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

ROBERT E. FRITTS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 8th of September 1999. This is an interview with Robert E. Fritts.

This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and

I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Bob and I are old friends. Could you tell me when, where you were born and something about your family?

FRITTS: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1934. I had the good fortune of being raised in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, then labeled as the "largest village in the world." In contrast to a Foreign Service career, we didn't move. I went through the entire Oak Park public school system (k-12).

My parents were born and grew up in St. Joseph, Illinois, a very small town near Champaign-Urbana, home of the University of Illinois. My father, the son of a railroad section track foreman, was poor, but worked his way through the University of Illinois to gain a mechanical engineering degree in 1922. He was a very good, serious and self-disciplined student. Hard to imagine now, but much of his income was earned from trapping muskrats, mink and foxes in and along the sluggish streams of the area. My mother also lived in the town, the daughter of dairy farmers. She became an elementary school teacher. They were high school sweethearts who were married in Chicago after my father found an entry-level management job in the steel industry. Over some 30-plus years, he rose to become executive vice president of a family-owned fabricating firm, Taylor Forge Iron & Pipe Works, now defunct. Indeed, after later being taken over by Gulf and Western, it was razed.

In terms of the Foreign Service, their background is interesting only in the context that while I was growing up, neither had any overseas or international exposure or interests. Neither did their parents. Nor for years did they know anyone who did, other than in the immigrant mix of Chicago. Several uncles served in WWII, but they were reticent to talk and had no desire to go abroad again.

During WWII, my father was judged too important to the war effort for a uniform because of his key role in producing war materiel. In later years, after I was in the Foreign Service, he became somewhat internationally minded as the firm acquired several foreign plants in Scotland and elsewhere, which he visited frequently. In addition, the small firm became one of only three American companies with the skill to forge the large titanium rings that composed the skeletons of Minute Man missiles. In later years, the firm suffered greatly from losing its bread-and-butter business of pipe, fittings and flanges to Western European producers. He held the Marshall Plan responsible. Eventually, my older brother served in the Air Force and also worked for a time in the Philippines. I made international and foreign affairs a life.

In retrospect, my family portrayed the general pattern of America in the 20th century - from farms, railroads and small towns to the city and industry, from a domestic industrial focus thru WWII to the Cold War and missile defense, from global military strength to trade competition and foreign investment, and a son representing the U.S. abroad in the Foreign Service.

Q: How about life at home? What did one talk about sitting around the dinner table? Were there family chats or things of this nature?

FRITTS: Sure, in those days of "housekeeping Moms", family dinners were standard. We always had sit-down dinners together. It was a routine and important aspect of a family (parents and two boys).

I don't recall much abstract discussion and certainly not on foreign affairs. My father was a firm Republican, although he was also very pro-union. My mother was raised a Democrat and they teased each other about her vote for FDR in 1934 being offset by his vote against. I think it was the last Democrat vote she cast.

As I recall, most of our table chat was on events of the day, with the exception that my father talked a good deal about leadership and management - of men, of course. He was a fine executive who never lost the common touch. My mother said that his father (a grandfather I never knew) had a town-wide reputation for running the teams who swung pickaxes for him on the Illinois Central railroad track. The men at Taylor Forge apparently loved and respected my father. In fact, no union at the main Cicero plant would sign a collective bargaining agreement unless my father's signature was on it. He had considered views about the capabilities of people and how to motivate them. He believed firmly that he had reciprocal obligations. My brother and I, in our adult lives, followed many of those principles and are much the better for it. Indeed, there were occasions in the Foreign Service when I consciously followed his ideas, such as periodically "walking the plant floor" of an embassy from motor pool to communications, trying to leave each "job" or post better than I found it, and identifying talent wherever it was at whatever level.

Q: In the steel business, management wasn't regarded as progressive. Your father was sort of a maverick, wasn't he?

FRITTS: Not really. He just sincerely cared about men and thought good management was also good business. He was unusual for the time in his belief in and support of unions, in large part because he believed his father than been exploited by the railroad barons of the day.

Shortly after WWII, the plant had an extended major and violent strike by its certifiably Communist leadership. My father eventually resolved it, in considerable part because the men would not associate my father personally with the "capitalist" stereotypes portrayed by the strike leaders. I well recall from those table conversations a tenet that "Workers don't settle strikes, wives do," in the sense that wives eventually put pressure on men to go back to work. I came close to trying that once in Kigali when the motor pool "downed tools," but I wasn't sure if the approach would be cross-culturally transferable.

Q: You went to school in Oak Park, Illinois. Were they public schools?

FRITTS: Yes, all the way through.

Q: Let's talk about elementary school.

FRITTS: William Hatch School was one of about eight feeder schools into the high school. It provided a very good education with an emphasis on English. I can diagram sentences today to the *n*th branch. The teachers were excellent. They were all women and unmarried - a carryover from the Depression, WWII and the then-attitude that teaching was one of the few acceptable professions for women.

Q: How about reading at the elementary level? Do you recall, did you use the library a lot?

FRITTS: I don't recall, but I was an inveterate reader as a boy. My grandmother, who lived in St. Joseph, Illinois, had a shelf of Civil War books inherited from her father, who had served with the 72nd Illinois Volunteers. The books were primarily memoirs of Union leaders e.g. Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Logan etc. I learned to read literately from those books, including by flashlight under a blanket in her house. A love of reading, of history, of non-fiction and of great men doing great things came from those volumes. I have them today at her behest.

Q: What spurred your grandmother to have those Civil War memoirs?

FRITTS: Her father was a Civil War veteran. He, like tens of thousands of others, was part of a large market for books about the war in which he and they had fought. The books were marketed by *book bummers* who peddled them by horse and wagon throughout the farms, towns and Grand Army of the Republic posts of a still mostly rural America, including St. Joseph. It was a good business. My grandmother had very few books and I doubt her father did. But she had these and treasured them even, though I suspect she had never read them.

Q: The high school - was it called Oak Park High School?

FRITTS: Actually, the Oak Park & River Forest Township High School. It was unusual for its time - quite large (about 2400 students) with functional buildings and grounds - almost like a small college in a middle-class suburb of western Chicago. It was recognized as one of the preeminent public high schools in the country. Again, English was emphasized. Even expository writing was virtually required. The English teachers lamented that Ernest Hemingway, an Oak Parker, had dropped out years before. They felt his writing would have been improved under their tutelage. About 90 percent of the graduates went on to college, which was unusual for any public high school then. For most Americans, secondary school is a very formative period and I was fortunate to live in Oak Park.

Q: What courses particularly interested you?

FRITTS: Well, I guess, the social sciences. I enjoyed history and literature. Though few of us would admit it, I also enjoyed English and writing, in part because they didn't seem difficult. They gave us a lot to read and I was a fast reader. We also memorized poetry

and I learned a few tricks that later came into good stead when delivering "Talking Points" and writing up memoranda of conversation ("memcons") and reporting cables. My handwriting was/is awful, so I learned to touch-type - without doubt the most useful course of my life.

Q: How about extra-curricular activities?

FRITTS: I was much involved. I played football and basketball and was elected or appointed to a lot of student offices - all those kinds of things.

Q: Was Oak Park a sort of upper middle-class type school?

FRITTS: Well, more just middle class. Oak Park didn't have much of a blue-collar component and its white collars were primarily lower management professionals. Any affluent upper crust came from the adjacent and much smaller suburb of River Forest. There were no student minorities of color.

Q: Let's see, you were in high school from when to when?

FRITTS: '48 to '52.

Q: How about foreign events?

FRITTS: Well, that period was during the second Truman administration. I remember being involved in debating clubs in which we took on particular issues of the day, such as the St. Lawrence Seaway. And maybe we debated foreign policy issues, the UN comes vaguely to mind, but, frankly, foreign affairs were not high on my peer's agenda or on mine.

Q: While you were going there, the Korean War started. Did that intrude at all?

FRITTS: Not really, I was only fourteen. I was in the back seat as my parents drove to our annual vacation when the radio announced the North Korean invasion of South Korea. My father was concerned and discussed with my mother the implications for the plant. I think our vacation was cut short. My mother was concerned my older brother might be called to service. Naturally, I read the newspapers and traced the arrows indicating where the troops were going, but, at that age, you have other interests.

Q: Well, then you graduated in '52. Did you know where you were going to go, or what were you pointing towards?

FRITTS: I did and it wasn't the Foreign Service, of which I knew nothing. I had passed the national Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) exam for a full scholarship and regular USN commission on graduation. I had also been accepted at Cornell. However, the NROTC unit at Cornell was filled, so I either had to go to Cornell without the scholarship or go somewhere else. For reasons I now don't know, I went to the

University of Michigan (U of M) and without the scholarship. I then retook and passed the NROTC exam and regained the scholarship for three years. I was sort of inclined to the Big Ten anyhow, because my family had been so deeply involved at the University of Illinois. My father and brother had gone there, an uncle worked there, my grandparents lived nearby, so there was a lot of Big Ten talk. However, I didn't want to walk in their footsteps or relive their lives, so I chose Michigan. Sort of a mild rebellion.

Q: So you were there from '52 to '56.

FRITTS: That's correct.

Q: What was your major?

FRITTS: I eventually chose political science with a focus on international relations, but with some uncertainty. Upon entering the U of M, I had no idea what I might choose as a major, so I took a wide variety of courses, all in arts and sciences. In the fall of my sophomore year, I had to choose a major. Nothing spoke clearly to me, so I finally sat down and just looked at my grades. They were excellent in political science and geology, which appeared incompatible. I thought about that, talked with my parents (who took no position), and decided that I really was not cut out to be a scientist. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed that international affairs also combined my other interests in history and foreign languages. I had also by then been abroad for the first time to Europe on an NROTC summer midshipman cruise and my world had expanded. When informed of the decision, my parents were concerned the major would not lead to a paying job, but they believed in their sons making their own decisions.

Q: '52 to '56 - McCarthyism was still going. Did that impact at all at Michigan?

FRITTS: Not very much. After all, my college generation was known as the "Silent Generation". There was very little student activism. I don't remember any Democratic or Republican groups and the student government was disdained. The students had other things on their minds. I reflected that stance. However, the Army-McCarthy hearings were held during the summer and I recall listening to them avidly. Little did I know that in later years I would know and even work for one of the pilloried Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) - John K. Emmerson - when he was deputy chief of mission (DCM) in Tokyo. A very fine man.

Q: In political science and all, were you finding yourself looking at other countries more closely by this time?

FRITTS: Sure. My studies in international relations, the annual NROTC cruises with the prospect of active duty, and intellectual curiosity were melding. I began to connect what was going on internationally with my courses and growing experience.

Q: Any particular area?

FRITTS: No, except I recall that my string of A's got upset when I took Middle East politics. I disliked the professor, which may have had some impact. In any event, I wasn't the first to find the Middle East difficult to understand.

Q: How about politics in Michigan at the time? This was Eisenhower time. In '52 an awful lot of students were entranced with Stevenson. Did that catch you up at all?

FRITTS: No, I wasn't involved in the political scene. Most of us weren't. I found Stevenson an intriguing person and began to realize that policies just didn't happen, there were options. But again, my focus was on the stuff I was doing at the U of M, including various student groups, all non-political.

Q: You knew you were going to have a couple of years of Naval service, didn't you?

FRITTS: That's right. There was a three-year active duty requirement.

Q: Well, were you at all gauging your college career on what might help you in the Navy?

FRITTS: No, but I was a highly motivated NROTC student and I think I was a highly motivated Naval officer. I went into the Navy with the distinct desire to give it a full opportunity as a possible career. As a scholarship midshipman, I received a Regular commission. I chose the Navy, in part, because I had liked reading Naval history as a kid. I had a somewhat romantic view of the sea and of those who went down to the sea in ships. The summer cruises reinforced those attitudes. I was certainly inclined to think that my growing interest in international relations could be satisfied through a Naval career.

Q: So when you graduated - you graduated in '56 - and right into the Navy?

FRITTS: Yes, I was commissioned two days before commencement, married five days after commissioning, and my bride, Audrey, and I drove to California and found a small apartment. I then went off to catch my ship in the western Pacific for three months.

Q: Where did you meet your wife and what was her educational background?

FRITTS: Well, it's one of those syrupy stories, in the sense that Audrey Nienhouse and I both went to Oak Park High School. She had also gone to another of the feeder elementary schools. However, the high school was so large that we didn't really become aware of each other until our senior year. We dated a bit in the spring. She went off to Hope College, in Holland, Michigan, about 163.59 miles from Ann Arbor - I hitchhiked it many times. We dated off and on throughout the first two years of college, became "pinned" our junior year, and were married on graduation. Graduation and marriage went together then.

Just the other night she commented that at one point as a student, she was doing some work in the high school office and dating me at the time. She thus looked up our class

standings. Out of over 500 seniors, she noted my GPA was ranked 34 and she was 35, so we were pretty compatible. At Hope College, she majored in history and education.

Q: Let's talk about the Navy time, '56. Where did they put you? You went to the West Coast?

FRITTS: Yes, I was assigned at my request to small combatants, which meant destroyers. I wanted responsibility and exposure to a variety of experience.

In retrospect, that stance reflected my father's influence as a role model and all that leadership and management chit-chat at the dinner table.

The same theme also guided every job I sought or received in the Foreign Service. I always wanted the broadest range of responsibility possible and believed smaller embassies like ships provided the means. The Navy concept was that officers had to be competent across-the-board, if they were eventually to gain senior positions and broad responsibility. I've often thought the Foreign Service could well adopt that approach.

I reported to the USS Porterfield (DD-682), a destroyer then operating in the western Pacific and home ported in San Diego. A remnant of World War II, in 1956 it was still a fairly modern vessel.

Q: You hoped to have more responsibility and experience than on a cruiser or aircraft carrier. Did you? And how did the training work?

FRITTS: Absolutely. The Navy gives its junior offices major responsibilities. Within a few months, I was standing watches as Officer of the Deck Underway and in control of a hundred yards of ship, 2200 tons of steel, 40,000 shaft horsepower and the safety of over 200 men, while conducting maneuvers at twenty or more knots in the company of other ships doing the same thing, often at night. Sometimes the captain was on the bridge, sometimes not. Very maturing stuff for a 22 year old.

In contrast to the Foreign Service, the Navy then and even more so today is focused on training. While we received training in shore schools, we also had required "hands on" and self-study to "qualify" for certain functions, such as Officer of the Deck. To "qualify" meant that the captain decided you performed whatever it was well enough to risk his ship and reputation with you.

