this man had come from a rather humble rural background and he had more appreciation of the reality of the less fortunate people in the country than the *comerciantes* and whatnot. As a matter of fact, I had a memorable experience with him. I went in his private plane, actually, at invitation, to the dedication of a worker's bank, it was sort of like a cooperative, but under the agrarian reform law in Honduras, labor unions could run these things and they were a little bit different than co-ops – I don't know that the distinction is that important, but in any event, this was not exactly a co-op, and it was under the labor code rather than under the anti-co-op law. In any event, we went over there, into rather bad weather, and the President started drinking fairly early in the day, for general purposes, I guess, and by the time we were coming back in the afternoon, he was quite liquored up. But he asked me to come sit by him and he proceeded to tell me that this was a union of the banana workers, not the major union banana workers, but one of the banana workers' unions, for an American investment company. In any event, he had been around Honduras when the unions organized against, as it were, the American investor banana companies, and he had thought they had a good case and he was glad that the Honduran government had not been violently opposed to unionization and so forth. And he said of course the workers had to struggle to get recognition from the union, from the company. And he said, in effect, he told me he knew about my interest in agrarian reform and that he also believed in the agrarian reform thing and he said, "But they're going to have to struggle for it," he said. "The government can't just hand it to them on a plate," something like that, and he said, "But I'm going to let them struggle, I am not going to use the Army to oppose these people." The man was so drunk at the time, I really didn't know whether to believe him or not, for that reason in particular. But it turned out, during the rest of his regime, which was still going on when I left in '70, that's what he had done. The investors in the land sometimes hired gunmen to kill *campesinos* and so forth separately, but to the best of my knowledge, no Army people were ever authorized to do that. As a matter of fact, he created something called the Institute of Agrarian Reform with a Honduran who had been up here with the OAS [Organization of American States] and some little progress was being made around the time that I left. There was this little general setback in the country when they had this small war with El Salvador, which was – this meeting we referred to as "The Soccer War." They had been a riot at a soccer game in El Salvador between the two countries, but that wasn't the real cause of the war. The real cause of the war was

somewhat related to the agrarian situation, and more particularly and broadly related to the labor situation in general. Salvadorans were coming in in large numbers over the border, illegally in effect, they claimed that under the Central American common market all those were supposed to [be able to more freely]. In any event, they were not only taking jobs, they were settling land, Salvadorans were buying land. Again, we're running into the very tight arable land [situation] in Honduras, and this was resented at various levels of the society and the government wasn't happy about it, so there was a little bit of a crackdown on the Salvadoran behavior out in the rural areas. The Salvadoran government alleged that there was violence being inflicted on its citizens and so forth. That was their excuse for staging what they thought was going to be like the Israeli attack on Egypt in '67, namely a sunset bombing attack that would wipe out the other people's Air Force. Actually, they had such a lousy Air Force that it was simply ridiculous. They didn't do anything to the Honduran Air Force and they didn't do anything, fortunately, to the city of Tegucigalpa. So as it turned out, although their ground forces were much better mechanized and so forth than anything the Hondurans had, and it was kind of a surprise attack - at least the timing was certainly, the tactical angle was very surprising. After a few days, they gave up on any air work, and the OAS arranged a truce and the thing sort of blew over. But it disrupted things in general, the major connections between Tegucigalpa and the rest of the world, Taca Airways, as a Salvadoran-flagged airline (although American invested), couldn't fly into Tegucigalpa during the rest of our time there. And there had been a lot of commerce between the two countries and that was badly disrupted for a while. In any event, the war didn't do that much damage, but it tended to be held against us. There was a tendency of the Hondurans to feel that we had been on the Salvadoran side and I'm afraid that some things that had happened in Washington may have given them some basis for that. There were times that we tried to persuade Washington to be more neutral about it, as it were, but we had lousy phone connections, and I was never on the phone, I wasn't high-ranking enough for that. We had during this time, by the way, a female *chargé* who had come there as DCM, Jova had left. She had a economic commercial background, and a very dedicated woman, but she was kind of ill at ease with the whole political scene and somewhat ill at ease with the Latin American scene and very conspicuous, as it were, being a female head of mission, back in, this was '69 we're talking about. '68, rather, '68. So it had its drawbacks in terms of its attitude towards the United States. By and large, I thought it was a useful posting and a good posting, really.