One sought to attain as many "qualifieds" as possible. They were career building blocks to become the ultimate "Qualified for Command." Frankly, that's also how I looked upon the Foreign Service - to "qualify" by functions, languages and posts to eventually be in charge of some things.

Q: How did you relate to the enlisted crew?

FRITTS: In contrast to the Foreign Service, the Navy trains junior officers to lead people.

But the crew was a challenge as about 40 percent of the men were draftees. In my first billet, which was a deck maintenance group, about half of the thirty-or-so men had convictions of various kinds. They were older, mostly poorly educated, and resented officers on principle. As draftee "time servers," they were poorly motivated. A fresh-faced ensign was fair game. But it worked out well, in part because I used some of my father's management techniques and because I had what a superior once told me was "command presence." I learned a lot of people lessons in the Navy, which helped throughout my Foreign Service career.

Q: Did you get involved in Asian affairs while you were with the Seventh Fleet?

FRITTS: Sure. After all, we were an operating arm of foreign policy as part of the U.S. forward defense presence in the Pacific. We operated out of Yokosuka and other Japanese ports, showed the flag where we could, and conducted visible combat-readiness training in carrier task groups, sometimes with allies. We also patrolled the Taiwan Strait as a deterrent against China.

Our destroyer squadron was deeply involved in the Quemoy-Matsu crisis of 1958. The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) threatened to invade the two offshore islands and our job was to assist in their defense by escorting Republic of China (ROC) troop and resupply convoys overnight from Makung in the Pescadores to three miles off the islands. Amphibious craft then left the ROK ships and wallowed across the water through intense artillery fire from the PRC emplacements on the mainland mountains overlooking the flat islands. The PRC had the water and islands zeroed in and a number of the ROC craft were sunk.

It was my first experience with a near-war situation. By then I had been transferred to the commodore's staff and began reading intelligence reports for the first time. Previous foreign stereotypes had become real countries with visible capabilities and dangers. My interest in foreign affairs began to exceed my interest in the Navy. A few months later, I resigned my Regular commission and received a Reserve commission, which effectively ended any career in the Navy. The Foreign Service would be next.

Q: How had you heard about the Foreign Service?

FRITTS: Sheer chance. I was walking across the U of M campus one evening in the spring of my junior year. I cut through a classroom building (Angell Hall) because it was shorter to cut through than walk around it. Oddly, one of the classrooms was lit and I poked my head in. A couple of men in suits were talking to students about something called the "Foreign Service". I sat down and listened. I had never heard of the Foreign Service in my life - didn't know any such thing existed. So I collected the material, thought about it and, pretty much as a lark, signed up to take the exam. The exam was given in Chicago in June of 1955. On the day of the exam, my soon-to-be fiancée and I were going to attend a wedding in Michigan. Audrey was very upset that I backed out to waste a day taking some "dumb exam" which, of course, changed both our lives. I was fortunate enough to pass both the written and oral exams. The Department had a policy of

deferring to obligated military service and my name was put on a register. Thus, during my senior year and three years in the Navy, I had in my pocket the option of a Foreign Service career.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions or how the oral exam went?

FRITTS: I really don't. I quickly realized they were gauging my breadth of knowledge and would challenge any views I presented. The goal was to see if I could think and respond.

Q: While you were in the Navy, were you able to pick up anything about this Foreign Service business?

FRITTS: As a matter of fact, I did. Importantly. It turned out that an associate of my father had a son, Bill Sherman, in the Foreign Service at Embassy Tokyo.

Q: I've interviewed Bill Sherman - an expert on Japan.

FRITTS: That's correct. So I took a day's leave when the ship was in Yokosuka, rode the train to Tokyo, and called on him in the old chancery where, some years later, I would also serve. We talked about the Foreign Service and whether it was a career. Bill was a good officer and became very successful. Seeing a real Foreign Service officer in an embassy environment was very encouraging.

Q: Well, as you were preparing possibly to leave the Navy in 1959, what to do, what were some of the factors that made you opt for the Foreign Service over the Navy?

FRITTS: Well, I had become more sophisticated and experienced internationally, was stimulated intellectually about foreign affairs, wanted to be actively involved in it, liked interacting with non-Americans and different cultures, and wanted to live overseas. If I stayed in the Navy, there would be some opportunities, but only occasional and peripheral. I'll also confess that I sensed the Navy was about to become a very technical service - which it did. That was not my strength. Frankly, I also decided that I could continue to serve the United States patriotically in a similar but different way.

Q: What did your wife think about it?

FRITTS: Audrey was very amenable, even though she had not yet been overseas. In those days, there was very much a belief in "Whither thou goest, I will go" and that's what she did.

Her grandparents on both sides were from Holland, part of the great wave of immigration in the early 1900s. Dutch was spoken occasionally in her home, but she rejected the heritage then, wanting to be purely American. I understand that's often a third generation attitude. Her grandparents had a little difficulty accepting an "outsider" i.e. a non-Dutchman marrying their only granddaughter.

Q: Well, was it difficult making the move or did you sort of flow right into the Foreign Service?

FRITTS: The transition could not have been smoother. I was mustered out in San Diego and we put what belongings we had into our '53 Buick Special and drove across the United States visiting friends and family along the way. I think I left the Navy in early June 1959 and reported into the State Department in mid-July.

An anecdote of the trip is that Audrey's grandparents and parents had a small cottage on a lake by a small town in Michigan. She had spent her summers there as a child and we stopped by. The local townsfolk and farmers knew her well and a neighbor held an outdoor cookout for us with 30-40 people. One of the guests came up to me and said,, "Well, what are you going to do now that you're out of the Navy?" And I said, "I'm going into the Foreign Service." He looked distraught, shook his head sadly, and said, "Why would you want to do that? You'll have to wear that funny uniform with a handkerchief on your neck". Confusing the Foreign Legion with the Foreign Service indicates again how Audrey and I were breaking the mould of expectations.

Q: So you started your entry training in July '59?

FRITTS: That's correct. It was at the tail end of the Eisenhower Administration.

Q: Could you sort of characterize and describe your class?

FRITTS: The class numbered about 30. All but a few were military veterans. In the class was Tom Pickering, who became an enduring friend. If you had taken a poll at the end of our three-month A-100 course as to whom we thought would have the most successful Foreign Service career, Tom would have won unanimously. His personality and skills were obvious.

As was customary, everyone did a little biographic presentation the first day. I felt somewhat overshadowed as many had graduate degrees, some from a place called "Fletcher School." They'd talk about "Fletcher this" and "Fletcher that", including Pickering. I was sitting next to Tom and finally asked "What is Fletcher?" and he told me about Tufts. Some years later Tom told me he decided at that time that anybody who didn't know about Fletcher was somebody whom he wanted to know. Coming from him, It was probably a complement. Maybe…

Q: Pickering had also been a Naval officer...

FRITTS: That's right.

Q: Any minorities or women?

FRITTS: We had one woman, whose name escapes me. I don’t recall any minorities.

Also in the class were Tom Boyatt, Mike Smith and Pierre Shostal, who had fine careers. We had a good class.

Q: How did you find the training?

FRITTS: I was just out of the Navy where you did what was expected and assumed it was for the best. The A-100 course wasn't really training in the sense of learning skills. Its focus was on orientation to a different professional culture.

I was very impressed by an FSI speaker, who later became locally known as an actor, who would back us across the room simply by invading our American nature of what constitutes comfortable conversational space. I never forgot that and often stood my ground in later years no matter how much expectorant was landing on my face.

We were exposed to various agencies and field trips, which were fun and useful. We also had a few sessions with senior officers, both the good and the bad. At our graduation reception, a senior officer and wife were the ranking guests. Their last post had been in Indonesia. A classmate asked the standard question about how they had liked it. "Oh, very much", he said, "The Indonesians are very nice... for brown people". Audrey and I were floored. The Navy had a saying that even an admiral "...puts his pants on one leg at a time". I realized that senior Foreign Service officers also had faults.

I found FSI language training refreshingly innovative. The approach was quite revolutionary at the time. I had taken French in high school and some Spanish in college, but couldn't really handle either one. I welcomed the FSI French opportunity, but found it still required work.

I was struck, in the French class and later with Japanese and Bahasa Indonesian, to observe the stresses that arise in small groups learning foreign languages. The atmosphere invariably becomes competitive and ego-driven as the slower learners feel dumb and the quicker feel superior. In reality, learning a language is not a gauge of intelligence. It's an abstract talent, like having genes to play the violin well. Some of the marital strains between husbands and wives became serious.

Q: In those early days and years, did you feel an outsider? Did your Foreign Service entry class come only from the "Eastern Establishment" or did it reflect various aspects of American life?

FRITTS: Well, I will say this. It's hard to imagine these days, but I felt that coming out of the Middle West, having gone to the University of Michigan (and not Fletcher), not having a graduate degree, not having overseas experience other than the Navy, and not having really thought about foreign policy or the diplomatic service until late in college, that I was somewhat at a disadvantage. I recall that at the end of my first job in the Department, which was on the German Desk, that I felt I had been more on trial than other junior officers in EUR (the Bureau of European Affairs) because my background was not the usual "Establishment" pattern. Sometimes the attitude was manifested by

praise expressed in terms of surprise.

Q: I sort of came out of the Eastern Establishment, having gone to a prep school and then to an Eastern college. But then I spent four years as an enlisted man, including going to the Army Language School. Thus, in my case, I felt my classmates had been officers and I hadn't been.

FRITTS: About the same kind of thing. But I remember that being "Eastern" was also no guarantee. Mike Smith, in our class, had all the Eastern background including Harvard, but he had never been further than about 100 miles from Marblehead, Massachusetts. In fact, he had never been further west than the suburbs of Boston and traveling to Washington, DC to enter the Foreign Service was the furthest south. A year later he was shooting and gutting his own meat in Nouakchott. He went on to become the Deputy Negotiator for U.S. Trade Relations (USTR).

Q: So where was your first post?

FRITTS: The Department. Personnel decided that all of us who were military veterans would spend our first tour in Washington as we were deemed to already have overseas experience. Only two or three of our class were assigned abroad.

Q: That must have been annoying as hell.

FRITTS: It was unprecedented and we were shocked. And the assignments were for three rather than the usual two years. We were all upset, including Tom Pickering, who chafed very much over it.

Q: So after orientation and French language training, it was early 1960. Where did you go in the Department?

FRITTS: Over the next two-plus years, I had three jobs, all in the Bureau of European Affairs (EUR). The first as a staff assistant to EUR Assistant Secretary Foy Kohler, the second on the German Desk, and the third, briefly, as the acting Luxembourg Desk Officer.

Those couple of years were so educational, that in retrospect, Personnel did me a favor. I was a far better officer at my first post in Luxembourg. I knew how country desks operated and had gained a sense of how to report and write effectively. I had also seen a number of fine officers in action, sometimes in crisis. I was impressed with their competence, commitment and integrity. I'd also seen poor officers and knew why their seniors thought them poor. Overall, I decided that the Foreign Service had promise.

Q: Let's see, the first job was with EUR Assistant Secretary Foy Kohler. What were your impressions and how did he operate?

FRITTS: Bear in mind that my tasks were to push papers, task and set deadlines, and

cajole office directors. I didn't have that much direct contact with Kohler, in part I finally realized, because the senior staff aide sought to monopolize access for himself. However, I alternated late nights and Saturday mornings.

To my eye, Kohler was "old school" in the best sense, very dignified with a calm demeanor. He was patient, never erupted that I knew of - certainly not at me.

After I'd been there some months, I screwed up my courage and went in to see him. I went through the list of crises, including the U-2 Gary Powers incident that scuttled President Eisenhower's visit to the USSR. I noted he always seem to know what to do. Yet he had a terrible schedule. How did he do it? When did he have time to consider nuclear disarmament, for example? "Well", he replied," I always take a shower in the morning and walk to work. That's when l think things through." It was, you know, a simplistic response. What he actually did was work off tremendous background and knowledge, which he synthesized when walking to work. Later, I found I did much the same thing on the morning car commute.

A comment on Kohler's integrity. At one point he was injured in an automobile accident in Washington, DC while en route to an embassy reception. In the trunk of the car was his briefcase with classified material he was taking home to work on. He refused to leave in an ambulance until calling State and having a security officer come to the scene and take custody of the briefcase. He took some heat on that during his confirmation hearings to be ambassador to Moscow. They should have praised him.

Q: You mentioned the U-2 matter...

FRITTS: My role in history on the Gary Powers U-2 bit was to be called to the White House to pick up an envelope for Kohler. It was not sealed. So in the Department car on the way back, I peeked. Inside the envelope were pictures of a U.S. pilot standing by an airplane. A few hours later the crisis became public and unfolded. I was not involved in any of the deliberations, but I had a great seat to watch how the Administration and the Department reacted.

Q: How were Soviet affairs handled?

FRITTS: Richard Davies, I think, was the EUR deputy assistant secretary for Soviet affairs. The whole Soviet thing operated almost unto itself. The practitioners were a close and cloistered group, almost walled off from the rest of the bureau. I later found that not uncommon with in-groups anointed or bonded by a specific language or interest. Sinologists, the Chrysanthemum Club (Japan), Arabists, at one time so-called "Atlanticists" and, later, economists come to mind.

Q: Were you picking up any sort of EUR philosophy about the European Community? Was their collegial chit-chat about were we were going?

FRITTS: The Director for that area was Russ Fessenden, a very able officer whom I

particularly appreciated because he and his group always met their deadlines. I recall that Russ was a true believer in the eventual expansion of what was then only the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It was seen as the way to reconcile France and Germany and create a peaceful Europe. The Bureau often couched that goal in terms of entwining Germany within so many linkages that it would be unable ever again to play a dangerous independent role.

Q: What was your impression of the clearance procedure within the Department?

FRITTS: You mean then or now?

Q: Then.

FRITTS: I found it normal that the Department wanted to speak with a coordinated voice on foreign policy. It was the way things were done and part of my job was to make sure it got done.

Q: Did you find yourself having problems being a very junior person acting for a senior person?

FRITTS: The only real problem was tasking. No one - then or now - likes being called by a junior staff assistant and told to have this or that memo or talker done by such and such time - always too short. Still, it was not that dissimilar from Navy situations, such as officer of the deck. You were representing a captain and there were ways to show deference while getting the job done. For example, I used to make sure to walk down to offices occasionally rather than just use the phone. The disembodied are always perceived as detached and imperial. I used the same approach in senior jobs. One of my father's recycled techniques.

Q: What did you do the German Desk?

FRITTS: I was sort of a factotum to Elwood Williams, a German expert who had been converted from the Foreign Service to the Civil Service after developing multiple sclerosis. He was a fine officer. It was universally thought that he would eventually have become ambassador to West Germany except for the disease. He was also an ex-Naval officer and we got on well. Sharing an office with him day after day, listening to him talk on his speakerphone, and pushing his wheelchair to meetings turned out to be good introduction to the workings and attitudes of the Department. Fortunately, he also looked upon himself as a teacher, possibly as a means of living his career vicariously through others. He also arranged or vetoed all meaningful officer assignments throughout West Germany. I learned a lot about the importance of corridor reputation and how even those with foibles can be put into positions to succeed. He knew the ins, outs and personalities of every post in West Germany and of every officer - how they would fit and how they wouldn't.

Q: Were you on the desk during the Berlin Wall crisis?

FRITTS: Yes, but I was the lowest of the low. I spoke no German and had no German expertise. My role was to fetch, carry and do scut work. The Director was Martin Hillenbrand, who later became Ambassador to West Germany. I had great respect for him. During the months long crisis, he dictated long memos in final to Secretary Rusk, President Kennedy and the interagency crisis group without changing a word. I'd listen. Another fine officer was Frank Cash, who later on became DCM in Bonn.

An anecdote about the crisis. Whenever an important memo was needed, my job was to find Grace, whose last name I've forgotten. Grace was a secretary elsewhere in EUR. Remember, there were then no such things as copiers - just carbon paper. Grace had very strong hands and could get thirteen legible carbon copies out of her typewriter rather than twelve. I don't think the U.S. Government today could handle much of anything - not least a foreign policy crisis - with only an original and thirteen copies!

Q: Hillenbrand has just written a book on his experiences.

FRITTS: I doubt if it needed any editing.

Q: Germany was at the center of our policy in those days, particularly with the Berlin Wall. Did you feel you were in the center of the action?

FRITTS: Yes. The German Desk and Hillenbrand personally, were the policy cockpit of the Department. Personally, I was kind of overwhelmed - busy operationally and learning a great deal, but only in a support role.

There was some angst within the German Desk as during the occupation of Germany, it had been a separate bureau. Being folded into EUR as just a country directorate was still hard for some to swallow.

I was also exposed to senior people such as Gen. Lucius Clay, who was our - I've forgotten the title - top representative in Berlin at the time. When Clay would return on consultations, I often met him at National Airport and served as his aide and escort officer.

It was occasionally embarrassing because often on arrival he would pump me for inside information e.g. who was undercutting him, why had DOD leaked this or that, why had Senator X said what he'd said, who had the President's ear etc. I usually didn't have a clue. Observing how he and others thought and countered the wiles of Washington added practical realities to idealism about all parts of the U.S. government working for the common good.

General Clay was very courteous to a young officer. He would even offer a martini or scotch-and-soda at his apartment. Wow!

Q: Did you run across Eleanor Dulles, by any chance?

FRITTS: I did indeed. Eleanor was still on the German Desk when I was there, but barely. She had been shunted to lesser and lesser responsibilities and to offices farther and farther from the director's office. She had been resented during the reign of her brother, Secretary Dulles, and was being eased out, but not without strain and what I gathered were occasional counter efforts. I saw her a couple of times at meetings and she certainly had an air.

Q: Well, did you run into any feeling on the German Desk that the new Kennedy Administration was getting out of control in the confrontation with the Soviets?

FRITTS: The only vignette I recall was just the opposite - too much caution. As I mentioned, Gen. Clay would occasionally muse to me. At one point, he said the USG was making a serious mistake by not confronting the Soviets with military force and "breaking through" the wall. That Khrushchev would "back down" if we held tough. I think that's also in his memoirs. He didn't mention to me any risk about WW III, but he waxed eloquent on a belief that the Soviets understood force. I think there is now some historical support for the view that Khrushchev did have a Plan B.

Q: That reminds me. During this time, President Kennedy had been elected. He inspired many, particularly young people, for government service and all. Did you sense any of that?

FRITTS: Yes, to an extent, but the Foreign Service was uneasy about the Kennedy Administration. My seniors were concerned that the President and his appointees were unduly young, unstructured, and too sure of themselves in foreign policy. The FSOs I knew were skittish about what these new inexperienced people might do and their insensitivity to and non-acceptance of whatever had been done. Over the course of a career, I came to share that caution with any change in presidential administration.

Q: But don't Foreign Service officers favor one party or the other?

FRITTS: Of course, individually. But my observation, at least until recently, is that the Service as a whole is more interested in competence than party. In addition, there's a strong practical reason to prefer to re-elect an incumbent president or party because it greatly simplifies the transition process.

Transitions to a different party are awful. It takes about a year to break through the defensive posturing of the worst appointees plus mounds of briefing papers stressing the basic and obvious. When the Carter Administration came in, the code was for them to wear boots and denim to the office and "no ties". Drove the foreign embassies nuts. Another Carter example: A colleague had to brief an ambassador-designate on "Why are there two Koreas?" In the Reagan Administration, I sent one of my desk officers to be a note taker at a meeting between a new undersecretary and a foreign ambassador. The officer came back with no notes. The undersecretary had told him to forget about it as he had a "good memory!" Good luck over the next four years... Naturally, I told the officer

to do a cable anyway and we back-channeled it to our embassy.

It's not a Democratic or Republican phenomenon. Every Administration's politicos, even those who know better, feel compelled to degrade their predecessors and reinvent wheels, if only by adding new labels.

Whenever possible, I later tried to avoid being in the Department during a transition.

Q: Well, then, you said you got yourself on the Luxembourg Desk. Did you know you were assigned to go to Luxembourg?

FRITTS: Yes, Bob Miller headed the desk for Belgium and Luxembourg. I was over complement for about six months so I became his assistant desk officer. I was fortunate to be able to learn what was going on in Luxembourg and who the few policy players were in the Department and Washington.

An anecdote from that period is that I would brief officers going to Luxembourg for one thing or another. A new Army attaché, who would be resident in Brussels and also accredited to Luxembourg, came through one day. I did the usual review of policy thisses and thats and who was who. In Luxembourg, about six months later, the same Army attaché visited the embassy on his first trip and stopped by my office to get some military budget data. He asked for an overall briefing, which I gave, almost exactly the same stuff I had told him a few months before. "My God", he said, "It's a pleasure to meet someone who knows so much about Luxembourg. The guy who briefed me in Washington knew nothing and had never even been there." Lesson learned: "If you ain't been there, you don't count."

Q: Had you asked for Luxembourg?

FRITTS: Yes I wanted a small post where I could do a broad range of things, as I had done in the Navy. I was fortunate to be the sole economic-commercial officer and Luxembourg was a full member of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the relatively new European Economic Community (EEC). Actually, Luxembourg's steel industry was larger than Belgium's, so Luxembourg wasn't the smallest potato in the field. It was a dynamic formative period and our Ambassador to the European Community at the U.S. Mission to the European Communities (USEC) in Brussels, Jack Tuthill, added high energy. I was often called to USEC or Embassies Bonn or Paris for policy coordination and review sessions held by Tuthill or other VIP officials. My so-called counterparts at the other U.S. embassies were twenty years older, truly senior, and many of them European and economic experts. on Europe. But still, I was on the ground in Luxembourg and knew a few things. So it was a valuable exposure to sophisticated policy analysis and management. I received the same instructions as the economic ministers in Paris and Rome and my reporting and assessment got folded into all the analyses. I was fishing in a small pond - but it was my pond.

Q: When were you in Luxembourg?

FRITTS: 1962 to 1964 - about two and a half years.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FRITTS: When I arrived, it was James Wine. I think he had helped sew up the religious vote for President Kennedy in the South. After a few months, he was succeeded by Bill Rivkin, a lawyer from Chicago. The American Foreign Service Association "Rivkin Award" is named after him.

Q: I've interviewed James Wine and he was important to the Kennedy campaign.

Luxembourg has the image of being sort of a social post for political ambassadors, such as Pearl Mesta in the Truman Administration. However, I've had a husband of one of the recent ambassadors there, a woman, say, "You know, I gave so much money and all they gave her was Luxembourg," Did you find that it was sort of a putdown that so many political appointees ended up there?

FRITTS: Both James Wine and Bill Rivkin were political ambassadors. I never heard them talk about their financial donations. I knew Rivkin far better than Wine, but each of them was committed to the job. Each wanted to have influential impact on the Government of Luxembourg (GOL) and to be respected by their American peers in the other capitals. Rivkin was a high profile activist. He thus irritated his American ambassador peers by portraying Luxembourg as more important than they thought it was. Perfectly normal.

Rivkin also believed that cutting a social swath in Luxembourg was an important aspect of the job. As De Gaulle was then President of France, Rivkin relished competing socially against the French Ambassador, who returned the favor. The contest was a source of much amusement to Luxembourg officialdom.

Q: The head of the association I'm working for is Ed Rowell. He's a former ambassador to Luxembourg. He's said that Luxembourg was in a way a very handy place if somebody wanted to use it. It was an approachable part of the European Community - you could go talk to people who were sitting in the policy center of the emerging European Community or Union. You could pick up quite a bit about what was going on elsewhere because you could get to them, whereas in the other countries, it was a little more difficult, more layers of bureaucracy. Were you able to find out what was happening in other parts of the European Economic Community (EEC)?

FRITTS: Sure. Our relationships with Luxembourgers were terrific. They were fond of saying that Luxembourg had been liberated by the United States three times: once in World War I and twice in World War II, including the Battle of the Bulge. It was a very, very pro-American place and even more so in the context that De Gaulle and France were such a pain. Their sincere devotion and appreciation for the liberations of Luxembourg affected all of us. We probably attended 20-30 small events a year attending

commemoration ceremonies throughout the country, sometimes just the laying of a wreath at a crossroads. In addition, there was a large annual ceremony at the U.S. military cemetery at Hamm, where most of the American dead from the Bulge are buried.

Luxembourgers also have a sense of quiet humor. They didn't take themselves too seriously and would lampoon the vainglorious stance of the French and the patronizing attitude of the Belgians. They liked American candor, humor and our more informal manner. While somewhat self-deprecating, they also have a quiet pride, which is only expressed when using the unwritten language of Letzeburgesch.

Thus, we always had access. But Luxembourg had not existed between France and Germany for over 900 years without having its own smarts, however much down-played. They communicated much by innuendo, satire, raised eyebrows and indirect guidance, such as "Why don't you ask that question in a different way?"

We added to the Department's knowledge of what was going on inside the EEC. And there were occasions, I can't recall specifics, when we knew fairly well that the GOL was, in its own way, using our views as part of its own within EEC councils. Which was, of course, our goal.

At that time there was also a two-officer sub-USEC (European Coal and Steel Community) office in Luxembourg whose purview was the ECSC and the EEC

Court of Justice, both located in Luxembourg. The sub-office reported to Ambassador Tuthill in Brussels. There were some jealousies, but our relation-ship worked pretty well and we exchanged insights.

Q: What sort of view were you were getting from the Luxembourgers over the very nationalistic regime of Charles De Gaulle in France?

FRITTS: As I mentioned, Luxembourgers don't like bombast nationalism. They puncture it with drollery. The effective way to work in Luxembourg is the collegial informal American way. They found repugnant the formalistic high profile demarches of the French. On the other hand, their nine centuries of experience led them to move deftly among the powers on their borders.

Q: We're still talking about the post WWII period of the '60s. How were the Germans looked upon at the time you were there?

FRITTS: There was a deep residual anti-German feeling in Luxembourg. It was sub-rosa and not public or official. The German embassy in Luxembourg was very low-key. The German ambassador, although imprisoned by Hitler, was not really snubbed, but invited only to the most formal events.

It's not well known, but in proportion to its population, Luxembourg lost more civilians killed by the Nazis than Poland. Many German Jews fled though Luxembourg, hundreds

with the assistance of George Platt Waller, the American Minister to Luxembourg in the '30s. Luxembourg was also the first occupied country to revolt against Nazi Germany. Steelworkers in 1943 nailed the Luxembourg flag to their smokestacks and went on strike. The Nazis put it down brutally by executing people at random selected from various social and occupational groups and organizations.

So the Luxembourg policy attitude was "We value what the Americans have done and the kind of Europe (with Germany constrained) you are trying to build." Former Luxembourg Prime Minister Joseph Bech, still alive, was one of the grand old founders of the EEC. Germany aggression, atrocities and attitudes were still vivid, dating from WWI and before.

Q: What were American economic and commercial interests in Luxembourg?

FRITTS: In the 1960s came the first wave of direct foreign investment by American firms within the EEC and Luxembourg got is share - Monsanto, Bay State Abrasives, DuPont and maybe a dozen more new American firms arrived to complement a Goodyear plant that had been there before WWII and was constantly expanding. While just a first-tour officer, I was still the go-to Embassy point guy for American firms on briefings, advice, negotiation strategies, and eventually plant openings and visits. It also provided lots of excuses to travel throughout the country. The downside was a lot of nights and weekends in the office as I was a one-man band.

On the economic side, the interest was to breakdown and forestall trade barriers.

I made the demarches and became knowledgeable on all the issues that large commercial-economic sections were handling at our other EEC embassies. A particularly tiresome but high-profile matter were the recurring "Chicken Wars."

Q: I was going to ask about the Chicken Wars ...

FRITTS: We had textile wars, too, but the Chicken Wars - we had two great Chicken Wars, as I recall.

Q: Could you explain what the Chicken Wars were?

FRITTS: Sure, the generic issue of American export promotion versus EEC protectionism. It's still being fought today in different guises, such as beef hormones and genetically modified seeds. Back then, the EEC, currently the European Union, sought to protect its agricultural producers from American agribusiness. Ostensibly our farmers vs. their farmers. Essentially, European poultry producers charged that cheap American chickens grown with hormones and prepared feeds were unfair and unhealthy, whereas more expensive EEC chickens were grown "naturally" by scratching around in nature and were thus healthier, even if more expensive. The official EEC view, of course, was not any alleged concern over the finances of its chicken producers, but that the hormones were bad for humans and that we were exporting these scientific chickens to destroy the

EEC poultry industry. Which, of course, we were.

Q: So what happened?

FRITTS: Well, the crises were replete with brinkmanship threats for the imposition of countervailing duties e.g. no chickens, no cognac. There were broad policy debates over the implications for the vision of the Atlantic Alliance and the future of the world etc. Each compromise would soon become unglued.