Q: What were you getting with this? How did you find the American fruit company?

DEORNELLAS: Well, the big one was United Fruit, known in Honduras as the Tela Railroad Company. They would trade at a port on the north coast, at a little village called Tela, T-E-L-A. That was the biggest of the two. The other one, where the workers' bank had been inaugurated, was from the Standard Fruit outfit, based in New Orleans, which had been sold, at that time to a conglomerate that is now, I think, marketing all their stuff under the Dole brand, actually.

Q: There's so much talk about how United Fruit ran Central America and that's where these places became known as banana republics. Did you see the heavy or fine hand of United Fruit?

DEORNELLAS: I would say that both the fruit companies were behaving themselves very well, the way I felt about it. The agrarian reform movement was not tangling with them directly, they weren't trying to take over any land the fruit companies were using. Partly because the fruit company workers were organized by these unions that had sponsored agrarian reform and there was a lot of respect, I think, mutual respect between the management and the union leaders, workers and whatnot, in Honduras. There's one particular union leader in [Honduras] that worked at the United Fruit workers named Oscar Gale, G-A-L-E, and whose grandfather had been an American citizen, I think. He originally came from Wales, but I think he had been in the United States for a while. He'd gone to Honduras as a mining engineer. But in any event, Gale didn't speak English, he wasn't really "Americanized" in that sense, but he had a lot of respect for the United States. He had excellent relations with the AFL and with the Embassy. He had developed a considerable respect as a patriotic Honduran, he served on some sort of a joint labor management government board on economic policy in his country, and that sort of thing. Very unpretentious man, he lived in one of the houses that the Indians had created with some collaboration with AID, a housing development, there were a couple of them, at least. He lived in one of the regular houses on the layout. I think his feelings about life were pretty good at that point, he had had a very rough childhood and he had started working a very humble way for the fruit company. I think he had become somewhat demoralized and had become an alcoholic. Fortunately, he had married a very good woman, and he had given up alcohol. He had awful cirrhosis of the liver. Periodically, the company, I think, used to pay for him to go up to New Orleans to the Oxford Clinic to try to do things about that. Actually, he didn't die of that, he survived my time there by a couple of years and was killed in a traffic accident, a highway accident. He didn't drive, himself.

Q: Was the AFL-CIO keeping an eye on things to make sure the unions were thriving? I mean, did you…

DEORNELLAS: Well, they certainly expected me to be cooperative with the unions, which I didn't mind being at all, it seemed quite appropriate under the circumstances. I had terrible with my - I'm trying to think of the name of the man that troubled Latin America at the time. It was a Scottish name, actually, but he was not a Scot, he was of Scottish descent, apparently, but at any rate.

Q: Well, if it comes, we should fill it in. What about the landowners? You know, I never served in Latin America, but one hears about, particularly in places like Central America, where they were twenty families that ran everything. Often, and particularly in those days, they would embrace and almost suborn the embassy, just by overentertaining and being the one kind of folk and all that. Did you see any of that?