I went back to Luxembourg twenty years later and looked up some colleagues who had been in the Luxembourg Foreign Office - one of them became ambassador to the EEC. We were having a glass of wine down by the Moselle. "You know," he said, "When you called to say you were coming in, we'd ask the topic. If you said "chickens," the three of us in the office would draw straws to see who had to receive you."

I recall on several occasions making a demarche on one thing or another and the Luxembourg official would say, "Okay," that's over. Let's adjourn to the bistro across the street for a glass." As an American I wasn't used to an aperitif in the morning, but that's where I heard about what the French and Germans and others were really doing.

Q: Were you there when President Kennedy was assassinated?

FRITTS: Yes, tragically. Ambassador Rivkin and I were in his limousine driving to an American trade show in the Hague. We only realized what had happened when we got to our hotel and the manager rushed out to say we had to watch TV as President Kennedy had been shot. We stayed in The Hague that night. The next morning, we returned to Luxembourg after a brief stop at the American trade show. The mounds of flowers laid by Dutch citizens overnight were so high that we had to go in the backdoor.

A memorial mass was held in the Luxembourg Cathedral with the Grand Duchess, the government and the diplomatic community present in droves. Hundreds were outside. There was a walking procession through the streets and, again, massive floral tributes. The embassy was banked by huge amounts of flowers. There was a tremendous outpouring of truly national grief. All of us received condolence letters for weeks, even from people we didn't know or who had met us only briefly. They talked about what the President and what America meant to them. The Kennedy image and impact were unprecedented for an American. The concluding memorial mass was held at the U.S. military cemetery at Hamm. There was a massive crowd there as well. It was really something.

Q: Were you there during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

FRITTS: I was, but it didn't impact much on me. All the high level stuff was handled on very close hold by Ambassador Wine and the DCM. Frankly, I was new, up to my ears, and really had no idea how dangerous the situation was - there was no CNN then and not much TV. Incredible as it may seem now, it was a foreign policy crisis in another part of

the world and I had a dozen things to be done tomorrow.

Q: Was Joan Clark at Embassy Luxembourg then?

FRITTS: Yes. Joan was the administrative officer. She was another role model, the first woman I had worked for. A fine manager, experienced and deft. She was expert in the intricacies of melding foreign policy with people and a subtle tiger in protecting policy and resource turf. She had a better grasp of how Luxembourg worked than either of our ambassadors and DCMs. She kept me out of trouble several times by explaining the pitfalls of my naivete or zeal. She was terrific to work with and for.

Q: What was your impression of the Luxembourg diplomatic service?

FRITTS: It was a totally career service. All the officers had advanced degrees, usually in law. Although they were low-key, I felt that underneath they believed they had to be a bit better than everybody else if they were going to retain Luxembourg's national independence and sovereignty. They were professional in every sense.

Q: Bob, you said you'd like to comment on political ambassadors to Luxembourg. Why don't you do it now?

FRITTS: Sure. I'd like to discuss political ambassadors in general later on, but as far as Luxembourg is concerned, by far most of our ambassadors have been political appointees. I'm aware that at one time the Luxembourg Foreign Minister requested a career ambassador and we sent one out. We've had a few.

Rivkin and Wine were serious and respected. Others wee not. I heard lots of unflattering Luxembourg anecdotes, for example, about Perle Mesta, who had been appointed by President Truman. She also lived on in embassy lore as having named her resident sister rather than the DCM as charge d'affaires a.i. when she left post on one her frequent absences. It got straightened out, but the Luxembourgers never forgot it.

The issue of representation to Luxembourg is now topical again (1999) as the Clinton Administration has spent several years seeking to confirm a Mr. Hormel, who is gay. I have no objection to gay or lesbians representing the United States, either in the Foreign Service or as ambassadors. As a matter of fact, I know a number of FSOs who were fine officers who did well, but were gay and I didn't know it until years later. But in the case of Mr. Hormel, as a retiree I wrote both Virginia Senators Robb and Warner recommending that Hormel not be confirmed. My view had nothing to do with his sexual preference, but that his confirmation with t such a delayed hyped appointment at such a late date in the Clinton Administration would be a financial waste for the taxpayer and a mismanagement of our bilateral relationship. The Luxembourgers, of course, will accept any American appointee and then work through their usually capable professional ambassadors in Washington. Anyhow, that's my two cents about that.

Q: Let's see, you left Luxembourg in about..

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FRITTS: The summer of 1994.

Q: Where did you go?

FRITTS: I was assigned as an Economic Officer at Embassy Saigon. My household effects were on the way and my car eventually reached the port, but not me. While on home leave, the North Vietnamese attacked Pleiku. Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, a former Army general, had the economic slot abolished in favor of adding a political officer. As a result, I'm one of a few FSOs of my generation who never served in Vietnam.

Q: I was wondering... You were receiving these economic assignments, but you had no major in economics?

FRITTS: No. Just the basics like Econ 101 and 102 at the U of M.

Q: Could one think about a career in the economic field without further training?

FRITTS: In those days, yes. The Department was very weak in economic expertise. Officers were assigned into it willy-nilly. That was fine by me because, again, my philosophy was to learn every function of an embassy. I felt that if I wanted to be an ambassador some day, I should be qualified in everything an embassy did.

Q: So what happened when your assignment to Vietnam was canceled?

FRITTS: I was given an option for language training and chose Japanese. I needed at some point to learn a "hard" language anyhow, so the timing was good.

Q: Why Japanese?

FRITTS: Because of being somewhat familiar with Japan from my Navy period. I found Japan fascinating, thought the country important, and knew the embassy from a visit in the Navy. I thought it would be fun to go there.

Q: To take Japanese language training means to almost take the vows to become a Japanese specialist, doesn't it?

FRITTS: In theory, yes, but I received a truncated version. Because my assignment was spur-of-the-moment and I was an economic officer, the Department offered only four months at FSI rather than the standard package of six months at FSI followed by a year at the FSI language school in Yokohama. After FSI, I went directly to the embassy in Tokyo.

It turned out well, but not in the way FSI expected. I rarely even tried to speak Japanese with officials. All the ones I dealt with in the international finance and economic fields spoke English fluently and took it as more than a bit of an insult if I initiated Japanese. But even the level of Japanese I knew was great for getting around the country with my family, which included two young girls.

But going back to your question of "vows." It became quickly apparent that there was a social and professional schism in the embassy between those who spoke Japanese, that is to say Political Officers, and those who didn't. The gulf was elitist and exclusionary. Sort of "Only we (Japanese speakers)" are qualified to speak with the gods and thus handle policy. I recall once when Ambassador Reischauer at a staff meeting directed the Political Counselor, Owen Zurhellen, to have the Political Section do an urgent canvass of its contacts to report on what the Japanese thought of some minor crisis. An hour later, I went to Owen's office on an errand and found him putting the final touches on the cable. I was quite impressed. "How did all of your officers canvass your contacts so fast," I asked. "What canvass," he replied, "I always know what all the Japanese think!"

Serving in Japan confirmed previous thoughts that the Department's practice of de facto limiting language training to political officers was an effort, perhaps even unconscious, to maintain the cult of presumed political officer superiority. Thankfully, language training was progressively opened up to a broad spectrum of functional skills and abilities. I understood at the time that the embassy Tokyo attitude was not unique. Chinese, Russian and Arabic speakers were similarly restrictive.

Fortunately for me, even though an economic officer, I knew just enough Japanese to be considered acceptable by what became to this day some of my very best friends in the Foreign Service. I added to it by wangling a mid-tour two month stint at the Yokohama school.

Q: How did you find learning Japanese?

FRITTS: The language is not difficult to speak in a rudimentary way. The easy aspects are that Japanese uses the same sounds as American English and is not tonal. The problems come from a lack of cognate vocabulary hints, the agglutinative process of multiple syllables before and after roots, and the hierarchical changes based on to whom you're speaking. Plus, of course, the difficulty of a goony writing system. One can only go so far in a language if illiterate.

We also had the usual area study course which was a great respite from the drudgery of oral repetition. I also read a lot on Japan, particularly the Meiji period, the Occupation and cultural mores.

Q: Were our Japanese language officers capable?

FRITTS: Very much so. Once in Japan, I met a group of exceptionally capable Japanese language mid-grade officers, who became lifelong friends - Bill Breer, Rick Straus,

Howard McElroy, Steve Dawkins et al. They had wonderful careers and performed unsung accomplishments in U.S.-Japan relations. They were, to use Dean Atchison's phrase, "present at the creation" of a new relationship with Japan following the Occupation and as Japan morphed from downtrodden to global economic leader. There were also fine forward-looking senior officers - Dick Snyder, Dick Finn, Dick Ericson, Tom Shoesmith and Bill Sherman come to mind. Dick Snyder, for example, as Japan Country Director, single-handedly forced through the reversion of Okinawa to Japan - a real tour de force. There were also the giants like Ambassador Reischauer, Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, and Phil Trezise, Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. They built a bilateral edifice that has evolved and lasted for fifty years. Collectively, they all became tagged as members of a Japan-focused Chrysanthemum Club. The U.S.-Japan relationship they built is arguably one of the most successful accomplishments of U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century.

Q: I've heard this before. Snyder was my ambassador in Korea. Unfortunately, he died before I could do an oral history with him. So you went to Japan, I guess about '65?

FRITTS: Yes, 1965 to 1968.

Q: What did you do there?

FRITTS: Half the tour was as an assistant attaché on international finance and the second half in the Economic Section following Japan's economic presence in Southeast Asia. As an assistant financial attaché, I was on loan to the Treasury Department. There was also a Treasury assistant financial attaché - so it was a three-man office, of which I was the State component. I worked with the finance ministry and Japanese banks on some issues and was also involved with the financial aspects of negotiating the reversion of Okinawa to Japan.

Q: Let's talk about the first portion first, working for the Financial Attaché, who was a Treasury official focused on international financial stuff. What were the concerns of the financial attaché and how did you fit in?

FRITTS: The financial attaché was primarily concerned with liberalization of Japanese trade and capital flows and the maintenance of Japanese Government purchases of U.S. Treasury securities for its foreign reserves. To pursue those goals, he and the assistant financial attaché analyzed the Japanese economy and spent most of their time with the Ministry of Finance, which called the shots on virtually all aspects of the Japanese economy. We also were the main embassy contacts with Japanese and American banks and financial institutions. The two Treasury officers were professional financial economists and their analyses were more sophisticated, in both macro and micro terms, than the State side produced. The financial attaché believed the Japanese Government was myopic about its impact on the world economy and short-sighted on domestic economic and financial policies. The embassy view was similar, but broader. It stressed that U.S.-Japanese economic issues should not drive or overshadow our bilateral security interests, impinge on the U.S.-Japan mutual security treaty or affect our policy

coordination in Asia, the UN and elsewhere. That U.S. dichotomy has remained consistent to this day, encompassing U.S.-Japan frictions, U.S. interagency fights and, even, intra-State office tensions.

Q: Did you find yourself in sort of a different culture working for the Treasury Department?

FRITTS: Of course. Every bureaucratic group has self-perceived elites. In general, Treasury officers considered themselves elite within the USG and, within Treasury, the international guys considered themselves the elite foreign service of the Treasury Department. As a result, I was not fully trusted by the financial attaché and there were a number of meetings between him and the other assistant I did not attend. And whenever Treasury officials came from Washington, I rarely attended those meetings or would be asked to leave at some point. Treasury had a strong "We-They" attitude.

Q: Well, with that Treasury attitude, did they have their own contacts and operate separately from the embassy?

FRITTS: Very much so. The financial attache was very protective of his contacts, even by usual standards of interagency turfdom. He considered the Finance Ministry to be a Treasury fiefdom. Even the embassy economics minister was chary about calling upon or entertaining senior MOF officials. When it couldn't be avoided, such as a clear instruction from State for someone higher ranked than the financial attaché to do so, the Financial attaché would set up the appointment, but I was pretty sure he briefed MOF officials on the substance and that they could more-or-less just listen politely unless and until the message was confirmed by him from Treasury. MOF officials liked that as it was a mirror image of themselves.

Q: Did you find that you were having a problem serving two masters? I mean, was the economic minister saying, "What's going on there?"

FRITTS: Well, Pelikan and his successor, Victor Mack, could be pretty smooth when they wished. Although they liked being secretive, they stroked their embassy peers, DCM and the ambassador on occasion. No heat came my way, possibly because I attended the economic section staff meetings and did some reporting directly for that section.

Q: There was a period when the Japanese shifted from a poor country to a growing economic competitor. Had this started by your time there?

FRITTS: Yes. It's hard to recall now, but Japan had only a few years before stopped being a formal foreign aid recipient of the United States. Indeed, Secretary Dulles once told Prime Minister Yoshida that Japan should not consider exporting to the U.S. as "...Japan cannot make anything that the U.S. would want to buy." So much for his insight!

Our bilateral economic concerns then, in the mid '60s, were growing U.S. imbalances

with Japan abetted by its variety of formal and informal trade and capital flow restrictions. The USG and American firms did not have the sophisticated understanding of Japan then which is common knowledge today. Thus, the embassy and Treasury office were constantly seeking to break down barriers, separate economic mythology from reality, negotiate special access arrangements and, where feasible and without a blink of paradox, force Japanese "voluntary restrictions" on selected exports to the U.S.

Capital flows were a similar story. We favored "free flows of capital" on universalist economic grounds, but specifically so that American banks and firms could invest directly in Japan and Japanese firms and tourists could invest and spend dollars in the U.S. Again, paradoxically, as the Japanese loosened up and began to invest massively in the U.S., we changed our tune and sought to discourage their investments in certain sectors and areas. The usual "Where you stand depends upon where you sit" approach to national interests.

Japanese economic analyses of their own economy, while public, were opaque and data suspect. Our financial attaché office thus maintained its own inferred and interpretive data charts and made independent analyses. As this was before computers, it was labor intensive although quite sophisticated. I wasn't really competent in that process, but I learned a lot. It helped immensely that I shared an office with an assistant financial attaché, Jon Gaaserud, who had been an assistant professor in economics. Over eighteen months, we often just sat and talked economics. He was a wonderful person and is a lifelong friend.

Balance of payments [b/p] issues were prime concerns and the Treasury office focused on it - b/p trends, the implications, recommendations for Treasury policy responses, etc. While there was some coordination with the embassy, to my eye, the really important stuff was done by letter between the financial attaché and his Treasury superiors. Those letters, to my knowledge, were never shared with anyone in the embassy and, certainly, not with me.

Q: What was your impression of the Japanese bureaucratic system, particularly as it pertained to finance?

FRITTS: In those days, as until most recently, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) called all the shots on the economic-financial side. It ran the economy and thus, to a large degree, the political environment. Usually, MITI, the Ministry of Trade, the Foreign Office and other ministries and the commercial banks, in the end, had to defer to MOF. The MOF folk believed they were the elite of the elite and held the keys to the Japanese kingdom. And they usually did.

All of us studied the Japanese bureaucratic culture and how to work in and around it We developed and followed a number of guidelines on what to do and not to do, whom to approach and not to approach - all that kind of tradecraft. Actually, we knew a great deal more than most corporate Americans. But what we, as experts, knew then is now common knowledge and can be bought at the bookstand of any international airport.

The embassy had many officers expert in their field and some had deep, even pre-WWII, Japan experience. We respected our ambassadors (Edwin Reischauer and U. Alexis Johnson) and DCMs (John K. Emmerson and David Osborn). We built a Japanese official consensus up through their cultural system, which, in contrast to otherwise common wisdom, also meant building pressures on them. Washington, of course, was always impatient. Indeed, Washington is always impatient. It wants instant results now. But our ambassadors had sufficient clout to make their writs more-or-less run.

Q: Did you deal directly with the Ministry of Finance?

FRITTS: Yes. My niche was primarily the commercial and development banks and their relevant MOF offices. I made demarches at my level, carried out modest representation, and drafted reports and cables which were released by the economic counselor, although cleared by the financial attaché. But then, the financial attaché rarely used embassy communications over back channel letters to Treasury.

I was rather heavily involved on foreign direct investment issues and Japanese capital flows to Southeast Asia. As the reversion of Okinawa loomed, I became sort of the economic guy on aspects of that and went to Okinawa several times to verify economic assessments made by the office of the U.S. High Commissioner. Frankly, I was still a self-taught economic officer and I wouldn't relish looking at those reports now. However, I don't recall that either the Economic Minister or Counselor had any significant professional training in economics, other than just doing it. The State generalist approach was a major weakness, which was later redressed by recruitment and in-house economic studies at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Eventually, I would study economics at FSI.

Q: What was the feeling at that time about Okinawa, at least within the embassy, your office? That it was about time and all that?

FRITTS: Our internal view was the Dick Snyder view, who was then the Country Director for Japan. It was simply put. The USG either moved to give Okinawa back and negotiate to our favor the use of the bases or maintain the status quo and see the bases become untenable. The Pentagon originally resisted reversion tooth and nail on military grounds e.g. any negotiated use would be less favorable, and emotionally e.g. the "Rock" had been bought with American blood.

I was not in Washington when Dick Snyder began the process, but we understood it was his idea. He pursued it within the USG against all odds with smarts, wiles, persistence, courage and a high-profile crusty impertinence. One anecdote I often heard repeated was that when Dick first got authority to discuss the issue at the Pentagon, he naturally received a very chilly reception. After outlining the concept, the Army general who chaired the large meeting stated declaratively that the Pentagon would never agree to Okinawa reversion. It was American territory, etc. Dick reportedly replied, "Well, General, the Pentagon has already agreed to return Okinawa." "What? General MacArthur never agreed to return Okinawa to Japan. That never happened!" Dick

listened calmly and then said, "Oh, yes, he did. He expected reversion when he made the express decision to retain Japanese as the language of school instruction."

Q: Who again were ambassadors while you were there?

FRITTS: Edwin Reischauer, the Harvard historian, followed by U. Alexis Johnson, who was twice, I think, Undersecretary of State.

Q: Did you have any connection with them?

FRITTS: Only to the degree that a second secretary did - attending the large weekly staff meeting, sitting in with occasional visitors, etc. Tokyo was a large embassy.

We all admired Reischauer. We assumed he had the knowledge to know what was going on and how to do it right. There was an exception, however. As an eminent historian, he was quite deficient in any working knowledge of economics. But then, that was similar to the Foreign Service of that generation.

He had a kind demeanor, never got addled, and always had a long-term - historical, I guess - perspective. He was very useful with Congress because he was credible. His staff meetings often became, I thought, repeats of his Harvard seminars. That was fine by me.

Mrs. Reischauer was a native-born Japanese and naturalized American. That was quite shocking to many Americans (and many Japanese) in those days. FSOs, I think, still had to receive Department approval to marry a foreigner and, if not granted, the officer had to resign. I didn't hear much gossip about Mrs. Reischauer, but I'm sure there was older embassy wives' chitchat. She was very gracious, even to us junior types.

Q: How about Johnson?

FRITTS: U. Alexis Johnson, one of the Service's most senior and experienced officers, was much more operationally inclined. He skillfully worked the Washington interagency process and decision-makers. He had previous experience with Japan and had just come from being deputy ambassador to South Vietnam. As my focus was on Japan in SE Asia, I became aware of how often he arranged to write his own instructions. Like Reischauer, he was well respected within the embassy. I think the Japanese Government also respected him, but were a bit fearful of his influence within the Washington professional power structure.

I don't remember any policy anecdotes. However, I was put into a golf foursome with him a couple of times and recall that he frequently asked players questions while they putted. He liked to win. He also got out of bunkers very quickly and lightly. He said he'd learned the technique in Vietnam, because the sand bunkers were often booby-trapped.

I want to mention the DCM, John K. Emerson. He had everybody's full respect - a wonderful man and Japan expert who had been vilified during the McCarthy period to the

point where he could never be confirmed as an ambassador.

Q: What was the book he wrote, a memoir, A Ribbon Runs through It*?, or something like that?*

FRITTS: Yes, it's excellent.

Emmerson had a wonderfully wry sense of humor. For example, I remember that Undersecretary Eugene Rostow and a VIP delegation came to Tokyo one New Year's and disrupted the Japanese officialdom, including Prime Minister Sato. The officials had to return from their hometowns and the only annual vacation (four days) most of them took. The only time you could see Mt. Fuji was during those four days when Tokyo shut down.

I attended the Country Team meeting chaired by Ambassador Reischauer for Rostow and the group. Rostow was livid. At his request the previous day, the embassy had provided the Foreign Office with advance copies of some confidential proposals to be discussed, including Vietnam and the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Agreement (MSA). Much to Rostow's ire, the texts of the papers had been published verbatim in that morning's edition of the Asahi Shimbun. He waxed indignant and accused the Japanese Government of all kinds of unscrupulous perfidy. He laced into Reischauer as well. Bring the Japanese into your trust, he said, give them something confidential, and they publish it for the world to see etc. The more he fulminated the angrier he got. It went on and on. Finally, Rostow paused. At that point, John Emerson, one of our finest experts on Japan, including pre-war II, sort of raised his hand and in a room of tomb-like silence said slowly and carefully, "Well, I can remember when the Japanese kept secrets very well, and I prefer it this way." Wonderful man.

Several years after he retired to the Hoover Foundation at Stanford University, several of us took him to lunch when he visited Washington. It was during the Chinese Cultural Revolution which also reverberated on American campuses, including Stanford. He recounted that on a recent Saturday, he had gone to Hoover Tower on campus, but it was barricaded by students waving Mao Tse Tung red books and denouncing the USG over Vietnam etc. Emmerson watched for a while, then went to the leader and said, "Look, I'm the only person within a thousand miles of here who has actually talked politics with Mao Tse Tung and Chou En-lai. If you'll let me go up to my office and pick up my mail, I'll come back and tell you about it." They did and he did. The demonstration stopped. A hundred or so students sat in a circle around him, and he spoke of his days in the caves of Yunnan as a U.S. Army officer assigned to Mao's army, where he interrogated Japanese POWs, and chatted occasionally in English and Japanese with Chou and Mao. That assignment, of course, had led to his being a target of Senator McCarthy and truncated his career. He paused and sipped a wine glass. "You know," he said, "that's the only time in my life when knowing Mao Tse Tung came in handy."

Q: How about Vietnam and Japan during this period of time? How was that seen from your perspective?

FRITTS: The Japanese were very skittish about the defense and security implications of Vietnam, particularly any erosion of the "Anti War" clause of their Constitution or expanding their role beyond our bilateral mutual security treaty. There was lots of room for interpretations - we wanted them broad, the Japanese wanted them narrow.

We thus leaned on the Japanese Government to "contribute" to the Vietnam effort non-militarily, which meant economically and financially. In the financial attaché's office and, subsequently, as part of the economic section, I worked within that policy context. We tried to increase Japanese foreign aid to the area, particularly to South Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Laos. We sought to tailor their aid to what we thought best for Vietnam and to our interests. For example, almost all of their aid programs were in the form of reparations payments tied to procurement in Japan. We emphasized untying aid as a means to make it go farther competitively and to permit U.S. firms to bid. We also tried to wrap Japan into a number of multilateral organizations concerned with SE Asia, including a very complex system of exchange rate stabilization in Laos. I was often the point person on those issues.

In addition, for reasons I don't recall other than a long-term goal of regional economic stability, the USG put a lot of pressure on the Japanese Government to support population planning in SE Asia. Talk about cultural conflict! The GOJ hated the topic and most Japanese were embarrassed even to hear the word. The major Japanese approach to its own successful contraception policy was abortion, which even then we didn't countenance as an export. I wound up responsible for a number of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and semi-private delegation visits to Japan of true believers designed to "raise visibility" and "break down official Japanese reticence" etc. Because the Japanese were so prudish on the topic, these groups felt the best way to make progress was to be very high profile, bring along the latest "devices", and use jokes and limericks to "loosen the Japanese up". I found our embassy translators became quickly unavailable when these groups came to town. Those meetings were just awful.

Q: How about students? Were they at all in your purview?

FRITTS: Students were not my responsibility. We would, of course, have periodic student demonstrations ("demos") outside the chancery, particularly over Vietnam and suspicions that the U.S. had nuclear weapons in Japan. In that pre-terrorist age, we didn't take demos seriously - just noise, bother and inconvenience. I remember being late to a Foreign Office appointment because of a "demo." My counterpart, it turned out, had been prominent in the major demonstrations in the '50s which forced the cancellation of President Eisenhower's trip to Japan. "Oh, yes," he said, "I remember demos at your chancery well from my student days. It's what we did then; it's what Japanese students always do." He then added wistfully, "And now, I'm a bureaucrat here. In the elections, I vote Liberal Democratic (conservative), although in my heart I'll always be a socialist. But I'm in the government now."

Q: How was living in Tokyo at that time?

FRITTS: It was fine - Americans were very much liked in Japan as being somewhat special. Tokyo was very urban and crowded, of course, with lots of pollution. We lived in an embassy compound within walking distance of the chancery. Compound living was okay, because most Japanese professionals, including my contacts, lived in compounds and considered it perfectly normal. The yen was 360 to the dollar, so we could easily go to restaurants, Noh and Kabuki performances, and have a maid for childcare. I was working up to my ears, but we could occasionally travel or ski as a family and use Japanese accommodations. Snuggling down with my family in a Japanese ryokan, I thanked FSI for even my modest Japanese capability.

Q: So you left Embassy Tokyo. Where next?

FRITTS: I went to the Japan Desk in State for about three years. I was the economics guy and later became deputy director, but still the main economics guy. I was there about three years - to 1971.

Q: Let' see, in 1968 Richard Nixon was elected with political debts to the textile states of the South with, I recall, an impact up on Japan. But first, let's talk about when you arrived in Washington. How were our economic relations with Japan? What were the concerns?

FRITTS: Basically, our economic concerns with Japan were more-or-less what they had been and still are since Commodore Perry "opened" Japan in the 1850s - how to open Japan up internationally and to ensure that openings benefitted American interests particularly. As it evolved, Japan's layers of formal, informal and cultural barriers were difficult to penetrate. Each advance uncovered a new problem. We believed that it was in Japanese, American and global interests e.g. the international financial and trading systems, that Japan be a major constructive player. Our specific policy approach for a decade or so was to induce the Japanese to end their insularities as in their interests and ours. At times we were a mentor, in others a friendly advocate, and in others, such as textiles, a fierce aggressor. To degrees, the same policy exists today.

The United States, of course, was hardly the open economic society we purported to be. We had our own array of protectionist exemptions and procedures. A favorite weapon was to theoretically negotiate, but actually to force, Japanese imposition of "voluntary export controls" on whatever products were impinging upon American producers at the time.

Q: And that brings us to textiles...

FRITTS: Economically, textiles was a receding industry in the U.S. Becoming increasingly outmoded, American producers had sought initially to stave off their decline by moving to the less-unionized South. However, labor-intensive textiles remained under pressure from "unfair and cheap" modernizing producers, such as Japan. The elected representatives in the South became more Republican with great political clout in the Nixon Administration. Thus, we sought to negotiate a series of "voluntary" Japanese

export restraints on textiles and ease the pressures on the American market at the cost, of course, of the American consumer. The Japanese resisted strenuously.

The State Department had the great good fortune in those years of having Phil Trezise as the Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. A career officer, he had formerly been our Ambassador to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). He knew the issues inside and out and had also served in Japan. He's just about the finest FSO role model I ever knew. A man of great knowledge, infinite patience, common sense, courage and impeccable integrity. He resisted interagency and highly charged political pressures. He got us through difficult times with Japan, the White House and volatile Cabinet members by patient, calm, wry wisdom.

For reasons I don't entirely know, he decided I had some talent and that it suited his purpose to have an occasional confidential action officer on Japan outside his own Economic Affairs Bureau. He thus called the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, Marshall Green, to borrow me on those issues. He also told Marshall that I would not always be able to divulge what I was doing, but that Marshall could check with him on any qualms. Marshall agreed. On a couple of occasions, that constraint bent my immediate boss, the Japan Country Director, considerably out of shape. The arrangement lasted about two years.

Thus, I frequently worked directly with Phil and was part of the formal commodity trade negotiation delegations he led to Japan, which included other agencies, Congressmen and trade reps. His understanding of Japanese officialdom was superb. They trusted him. He had a conceptual long-range vision of how the trade and economic issues fit into U.S.-Japan relations, which he considered vitally important. That trade issues did not crash the U.S.-Japan relationship in those was due in no small part to his skills. While he was respected within the USG and on the Hill, knives were frequently out.

The Secretary of Commerce, Maurice Stans, was a major political supporter of American textile producers and a formidable adversary of State and Phil. He would send Commerce or even private industry emissaries to Japan in secrecy with instructions to avoid the U.S. Embassy, threaten the Japanese Government with dire acts, and instruct the Japanese not to inform us about the discussions. The last stricture would last about twelve hours after arrival when the Japanese would let Phil know, followed by their media. The USG looked divided, weak and foolish. An already bad political-economic situation would become worse.