DEORNELLAS: I would say that was not true, really, in Honduras. Honduras was not dominated by any one or small group of well-to-do families. I gather El Salvador was. But Honduras was not, really. The main problem on the agrarian reform thing was not with people who had been big landowners, for you know, time immemorial or whatnot. The main problem was that the land had been open for cultivation, not really possessed in a legal or control sense, was being taken over by city types who had some money to spend and were taking advantage of the roads that AID and whatnot was coming to build. I mentioned the evicting of the people from the common, so to speak, I think a little bit like the enclosures of the 18th century in Britain. At least the fair-minded consul we had and I used to get together and talk about those things as a matter of fact. In any event, no I think the – frankly, I thought everybody was doing a pretty good job down there at the time. As it happened, when they did stage a general strike, about a protest to increase the sales taxes, my wife was badly injured, a hip break. She had to be evacuated to the canal zone hospital. Ambassador Jova told me to go ahead and accompany her down there. The AFL, they brought in a guy from El Salvador that was a little more experienced than the man in Honduras and the situation eased off without real violence. They did deport one of the major leaders of one union, not Gale, and they also deported the Jesuit priest, James Carney, who used to do business admittedly under the name Father Guadalupe. That's what an awful lot of people who were upset thought it was a very [proper] thing for him to do. His pitch was that "Carney" means niece in Spanish, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the Jesuits in Honduras were not using their last names, they were using their first names, and there was already one of them there who was named James when he came. But he was very close to the major unions and close to the agrarian cultural reform people, kind of thing, and I got to know him well enough to where I guess you'd have to say by many people's standards, he was a bit of a radical, all right, but he certainly [were not] taking orders from Moscow or Beijing, or anyplace like that. He was still in good standing with the Jesuits and he was working hard as a rural [priest]. I mean, he didn't wait for people to come into church in the city, he got out in a jeep or on horseback and ran out looking for people to console or sympathize with. He was deported during that time, and Ambassador, by golly, got together in my absence - I mean, I didn't claim up to it - with the new Papal Nuncio, he covered Nicaragua and Honduras. By golly, they went to the government and got them to let Father Guadalupe come back in. Now, they didn't let the labor leader come back in until I got back and made some special persuasive pitches to the government about how, essentially, the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know. They knew the man wasn't really a devil anyway, but I mean, I just tried to get the point over to them that maybe he was a little militant by their standards and maybe made a few "demagogic" speeches now and then, but essentially he was a relatively harmless guy compared to the real - there were one or two real Communists down there, pretty nasty people. Fortunately, they didn't have much influence.

Q: Did Cuba have any influence? Were there Cubans there?

DEORNELLAS: At the time I was there, they really didn't. AIFLD, that I could detect, had sent in before I got there, while O'Grady was there, an expatriate from Cuba who had been active in the labor movement in Cuba under Batista, and he was very persuasive

with the Honduran labor unions. The labor unions had done pretty well under Batista, I gather, it was his story, and I think there was some truth in it. Whereas, under Castro, they weren't doing that well as independent organizations. He had done a very good job in that regard and Ambassador Jova was very appreciative of him. Fortunately, that angle was pretty well taken care of.

Q: Well, when you left there in 1970, where did you go?

DEORNELLAS: I went to the Dominican Republic. Which, for the labor field, was culture shock, a huge change. The American labor movement really had no significant influence in the Dominican Republic at that time. Well, Socialist, if not Marxists, did have considerable influence in the labor movement, and the kind of people that I was supposed to be dealing with were still resentful that the American, well more or less, invasion if you will, intervention, under Lyndon Johnson in '66 I guess it was. So I didn't have very much to work with there. AIFLD was trying to run a program but we really weren't dealing with what there was in terms of fairly important unions who were from a Socialist background at least. They were hostile to the U.S. And then there was the Christian so-called labor movement which was relatively hostile to the U.S. throughout Latin America. They didn't have any particular significance in Honduras, there was an establishment there, they didn't have much. They had more in places like Chile and some other places. They were fairly significant in Santo Domingo. However, neither the Socialist bunch nor the "Christian" or "Catholic" bunch had any connections with the embassy and apparently they had had very little if any connections with my predecessor, so it was very difficult for me to try and establish contact. I was struggling away and beginning to make a little bit of contact with the Christian-Catholic bunch when the job in the Dominican Republic was abolished. You might be interested to know that as for the Socialist group, I managed to talk to one or two of them on the telephone but they never would let me come to the place. I found out from no less than the station chief of the CIA, who was a friend from way back, South America, that by golly the agency's policy was that the only person in that whole setup who was supposed to have contact rights on behalf of the U.S. Embassy was a man who had come from Romania, I think he was nominally Jewish but he had a leftist background. He had been with Bosch, B-O-S-C-H, who was the leader of the Socialist clutch. He had been with Bosch in exile and so forth. The agency had arranged for this guy to supposedly keep in touch with Bosch to the extent of to let them know if he expected if anything really bad happened, the agency would be informed. The arrangement was that was the only way the American was going to deal with this outfit was through this particular contact with the agency. No less than the station chief acknowledged that to me and he admitted he was a little embarrassed about it, but it was policy laid down from Washington and it had been approved. So that was one reason I couldn't deal with them very well. But it was kind of frustrating, there wasn't a whole lot to do there compared to Honduras where I had been busy as a bee.

Q: Had all the apparatus of Trujillo been dismantled by the time you were there?

DEORNELLAS: Well, it kind of depends on how you look at it, I guess. Balaguer, the old bachelor or whatever, who was the president and effective dictator, pretty much of the country, had been created by Trujillo and he had been the nominal [president] under Trujillo. I'm sure he was still in with the Trujillistas. In any event, he was not doing anything quite as rough as had happened under Trujillo and they went through the motions of that in elections, you know. All that sort of thing. But in effect, it was also pretty much a dictatorship, maybe a little less of one, truly military dictatorship than Honduras. There were certainly remnants of the Trujillo regime.

Q: From your perspective, was labor being exploited, or did they have a pretty good say in the economy?

DEORNELLAS: I don't think the labor unions were significant, really, in the Dominican Republic. The American food companies weren't operating there. There was one European founded and operated outfit that did grow some bananas out on the East end of the island. In any event, I would say that with the possible exception of the port workers, the labor movement in Santo Domingo wasn't doing anything particularly effective. The dramatic thing about the port workers was that they had such a huge membership they had limited job opportunities since Americanization had begun there. As a matter of fact, they had to spread the work around, but they managed to keep the faith enough to where a guy could work only two or three days a month but at least survive. That was kind of tolerated or allowed, but in any event, I don't really think that - I was half-sympathetic to abolishing the job because one, I felt frustrated and two, I just didn't really think there was probably enough work available in the field to have a specialized job.

Q: Well, did you feel that the workers were being exploited?

DEORNELLAS: Well, you know, there's a limited pie to divide up in all these places. How much of a slice can you hand any one person? In terms of the kind of [assignments] or whatnot that had been pretty well established in Honduras with the banana companies, I don't think there was that. I don't think there was any real effective intercession by unions there. The country was, I guess, compared to what many other countries were like in Latin America, or at least some, was relatively prosperous. At the other end of the island, Haiti, you know, was miserable. So by comparison with across the border, the Dominican Republic wasn't so bad. Didn't have anything like the population pressure that Haiti had, for one thing. And there was a pretty fair amount of cultivable land and Balaguer did run an orderly place. I guess it was somewhat attractive to foreign investment, but it wasn't that controverted at least in my time there. The people were sort of used to it, being subservient to a really dominant political regime. In that sense, I'd say that [authoritarianism] still existed, really. Balaguer made a point of not being the blustery, classic dictator. He was a very self-effacing person in manner. He ran a pretty forceful ship.

Q: You left there when?

DEORNELLAS: ’72.

Q: Then what?

DEORNELLAS: Oh, I came back at loose ends.

Q: Who was our Ambassador to the Dominican Republic when you were there?

DEORNELLAS: Francis Melly, spelled M-E-L-L-Y. A good man, and reasonably sympathetic to - well, let’s put it this way, very aware of things. He’d realized that I wasn’t really achieving very much, but I just had the odds against me. And I didn’t try to deceive him on that. One thing I appreciated about him was that when he had regular staff meetings, which he did, I was invited to be there. I was there along with the section chief. Of course, I went to the [political] staff meeting, too, as a matter of fact, with that contract and all that. The place was sufficiently “developed” to where we actually had these staff meetings in a metal, what’s the other thing?

Q: We call it a bubble. You kept the bees out.

Well, in 1972, you came back at loose ends to Washington.