After being caught several times, Stans switched to sending reps who would check in only with our ambassador, who wasn't supposed to report back. The ambassador, Armin Meyer, was put between a rock and a hard place. He was a Middle East expert newly arrived in Japan and thus without much clout in Japan or within the USG. Secretary Rogers reportedly had trouble confronting Secretary Stans or NSC Advisor Henry Kissinger, so the burden really fell on Trezise as Stans and others, including southern Congressmen, rode roughshod and tried to call the shots directly on trade and financial matters. It was a tough period.

Eventually, Trezise was able in his way to attain Japanese acquiescence on voluntary textile export restraints and openings in commodities, such as beef and citrus. His scenarios on other products and issues became the future models. One prescient Trezise insight was his prediction to the Japanese that within ten years, they would adopt the same approach as the U.S. when sectors in their economy became pressed by imports from Korea and Southeast Asia. And so it was.

Q: You mentioned that you'd be doing things that you couldn't tell your colleagues in the East Asia Bureau. Like what?

FRITTS: Given the adversarial environment within the USG, Trezise would often seek informal understandings with the Japanese before surfacing them within the USG. Trying to work out cooperatively what might fly or not. What was or wasn't negotiable. He was a master at building an eventual consensus within the USG, with American commodity interests, and with the Japanese. However, premature formal consultation meant leaks, sabotage and dangerous failure.

How often Phil spoke with Marshall, I don't know, but I do know that Marshall trusted Phil. The issues were so sensitive and the stakes so large politically that I don't think Marshall passed much on to his Country Director for Japan, Dick Finn. Dick and his successor, Dick Ericsson, were very perturbed when I couldn't tell him what I was up to.

I remember literally racing back to my office from Phil's office one night having been given forty minutes to draft a letter from the President to Prime Minister Sato. Once in my office, I had writer's block. Then Dick Finn came in and wanted a briefing on what the crisis was and what I'm writing. I couldn't tell him. It was tense. I still met the deadline.

Bear in mind I'm not a major actor in all this. I'm neither conceptualizing new policy nor negotiating trade-offs. I'm still mid-level. I was a "go to" guy who drafted quickly, understood the issues, could integrate disparate facts, add a few creative licks, and report well. Most of the really substantive stuff came from Trezise's own people. While they didn't always know his full purposes, they trusted his wisdom and integrity. Trezise used some wiles, but he did so to sustain negotiations against the rogue actors roaming around.

Q: During the Nixon period, there were several shocks or, as the Japanese said, shokkus, *in U.S.-Japan relations. What were those all about?*

FRITTS: The short answer is non-consultation. Advance and cooperative bilateral consultation had been a prime policy mantra toward Japan for decades. It was a key bedrock to Japanese attitudes toward their U.S. relationship. They gave us considerable policy slack across-the-board assuming we would consult with them on any initiative or situation involving their key national interests. We issued repeated assurances. We even set up annual Economic Cabinet meetings to testify to it.

Unfortunately, the U.S. talks a good advance consultation game, but often doesn't play it. Then or now. Just recently (2000), Clinton overflew Japan to go to China. It was the first time an American President going to China had not stopped in Japan. It was a major shock and demeaned the U.S.-Japan relationship. Each time the U.S. insults Japan in that manner on key issues weakens the special relationship from which the U.S. so benefits.

But back to the "Nixon shokkus". They were three in number and hit the Japanese in key areas of their national interest.

First, the U.S. announced a successful secret opening to China. Japan had consistently held back on its long-standing desire to improve relations

with China in deference to our hostile stance. Every time they wanted to loosen up, we essentially forbade it. Then we moved and left them hanging.

Second, the decision to float the U.S. dollar by negating U.S. adherence to the gold standard at $35 per ounce. We had labeled that policy as a linchpin in our huge financial relationship.

And third, the U.S. embargoed soybean exports because of short supply. We had a virtual international monopoly on soybeans. Soybean products are a major part of the Japanese diet and their consumers went into panic. An unintended result was that the Japanese determined never to be caught short again, made massive investments in soybean production in Brazil, and the U.S. created a major competitor in soybeans.

Q: How did you find Japanese negotiating techniques when working at the Trezise level on these narrow, although sensitive, issues?

FRITTS: Well, all of us working on Japan had to adjust to the fact that not much would ever remain confidential on either side for very long. Thee were so many actors with axes to grind. On our side, some thought that public Japan-bashing was the way to progress with the not inconsiderable goals of enhancing their own image, careers or political ambitions. And strangely, up to a point, we agreed.

To create their needed consensus, the Japanese often require a measure of being backed into a corner before their various groups can agree upon concessions as "unavoidable." They need a catalyst and sometimes a series of catalysts. That may sound counter to what I said before about rogue negotiators and mismanagement of U.S.-Japan economic relations. However, there were times when forcefulness was necessary to provide a means of agreement. Sometimes the Foreign Office even wanted it and would infer how it should be applied. On the other hand, gratuitous insults, overblown rhetoric and threats stymied or reversed progress. Given American culture and our governance system, it's almost impossible for State to fine tune policy, particularly in trade and finance where the Congress and interest groups participate directly. Trezise came as close as anyone.

Q: The Japanese were/are occasionally accused of not implementing trade agreements.

Was that the case?

FRITTS: Frankly, both sides would occasionally renege under some subterfuge or other. We would often cite revised legal interpretations, such as on initiating anti-dumping actions against Japan.

The Japanese reputation derived from the fact that after negotiating the removal or easing of formal barriers, various informal and cultural barriers would then be uncovered. Our exports and investments thus didn't increase as expected or Japanese "voluntary" export restrictions would lag.

There were also serious misunderstandings. President Johnson twisted Prime Minister Sato's arm, or possibly literally squeezed it, to force his approval to carry out "voluntary" textile export restrictions. The meeting at the White House was private with only Sato's interpreter present, a serous Johnson error. There are about fifteen shades of "yes" in Japanese. The one Sato used was translated as "Yes." Actually, when reconstructed after the fact, we thought it more akin to "I understand what you're saying and will do my best to consider how it might be done". Johnson later reportedly went ballistic about Sato when the Japanese Government denied privately and then publicly there had been any "agreement."

Japanese has many nice-sounding but non-binding phrases that they often sought to insert into communiques and agreements. In English they come out as "full and proper consideration", "best efforts", and that kind of approach. We knew what it meant e.g. "We'll try, but progress will be slow". The uninitiated either didn't understand or, even when we told them, were eager to proclaim public victory for image purposes. As reality set in, their reactions would charge Japanese "run-arounds" and duplicity. After I left Japanese affairs, the USG tried to adopt quantitative benchmarks to measure progress, with occasional success, but also much rancor as the Japanese charged that we were waging "managed trade" rather than "free trade".

Q: I would have thought that there would be a certain almost career or professional danger to bringing in American interest groups working on some of these things. In a way, by explaining how the Japanese operate, it could sound like you've either gone native or you're giving too many concessions. It must be difficult to bring your fellow conferees up to speed about how to deal with the Japanese.

FRITTS: Well, negotiations with Japan are hardball. Their officials are well-educated and experienced. Their professionals understand us as well or better as we profess to understand them. There is gamesmanship involved, but we are prisoners of our culture as they are prisoners of theirs.

Given the period we're talking about, the '60s and '70s - what we then thought as rather arcane but accurate knowledge of the Japanese system is now common knowledge by even the most junior business people going out to Japan, many of whom speak fluent Japanese. Meanwhile, Japan has evolved - has become much more like us.

An anecdote about their system. We had a series of U.S.-Japan Joint Economic Conferences, which were Cabinet-level meetings held annually between the U.S. and Japan. Part of the concept was to expose more insular Japanese ministers and officials, other than just the Foreign Office, to us and our concerns - and to induce them to be more interactive and open in discussing issues and problems. On one occasion, I was part of an advance team with Phil Trezise and others who arrived a few days early. As the working-level coordinator, I had thrashed through the issues within the USG, including the briefing book policy papers, and set up the arrangements. As per usual, I had drafted, negotiated USG clearances, and provided a draft joint communiqué to the Japanese Embassy in Washington.

I arrived in Japan overnight, along with Phil and others, and was looking forward to spending half a day or so getting around and talking with people whom I knew in Japan before getting down to the work of the conference. Early in the morning, I had a call from my Foreign Office fellow counterpart asking me to come over "...for awhile". I demurred, saying I had some other things to do. "No, we really want to see you. You really have to be here." "Okay," I said, "I'll stop by the Ministry." "Oh, no," he said, "Come to the Okura Hotel."

When I got there, I entered a suite they had turned into an interagency cockpit, with a Foreign Ministry guy in charge. I was put at a small table in a corner of a rear room. I couldn't get out without having to walk over about a dozen officials who filled the room. I became captive to negotiating the joint communiqué and I was there for the next twelve hours. We went through the issues and phrases piece by piece. We'd reach an impasse, they'd form a whispering group, a junior officer would leave, and some time later, he and new people would come back and huddle in the other rooms I could see from my corner. What they were doing was running over to MITI or the Ministry of Finance and elsewhere, negotiating with those ministries, and then back to the Okura with revised wording to negotiate. I was there, as I say, for 12 hours or so. I don't remember either food or a john break. We worked out the communiqué which constituted the outcome in advance of the Joint Cabinet meeting to be held. That shows their intensity and the complexity of consultation required to achieve a Japanese consensus. All of them versus me. Quite eye-opening.

Q: Did your negotiated communiqué stand?

FRITTS: Only one word got changed. I was quite proud of that.

Q: So, in retrospect, do you believe our economic negotiations with Japan have been successful?

FRITTS: Oh, yes, very. Japan has opened tremendously. So much so, its culture is changing rapidly. Each advance was too small by our standards, but given the context of where the Japanese were coming from, quite long by theirs. I think the U.S.-Japan relationship can be considered as one of the best and most successfully managed bilateral

relationships in history. A true testament to long-term American diplomacy. All of Asia would be in a much different strategic environment today without the firm U.S.-Japan relationship forged over a half-century. And economics are an important part of that success and environment.

Q: Did you feel that way then? Or just, "Oh, God, dealing with the Japanese?"

FRITTS: I always knew, concurred in, and fiddled with our overall long-term policy. But few of us then would have predicted Japan's rise to a top three world economy. However, when I left the Japan Desk, I had been totally immersed in U.S.-Japan issues for about seven years. I was tired of the problems. Some years later in the Carter Administration, a new East Asia Assistant Secretary, Dick Holbrooke, asked me to become reimmersed as Japan Country Director. Much to his surprise, I turned him down to direct another of his offices. I just didn't want to take on what to me were old problems in new guises, political and economic. I wonder how our Middle East colleagues bear it.

Q: Yes, some issues just don't go away. Did the political climate change at all in Japan while you were handling it there? I guess it was the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) throughout..

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FRITTS: Yes, the LDP reigned and the political climate was static. But there was a major change in how the Japanese did their diplomatic business. The quality of Japanese representation in Washington and abroad jumped markedly. They always had good people, but a real sea change occurred with their international skills. Always well trained technically, they became much more global, more confident in their ability to interact internationally, and adopted a higher profile in expressing positions. Non-foreign ministry types became fluent in English. Even spouses, who previously could rarely speak English, began to initiate conversations rather than huddle together. Rather than just working the usual places like the State Department, they expanded into the media and onto the Hill. They became Americanized in the conduct of diplomacy. It happened in the space of a few years.

Q: Were they picking this up on their own, or was there a sort of tutorial with us saying, "If you really want to get something done in the United States, you've got to work the media, you've got to work Congress?"

FRITTS: We had always sought to engender greater Japanese openness, less insularity and a more global view of their responsibilities. But the change was also generational, engendered by growing confidence in a world class economy, increased experience, the dimming memory and inhibitions of WWII, the lifting of foreign exchange controls which sent floods of Japanese abroad to clog world tourist sights. Japanese society was changing, and the Foreign Office anticipated and was even ahead of the curve. Would that our Foreign Service could be so farsighted and financially supported.

Q: How did you find the Japanese media? From what I gather, it's a pretty hungry beast - lots of newspapers, lots of TV, and they're all over the place?

FRITTS: The Japanese media are hyper-competitive and very influential. Anything happening in the U.S. and the USG, particularly with any relevance to the U.S. and Japan, is automatically big news. The U.S. is covered extensively and intensively. The media national circulation plus proportion of readership and viewers are much higher than in the U.S. The media were quite insular then. They viewed the first Nixon Administration as "weak" because Nixon's competitors in the primaries were included in his cabinet. Now they have bureaus around the world with very qualified, sophisticated journalists.

Q: Did you get involved when Kissinger went to China? It was the first of the Nixon shokkus.

FRITTS: I had minor roles in damage control - drafting instructions on how to mollify the Japanese. My only role in the opening to China was that John Holdridge, who was on the National Security Council staff, realized he had to have white tie and tails for the Nixon trip to China. He knew I had a set (left-over from being a member of the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club. He asked if I still had them. I did, he wore them, they went.

Q: Did you feel that our involvement in Vietnam tended to downplay the importance of Japan. That all of our effort was focused on Vietnam?

FRITTS: No, not at all. Vietnam actually provoked a good deal of policy attention toward Japan, albeit often in a Vietnam context. We were up to our ears in trying to assuage Japanese fears that Vietnam was going to disrupt all of Southeast Asia, cut down on their lucrative trade and investments, and create regional instabilities. Their nightmare was that Vietnam could lead to U.S. military conflicts with China and/or Russia or a renewal of war in Korea. Japan wanted an end to the Vietnam War. From Japan, we wanted all the political and, particularly, economic support or "contributions" we could garner. I guess our diplomacy could be termed as focused on assuagement, inducement and reassurance. We tried to get them increasingly involved in Vietnam and SE Asia, not militarily, but economically and financially.

Q: I realize you were dealing with Japan, but was Korea beginning to... It was still early days in Korea, I guess, so Korea wasn't much of an economic power, was it?

FRITTS: No, but Japan was still negotiating reparations and trade agreements with South Korea. Whatever our difficulties in negotiating with Japan, we took relief from the fact that it was much worse between the Japanese and Koreans. Their bilateral "discussions" were marked by Korean vituperation and harassment.

I remember discussing Korea with a Japanese diplomat, who had come back from meetings in Seoul. After we had discussed the substance for my report, he added. "You

know, in negotiating with Americans, we're very careful to write down everything precisely and clearly, because we know you'll raise it with us and we'll need to be prepared. But we don't take notes of talks with the Koreans. Whatever is agreed won't last anyhow, so why bother?"

Q: Now this was the Nixon White House and Kissinger is national security advisor. Did relations with Japan reflect their "command and control" styles?