DEORNELLAS: Yes, I collaborated somewhat with O’Grady, Jack O’Grady was the labor advisor for Latin America at that time. There was fairly important money being spent by aid through this American Institute for Free Labor Development on labor-related programs in Latin America. So I collaborated with O’Grady on that and he had a serious heart attack and was hospitalized for some time, I kind of acted in his stead. I didn’t have any permanent assignment to speak of. The Labor Department was still trying line up a wave of specialized positions. They did want me to go to Nigeria, Lagos. I found out through the State Department. My own attitude in part was, we had a bunch of children who were high school age, some of them were, and we’d been in the Third World for a while, so I was just putting down roots in the States. So I wasn’t eager to go abroad, particularly to a place where, again, I thought the labor movement probably wasn’t very significant, and where, I found out, the State Department, including the Ambassador, really didn’t want a specialized position. So I kind of managed to get out of that business. So I didn’t go to Nigeria. I got an assignment to work with a gentleman in Cultural Affairs, or whatever they call it, something collaborating with [other agencies]. In any event, it was a task force that was looking over the situation of specialist programs for the worldwide thing in Washington. People being brought in for various things and how that was really working. You know more about [this] than I do. They run that, what was that, “H” program, I guess, for visas?

Q: Yes, “H” Specialist Visa.

DEORNELLAS: Yes, trainee people coming in, fill specialized jobs. I remember one study we got into. We found out that foreign medical school graduates had taken jobs in

the medical field in the U.S., to the extent that, I believe at that time, the majority of anesthetists and the majority of lab people, what are they? They're kind of doctors.

Q: Pathologists.

DEORNELLAS: Pathologists, thank you. The majority of pathologists and anesthetists are those who had Doctoral or MD degrees, you understand, were actually graduates of foreign medical schools. That went on for a while, and the guy in charge of the task force was another one of the people who recommended me for a promotion along the way, being a generous sort of guy, I guess. And it didn't happen, and it got actually blocked off. After a while, I did get an assignment - well, it was a mixed office of Civil Service and Foreign Service people, and the particular slot I went into had been occupied by a Civil Service employee. There were other Foreign Service people in the place. It was called Munitions Control in those days and the program, in effect, was to review export licenses on material of military significance for either the technology or the items themselves. I was studying the electronic stuff there. There was another Foreign Service guy doing aviation, and a Foreign Service guy was an assistant to the director. In any event, I was there for some years and there was a lot of collaboration with other agencies. In effect, of course, when I signed a license, my name was on it. In that sense, I was responsible for it, but I had very limited discretion, really, as to whether to say "no" or "yes." I had some discretion as to where to refer the matter, to other agencies. For a refusal, the other agency, some other agency would have had to make the objection.

Q: How about the Pentagon? What I've gathered is the Pentagon doesn't want to see anything going out at all, the Department of Commerce wants everything to go out.

DEORNELLAS: Yes. I had very little relationship with Commerce. The Pentagon relationships were good enough and they didn't really object that much to - they certainly didn't object to everything, by any means. I was working with NSA [National Security Agency] and Department of Energy on some nuclear-related stuff, and so forth. Everybody was reasonably easy to work with, I would say. The exception to that, really, was that on the rare occasions that we turned down something for Israel, I and other people would get complaints from the Israeli Embassy about it. That was the main friction. Of course, sometime the exporters themselves were unhappy about having something turned down. Sometimes they understood why, and other times they didn't. I don't recall any of them going to a Congressman about it. I think the Israelis may have done that on some instance, but it didn't get that bloody. What I distinctly remember in terms of atmospherics or whatnot, is that when I first went into the job in early '66, late '65, along in there, of course, we still had a Republican administration, and Kissinger was the Secretary of State and so forth. In any event, we were being super nice to the Shah of Iran. I remember that, as I recall it, on occasion we approved things for the Shah, for Iran, that we weren't even letting the Israelis get at that particular point. Not much, but a few exceptional things. My fellow Foreign Service officer on Aviation pointed out to me, which I knew, [that] all the electronics that were on the plane, you see, had come to me. So actually, F-18s, were exported, or approved for export, at least, to Iran before the U.S.