FRITTS: Well, I've spoken of Maurice Stans, the Secretary of Commerce, who cut an independent swath, that U.S. economic policy with Japan was often schizophrenic, and of Trezise' efforts to provide cohesion from his level. Okinawa reversion occurred in 1972 with Secretary Rogers. Whatever the truth, we felt Kissinger was Europe and China focused and didn't care much about what we viewed as the tremendously important relationship with Japan. We thought he took it for granted.

Q: Did the East Asia Bureau feel during this time that Japan was getting enough attention?

FRITTS: Well, we were, of course, incredulous at the non-notification to Japan before the U.S. opening to China, the negation of dollar convertibility, and the soybean embargo. They were insults to a major ally.

Q: Was the feeling that this was lack of attention or deliberate?

FRITTS: I don’t know what Kissinger now says, but they were omissions we couldn't understand. Frankly, we thought it would never have happened to a Western European country. Our memos said how bad it was, but, of course, it was water over the dam. Our professional focus had to be on damage control, such as citing exceptional circumstance, no lessening of our strong relationship, sending out VIP's with kind words - that kind of thing.

Q: Well, I think one of the ideas that was floated around, why this happened was that if you told a Japanese anything, even at the highest level, it would be leaked within a very short time.

FRITTS: That probably was a concern and, unfortunately, it was probably true. We generally operated on the premise that most of what we did with Japan would become public, particularly on the economic side. Defense issues had a better record, although they were not immune, as per my Rostow-Emmerson story.

Q: Well, you had now spent seven years on Japan. Right now, I'm interviewing Bill Breer, and, God, he never left Japan. I mean, he was either in Japan or on the Japanese Desk for virtually his entire career. Now retired, he's chair of the Japan office of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Did you consider becoming a Japan hand? Or did you want to get out from under?

FRITTS: I considered a career path on Japan. In fact, while at embassy Tokyo, as I mentioned, I wangled an additional two months at the Japanese language school in Yokohama. But as I stated, I was tired of the same recurring problems.

Also, consistent with my career pattern, I wanted something different. I never wanted to return to the same country, even in a different slot. I also didn't want to spend another year or so on advanced Japanese language training, which I felt was not professionally worthwhile, except for ticket punching. I wanted a new experience.

Q: So how did you go about getting out from under?

FRITTS: It will sound odd, but having worked on economics for a decade, I felt I ought to study the subject.

Q: This is just about the time that they were developing the six-month economic crash course at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI)?

FRITTS: That's correct. It was designed as a master's degree equivalent. But my interest in the course was to become better at policy advocacy.

Q: What do you mean?

FRITTS: I had learned that to affect interagency outcomes, I had to be credible in economic analysis, particularly with Treasury, plus the international financial organizations and trade people. The usual Foreign Service horseback economics were not enough to succeed in interagency conflict. I needed to recognize faulty economic theory, pick from or add wheat to chaff, and speak the jargon in adversarial debate. In part, I looked on advanced economics as a form of language training.

Intellectually, I had become reasonably adept at what we now call microeconomics. I wanted to put those pieces into a conceptual whole - what we now call macroeconomics.

Q: How did you find the course?

FRITTS: Quite difficult. The Economics field was beginning its switch from a descriptive approach to quantitative, including regression analysis. Even though I was only in my 30s, I found it hard to be back in a classroom, with evening study and quizzes, rather than being operational.

Q: Did the course meet your goals?

FRITTS: Very much so. It stood me in good stead the rest of my career and after. In fact, I counsel international relations students at the College of William & Mary, where I currently sit, to get a full dose of economics. Almost all foreign policy problems are political-economic or vice-versa. You better have both halves of the sandwich.

Q: How did you use it?

FRITTS: Several ways. One was the ability to spot baloney - biased or inadequate presentations. As ambassador, I found it very helpful with USAID when I was being urged to approve projects or programs. I could argue in their terms and get things changed. Sometimes I had political concerns that I could argue more effectively in an economic context. Later as a Country Director, I became reasonably credible. Not many regional country directors had a conversant economic background. When needed, I could break down the stereotype of political apologist. Overseas, in Rwanda and Ghana, I could talk shop rather than platitudes with expert officials and ministers plus IBRD and IMF types. I became more effective.

Q: Did this bring you up to a par with sort of the general public servants you'd be dealing with?

FRITTS: It depends. Compared to many FSOs of the time, it was superior. Compared to Treasury, I had become better, but not par. After all, I still wasn't a trained Ph.D. economist.

Q: Well, the next post we'll talk about was where and when?

FRITTS: Jakarta, Indonesia. The summer of 1971.

Q: Why Indonesia?

FRITTS: Out of the blue. I was walking down the hall one day and Jules Katz, Trezise's principal deputy, said, "Hi, Bob. Congratulations. You're just been paneled (assigned) for Jakarta." That's how it was done in those days. So I was assigned as first secretary in the Economic Section

Q: In terms of assignment, did you know Francis Wilcox, who was the patron of so many economic officers?

FRITTS: I knew her, but naively never thought of her as having anything to do with me, as I had been in the East Asia bureau. She was the long-time executive director of the Economic Affairs bureau. She was very loyal to Trezise. Very capable, with something of a fierce reputation, which I sensed, but never saw. Since I didn't work in her bureau, I teased her a bit. Not many officers did.

Q: She had a lot of influence watching over her brood of economic officers. She saw that her chicks were well treated and really worked at it.

FRITTS: So I learned after the fact. She knew everyone's corridor reputation. She certainly knew I worked with Trezise a lot and that I admired him. Speaking of admiration, some years later a number of us recommended Trezise for a Rockefeller national award for integrity in the public service. He didn't win, but we tried.

Q: We're now in Indonesia in 1971. Sukarno is gone and Suharto is in power.

FRITTS: That's right. Suharto had been in office about six years or so. Our ambassador was Frank Galbraith, a fine person - he understood the country very well, spoke fluent Bahasa, knew everybody. He'd made a career out of one country. He'd been one of the first Americans to step ashore after the Japanese surrender in 1945. He was always very patient - in policy and management. It was a happy embassy with respect up and down.

I was a first secretary in the Economic Section. Peter Seip, briefly, and then Erland Higginbotham was the economic counselor. My focus was on government and commercial banks and the Indonesian financial system. As we sit here today (1999), the Indonesian financial system has collapsed. It had also collapsed before my arrival in Japan and came close to doing so again while I was there.

Q: What was the politico-economic situation in Indonesia when you arrived there?

FRITTS: Quite stable. The Suharto Government was well established, foreign investment was pouring in, some of it naive, almost all of it involved in payoffs. Indonesia was leading the creation of a new regional body - the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Human rights were part of our policy, but not on top. Indonesian and embassy memories of the traumatic 1965 Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) coup attempt and its implications for Indonesia and our interests in Southeast Asia were still fresh. Our policy view was unambiguous: The U.S. and Indonesia had luckily escaped a strategic bullet and we should seek to ensure that it wouldn't happen again. We thus had large foreign aid projects, PL-40 commodity transfers, and a large military assistance and training (IMET) program. The economy was weak and fragile, although foreign investment, including American, was exploding.

The foreign aid program was headed by Dick Cashin - very sophisticated, smooth and capable. Possibly the best AID director I ever knew. His thrust was to support truly viable - the emphasis is on viable - self-sustaining development in Indonesia. I don't remember examples, but he thought "outside the box." He later became a senior official at a non-governmental organizations (NGO).

Despite corruption and an autocratic political system, Indonesia was beginning to make marked economic progress. It was shifting from a food importer to rice self-sufficiency, creating a domestic capital market, becoming a modern resource producer, (particularly in natural gas), hyperinflation was decreasing, and standards of living increasing. The previous description of Indonesia as "shared poverty," coined by the then well-known anthropologist Dennis Goertz, was almost gone in the urban areas. Instead, there were blatantly visible income differentials, corruption, banking manipulations and other dysfunctions, which now are lumped into the term of "crony capitalism."

Q: But our impression of the of the Suharto regime at that time was favorable?

FRITTS: We were very supportive of the Suharto Government. As I said, the 1965 abortive coup was still a very recent event. Our conceptual vision was of a strong, viable, stable and economically dynamic Indonesia stretching for 3,000 miles across the strategic supply and trade lines of ourselves, our military forces, and our allies and friends, particularly Japan.

Q: Was there any sort of examination of Indonesia and its diverse nationalities? Right now we're talking about major problems as of today in East Timor, and then there's this Aceh group and all. Were we looking at this all being held together by force and possibly breaking up?

FRITTS: We believed in and supported Indonesian cohesion. Sukarno's great achievement was putting these hundreds of groups and islands into a conglomerate nation state with a commonly used national artificial language (Bahasa). Even so, there were some Indonesian suspicions about the depth of our commitment, because of an alleged CIA plot in the 1950s to support an insurrection in, I think, Sumatra and bring down former President Sukarno by breaking up the country. I've forgotten the historical details. But our policy could not have been firmer - the strategic necessity for a stable Indonesia. I believe our policy is the same today, because if Indonesia breaks apart into its many entities, it would create severe problems throughout Southeast Asia, plus Japan, China and India. Very destabilizing. As we've seen with the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, devolution is no solution. Instead, it spawns conflicts. As someone once said, we should not be lulled by the Indonesian culture and its emphasis on conflict avoidance. "Amok" is a Bahasa word.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Indonesians, the banks, and the economic instruments?

FRITTS: We had very easy access to most - not all - officialdom. My predecessor even sat in occasionally on internal meetings of the Indonesian central bank (Bank Indonesia). By the time I arrived, the immediate hyperinflationary crises were easing and I did not have such invitations. But appointments were easy; one could even wander around and drop in a bit to chit-chat. The banking system people appreciated our interest in what they were trying to achieve, both in terms of our direct support plus the influence the USG had with the World Bank, the IMF and other donor organizations. Although hyperinflation was declining, it was still high. The banks offered consumer rupiah deposit rates of a hundred percent per month. The rates were so lucrative that Ambassador Galbraith finally convened an embassy task force, including me, which concluded it was a conflict of interest for embassy employees to covert dollars into deposit rupiahs. Some AID folk had tens of thousands of dollars invested personally. The Indonesian Government regarded the U.S. embassy as critically important to its interests. Indonesia is an exotic place to begin with and it was also fun and challenging professionally.

However, Indonesian officials could be tough and ultra-sensitive. They had fought a long bloody war with the Dutch and could be quick to take serious offence at any hint of Western arrogance or challenge. As usual, we generally gave a lot of know-it-all

economic advice and guidance, both directly via USAID and our economic section and by trying to influence the IBRD, IMF, NGOs and other donors, such as the Harvard Development Advisory Service, resident in Jakarta. But one had to be careful as Indonesian cultural sensitivities and sense of nationalism were very strong. Luckily for us and Indonesia, the chief Indonesian economic ministers and officials were American-trained, the "Berkeley Mafia," but even so, too high a profile could be distinctly counter-productive.

I also enjoyed Indonesian humor. When one of my best contacts, a senior Ministry of Finance official retired, he took pride in the fact that he had actually exceeded the mandatory retirement age by three years. His Indonesian father had served in the Dutch colonial government and as his son my contact had access to special schools run by the Dutch Government. One day he had been called to the teacher's desk for some purpose and the teacher had asked how old he was? He had replied, "I'm twelve, sir". "No, you're not," the schoolmaster replied, "You're too small. You must be nine". My retiring friend commented "When the Dutchman said you were nine, you were nine. And that's colonialism!"

Actually, that was an understatement. I knew he had also been a senior guerilla combat officer in the independence war against the Dutch.

Q: What about corruption that seems to have been a major source of Suharto's recent (1998) downfall?

FRITTS: We were very aware of it. It was well known, for example, that for Indonesians to gain contracts with BULOG, the commodity import-export agency, which also handled our PL-480 shipments, that bribes were involved. Although Dick Cashin was quite effective in insulating our PL-480 programs, our efforts elsewhere had little impact.

The embassy standing view was that as Indonesia became more prosperous, corruption would become less. I thought that simplistic. Using economic principles, I wrote an analysis of Indonesian corruption which argued that as the prey became larger, so would the wolves. It earned some sort of Department award.

We counseled American business not to pay bribes, but what were their alternatives? A very aggressive and astute commercial attaché, Joseph Harary, was dead-set against bribery. He tried to find ways for businesses to work with groups and organizations that were not corrupt, but it was swimming upstream. American firms would agree with us, but then do what they deemed required. Many avoided the embassy, because of the U.S. law against bribery and the belief that the less we knew about them the better. Of course, Indonesia was not alone in crony capitalism. It was endemic throughout Asia. Some may even argue there's a bit of it in the United States from time to time...

And we sometimes didn't help our case. I recall when a congressional delegation came to Jakarta for annual PL-480 negotiations. At lunch, I sat next to an American businessman with the delegation. I asked him what he did. He said he was the "social chairman" and

avoided further conversation. During the lunch, I sat next to a Development Ministry counterpart. I noticed an Indonesian minister at the head table confer with a junior-type who came to our table and whispered to my counterpart who got tense, jumped up, and left. After lunch, it was announced, to my surprise, that a PL-480 agreement had been reached and the afternoon session was canceled. On leaving, I saw my counterpart rushing about outside. I asked him what was going on? "Don't you know?", he said. "We've been told we can have the agreement as it stands, if we can put two prostitutes into every congressional hotel room by 3:00 p.m. I'm half-way there."

Q: So did American commercial interests continue to grow?

FRITTS: Sure. They were very large. There was a real surge of American investment, particularly in resource development and American bank loans. Suharto had been there long enough for Indonesia to look attractive and able to pay from oil and gas receipts. The economy really began to come along as hyperinflation declined. An Indonesia stock exchange began. The new foreign investment law was quite liberal, was codified, and petty corruption declined as the government consolidated multi-permits into a more-or-less one-stop investment promotion office. There was a huge inflow of American foreign investment in those years.

Indeed, American banks helped precipitate an Indonesian financial crisis in their lemming-like rush to extend short-term loans to Indonesian state-owned producers of raw materials, particularly the state oil firm, Pertamina. The Indonesians skillfully parlayed the financial lust far beyond the ability to repay and the house of cards collapsed. Eventually, an IMF-led consortium bailed the banks out. It was an object lesson that so-called sophisticated risk-analysis is ignored when CEO's want to assert image and egos. If my competitor has a $50 million dollar loan to a client, I've got to have $75 million, no matter what the data may show or, in the frequent case of Pertamina, did not show.

Q: And the oil business?