Navy got them. The Israelis didn't really want them. They wanted 16s above all, and 15s. The Shah was approved for some 18s before the U.S. Navy was even getting them. That lasted for another few years. As a matter of fact, I went out once to Wright-Patterson Field to make a presentation to the military guys who were going out to military missions in various points [around the globe]. I was amazed to find out that the ranking Navy guy in the group, an Admiral, was going to head the military mission in Iran. I was really surprised to find out that we were sending an Admiral. In the American setup, there's no Commodores so an Admiral really is up there with, typically, with a Major General, at least that's his protocol rank, I guess. But he was going out there on a military mission to Iran, by god. This was about '58, I guess. About '78, sorry, getting all mixed up here.

Q: Was there any disquiet in your office about overloading Iran with all this equipment?

DEORNELLAS: [Laughs] Very interesting you'd say that. The guy who was running this patrol in my day was a former career Air Force officer. He had been an alcoholic, he was anything but at that time, he was a workaholic. He had been a career Air Force guy. I said to him once something about concern about the kind of thing that we'd be shipping to Iran, you know, and he said, "John, if we ever have a falling out with them, there won't be any Americans available to maintain this stuff. They won't be able to maintain it." In any event, he might have been thinking more of the aircraft than the electronics, but to some extent, I guess, it applies to both cases. This man was a real interesting character. When he first interviewed me for the job, I had the nerve to say something to him and I found out, you know, that he and I could hit it off. He sat there through the whole interview and chewed on an unlit cigar with the cellophane still on it. I found it so interesting that I finally said at the end of the interview, when I decided he was a real human being, I said, "Excuse me, sir, can you tell me do you have a light for those things?" He says, "No, I'm a reformed alcoholic, and I used to depend on smoking, and then my doctors told me I should give up smoking." So he said, in effect, he didn't chew tobacco, but he did this. To reduce somewhat the effect, I guess, slow down the effect of the cigar maybe going soft. He literally did it with the cellophane still on the cigar.

Q: Well, okay. You're saying about '78 you left that job?

DEORNELLAS: No, I stayed there till I retired. They were somewhat loathe to see me go, really. Consequently, Bill Rogers and I - I remember his name, he was very helpful. He had an FSR designation, a retired Air Force guy. In any event, he got an extension, as long as I stayed an FSS or whatnot, I was supposed to have only limited Washington assignments. He got an extension for me for a while. But Personnel wouldn't really extend it indefinitely. He did say, "Well, why don't you go abroad again?" Nobody thought up any worthwhile assignments like me and I already knew the FSS designation on me. My wife didn't want to go abroad, period. So I went ahead and retired.

Q: You retired in what year?

DEORNELLAS: Technically, it was December of ’81. About the last day or so of ’81, as I recall. I had this law degree and I was a member of the DC [District of Columbia] bar, and I did qualify for the Virginia bar but I never did anything particularly lucrative with. I worked as a volunteer with legal services for a while and I worked briefly doing some court records check kind of stuff. In any event, I did decide to go out on my own. Get employed as a lawyer, didn’t go anywhere. Admittedly, when I did retire, I had gotten in mind of doing something, but in any event, I had to either go abroad [or retire]. I guess there was a theoretical possibility.

Q: Well, there was something that you, I think, had when you were in the Foreign Service you had to, you couldn’t spend more than eight years.

DEORNELLAS: Actually, I had about nine. Frankly, I think the idea of the Foreign Service surge in Washington, which goes back to the “Wristonization,” you know, integration and whatnot. I think that’s a great idea, especially if you have children around, that’s what I’m thinking about particularly. Of course, it’s a little bit of a shock to the wives when they have to come back to the States and do a lot of maybe domestic work that they had servants do. On the other hand, it enables them to continue a career [on their own].

Q: Well, great! Well, I want to thank you very much. It’s been quite interesting.

End of interview