FRITTS: The oil business was going well, but as I recall, the really big major business was liquefied natural gas (LNG), which requires billions of dollars in investment. Major LNG facilities were built at that time.

Q: I interviewed Ambassador Roy Huffington, who invested quite a bit of time and effort in the oil and petroleum business. What about Japanese products? Were they sort of flooding the market, beating out American?

FRITTS: Not really. I recall serious issues over big-ticket items, like GE hydroelectric turbines pitted against Hitachi. We were also urging the Indonesians to press the Japanese to untie their reparations agreements from procurement in Japan. It was about that time that the Embassy was permitted to promote a single American firm rather than all American firms for a contract or sale. We were at least equally competitive toward Japanese foreign investment which, in a broader context, we welcomed. But we wanted a fair American shot.

Q: Were the Chinese, as a business community, pretty well out of it, or were they coming back?

FRITTS: The Chinese-Indonesian business community had never really been "out", despite discrimination, occasional anti-Chinese riots, and the efforts to link the aborted coup to the Peoples Republic of China. Most had adopted Indonesian names. The main financiers remained and prospered as personal bankers to Suharto, his family and others.

Q: It sounds as if we had good access and knew a great deal about the government.

FRITTS: That's true, but we also recognized our gaps. Later, as country director, I became very concerned that our excellent access at the top was too narrowly based.

Our contacts at the top stemmed from two people - Ambassador Frank Galbraith, who knew everybody worth knowing over two generations, and an exceptionally capable defense attaché, Colonel George Benson USA. I think Benson also had three or four tours in Indonesia. He was there during the PKI coup attempt and knew Suharto and the other mainly Javanese officers as majors. That group became the new power structure. While Benson and Galbraith had unique access, the Indonesians are very sensitive about foreigners. Galbraith and Benson were professionally prudent in how they went about it. I should add that Ed Masters, who succeeded Galbraith, also had good access, because he had been a well-regarded former Deputy Chief of Mission in Jakarta. For a decade or more, we had exceptional access and influence. More than any other foreign embassy in Indonesia.

But it was difficult to identify and cultivate middle-grade officers who were the future leaders. The senior Indonesia military severely restricted access to mid-level officers by foreigners, including diplomats and defense attaches. Their standing orders were that younger officers needed official permission to attend any embassy events or meet with foreign diplomats or officials, even socially. So how to keep in touch?

The answer, albeit partial, was most unexpected - through Harriet Isom, one of our consular officers. Harriet had been arguing long and strong that as a Bahasa Indonesia language officer, she should be in the Political Section, even in an Islamic country. Galbraith and the DCM, Skipper Purnell, believed she could do no useful work there and refused. Harriet finally created enough pressure from the Department that Galbraith agreed reluctantly to give her a three-month shot. The three months became two years plus.

She was six feet tall and, in those days, wore a blonde beehive hairdo that added another eight inches. Indonesians average about five foot-six. She was something else - imposing, smart, deft, assertive and language qualified. Indonesian officialdom had never seen her like. A real curiosity. She became our hostess with the mostest - multi- parties and open-houses per month at her modest house. And guess who mingled there? Indonesian majors, captains, lieutenant colonels - all came to Harriet's. Why? Because no permission

needed. Why? Because she was a woman and thus, by definition, no threat. She didn't count either as a diplomat or a foreigner.

Naturally, we all made a bee-line to Harriet's. Col. Benson became a regular. It was an eye-opener for me. I learned how effectively astute woman officers can succeed in sexist societies by exploiting the biases to their and the U.S. advantage. I later saw it happen in South Africa and heard of it in Saudi Arabia. Harriet was terrific. She was ambassador twice – Laos and Mali.

In retrospect, my concern over the generational contact gap was misplaced. In the '70s and '80s, we thought Suharto would step down at the next or following election. As we know now, it didn't happen. Far better if it had.

Q: What in general were you picking up from the Indonesians about our Vietnam policy and the American role?

FRITTS: At that time, the Indonesians had sort of a two-prong policy that stemmed from economic and military weakness. They would not publicly gainsay the war in Viet Nam, but neither would they contribute to its waging. In the short run, they didn't want to sever all ties with the Vietnamese with whom they felt some resonance in wars of independence. Somewhat as a paradox, in the longer run they looked upon Vietnam as a potential rival to what they regarded as Indonesian natural leadership in Southeast Asia. They wanted to retain the ability to be credible with Vietnam after the war.

Later, when the war was over and I was country director for Indonesia and its neighbors, we provided constant reassurance to Southeast Asia that while we'd lost the Vietnam War, it did not mean the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region. We sought to maintain confidence that the U.S. would remain a major regional player and be a counterweight to China. There was regional concern that we might pull back. Singapore PM Lee Kwan Yu, for example, became more amenable, and offered port calls and ship repair facilities. By the way, we didn't use the word "lost" then.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, you knew Japan. How about the role of Japan while you were there? Was Japan our rival economically, or were we seeing Japan as a partner?

FRITTS: We saw Japan as a partner which we wanted more engaged in order to bear more of the assistance "burden". It was during my tenure either then or later as country director that Japan's bilateral level of foreign aid surpassed ours. Up until that point, our mantras were about Japanese burden sharing, introducing them to a broader view of the world, and contributing to stability in Southeast Asia - all that good stuff. Once their aid exceeded ours, we began to realize that the Indonesians knew it, too. We had to begin to remind them that we were their political as well as well as economic key supporter. That Japanese firms should not be given priority over American firms. Japanese firms, of course, did the informal deals the Indonesian power structure wanted.

Q: Singapore? Lee Kwan Yu? Was he an influence at all?

FRITTS: The Singaporean-Indonesian relationship was prickly at best. Both sides suffered from superiority-inferiority complexes. Indonesia perceived Singapore as a small Chinese island state which thought itself too smart by half and which siphoned off trade and financial services which should have come to Indonesia. A good deal of Indonesian trade was smuggled into and out of Singapore. In retaliation, the Indonesians built a large port and trade entrepot on an island visible from Singapore. Batang, I think.

The history of *confrontasi*, the undeclared virtual war between Indonesia and Singapore during the Sukarno era, still reverberated. A major shock to the Singapore-Indonesian relationship when I was there was the Singaporean execution of several Indonesian marines who had been arrested in Singapore during *confrontasi* and had been in jail for years. Suharto made a personal appeal for clemency to PM Lee Kuan Yew to no avail. Working things out "the Asian way" failed. A great loss of face for Suharto. It was never forgotten.

Q: Did you get out much into, I guess, Irian Jaya, Borneo or East Timor?

FRITTS: Other than several trips to Sumatra, not much. My tour was cut in half to go to Khartoum.

Q: So you left Indonesia - we're talking about when, mid-'70s?

FRITTS: A bit earlier - early '73.

Q: Why were you yanked out so early?

FRITTS: Totally by surprise. Cleo Noel, the Chief of Personnel, who was going to be ambassador to the Sudan, asked his staff for a list of Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) prospects. He thought he should live by the system he had run. My name was on the list. I had never met him nor was interviewed, but, all of a sudden, I was to be DCM in Khartoum. However, as you know, Ambassador Noel and my predecessor, Curt Moore, were tragically assassinated just as I arrived in Khartoum. I thus became instant charge d'affaires a.i.

The definitive story of the assassinations, the trials in the Sudan and their aftermath is in the book *Assassination in Khartoum (1993)*, authored by our former colleague, David Korn. His book is the only public account on which those of us involved cooperated because we agreed earlier not to do so unless the two widows approved. Lucille Noel and Sally Moore trusted David, who had known Curt.

Q: When did this happen?

FRITTS: In March, 1973.

Q: How did this hit you?

FRITTS: The assassinations or the assignment?

Q: The assignment first.

FRITTS: Well, Audrey and I were surprised and pleased, but also somewhat disappointed. We had been looking to enjoy more of Indonesia. As always, the first year at a post is the toughest. You have to learn the work, develop contacts, and start to become productive. Vacations are rare. The first year is also filled with challenges for family members. That period was now behind us. Our two girls were doing well in school; Audrey's and my Bahasa were starting to be fluent. Then bang! We were to yank the girls out of school and go to a totally new continent - Africa.

However, like all Foreign Service families, we knew how to pick up and go. We followed a philosophy that our kids also knew that our "home" was not a place; our "home" was anywhere we were together. When I had a new assignment, Audrey and I would convene a little ritual. Susan and Robin would be asked to get cushions. We would then sit in a circle on the floor *zabutan*-style. I'd announce our next post and we would discuss the changes. Nothing democratic about it; no options. However, the kids were used to it and, maybe, even kind of liked it. They knew they were losing friends, but also had learned there would be new ones. The March timing was bad - they knew they'd be out of school for awhile. But we made a fast trip to Bali, packed up, and left.

Of course I was pleased to be named DCM. It was a plum career step and I was young for the job. I knew nothing about Africa or the Sudan. Zero. But the country and Nile confluence sounded interesting and even a bit romantic.

It was to be a direct transfer from Jakarta to Khartoum, but I raised a minor fuss that I wanted to go via Washington for Department consultations. Besides not wanting to be ignorant, I also knew I had to know the players at home. Reluctantly, the Department finally agreed. As it turned out, it may have saved my life.

When I arrived in Washington, the State experts said, "Oh, we can't tell you much about the Sudan. Ambassador Noel's the real expert. He'll bring you up to speed much better out there than we can here."

Q: Well, what did you pick up on consultations?

FRITTS: That I would be very fortunate to have Cleo Noel as an ambassador. Besides being an expert, he was a respected professional, a man of honor and integrity, and he'd been genuinely welcomed by the Sudanese Government and friends from his previous tours in Khartoum.

Also lauded was the departing DCM, Curt Moore, who was a close friend of Ambassador Noel. He was also highly respected as a person and as a professional. He had been chief of the U.S. interests section (part of the Dutch embassy) in Khartoum for several years

until the restoration of bilateral relations a few months before. Ambassador Noel was now the first full-fledged U.S. ambassador in Khartoum since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Q: How about the policy side?

FRITTS: The Sudan, as part of Arab unity, had broken relations with the U.S. in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. But now it had become the first Arab state to restore relations. The U.S. hoped Egypt would follow suit. The Sudan was thus viewed as a wedge to reestablish the American diplomatic presence in the Middle East. Our goal was to nurture the Sudanese relationship to serve as a model for other Arab states also to resume full relations with the U.S. The process would entail building mutual confidence via political consultation, initiating an aid program, attracting American private investment, enhancing trade and cultural ties, and otherwise indicating that a formal, working, friendly relationship with the U.S. was beneficial. The Sudan was also not inconsequential in its own right. It's the largest country in Africa, is on the strategic Red Sea near the Horn of Africa, and borders eight African countries, including Egypt, Libya and then-Zaire now the Congo - again.

Q: Well, how did things develop on consultations?

FRITTS: Tragically. I was in the Department of Commerce on, I guess, about March 1 when I was called out of a meeting by the secretary on the Sudan desk who said I was to return to the Department immediately, but she was not permitted to tell me why. I said, "Immediately?" She said, "Yes, immediately." So I broke off the meeting, went back, and found out that Ambassador Noel and Curt Moore had been taken hostage by Black September Organization (BSO) terrorists, while attending a farewell reception for Curt Moore at the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum. This was, I think, the first ambassadorial hostage situation of what became a string of hostage and terrorist situations to this day. I found out that the Principals were meeting in the Operations Center, to which I repaired immediately. Bill Macomber, then under secretary for management, had convened a task force there and the ongoing discussion was what to do and how to do it. With all my vast Sudan experience, I was, of course, but a fly on the wall.

Macomber finally said, "Well, we'll leave right away for Egypt and see what develops". The idea was use Air Force transport, fly to Cairo, and determine what to do based on the evolving situation. Macomber envisioned guiding any Sudanese negotiations with the terrorists and wanted to be closer to the action.

Macomber then said, "Who's going to go with me?" He checked off various names of people who were or were not in the room, altogether a small group of about six. He hadn't named me and probably had no idea I was the new DCM. He knew my face from other activities, but no one in the meeting had paid any attention to me - what did I know? Macomber got up briskly to leave. I intercepted him and said, "Mr. Secretary, I'm to be the new DCM - Curt Moore's successor. I need to be on that plane." "Okay," he said, "I'm leaving in two hours. Can you do it?" Of course, I said, "Yes."

Luckily, being in transit, I was staying across the street in the Columbia Plaza

apartments. I just threw stuff into a suitcase and garment bag. My wife and daughters were visiting my parents in Florida and due up in a day or two. I tried to call her, but no answer, so I left a note. My brother, purely by chance, was in town on business from Atlanta. I called him to say what was up, that I had hidden the room key in shrubbery outside Columbia Plaza, and to collect whatever I left behind until Audrey returned. I hustled back to the Department and boarded the van for Andrews Air Force Base.

Q: So what was your impression at the meeting? As you said, you were a "fly on the wall" at this crisis session. Did you feel the group was floundering or knew what was going on?

FRITTS: Well, in any situation like that the information is incomplete. There were rumors within rumors from Embassies Khartoum and Cairo, the media, and intelligence sources. Many conflicted with others. What Macomber wanted to do was get in close on the ground, be briefed, gain direct knowledge, and decide how to have an impact - perfectly reasonable. Substance aside, we did not then have the instant communications of today. Our only real time link was a specially setup teletype (TTY) projection onto a wall screen.

Q: Did the Air Force respond well?

FRITTS: In truth, the Air Force was not used to being called up on short notice to provide an airplane for a State Department official and team to go anywhere. They said no aircraft would be available for hours. But Macomber was a very impatient, high-profile, hard-nosed person, as you may recall, and raised Cain with the White House. As it turned, the only plane immediately available was the President's 707 Special Command Flight to be used in response to a nuclear attack. One was always aloft, but it landed at Andrews for us. It was quite spiffy, with all sorts of radar consoles, excellent communications, and some very nicely appointed seats. But you can imagine the Air Force was bent out of shape big-time.

Q: Oh, yes!

FRITTS: - to have, you know, a group of State Department people preempting their airborne strategic deterrent. And they didn't let it last very long. We flew from Andrews Air Force Base to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, a distance of, maybe, 100 miles? And half the trip was circling and dumping fuel over the ocean. We then sat at Dover for several hours awaiting another plane, but the Air Force could say they had gotten us started. So while Macomber got us up in the air, all right, we didn't go anywhere.

Q: And then what?

After several hours, an Air Force C-141 arrived and flew us from Dover to Frankfort, Germany where, after another layover, we flew on to Cairo. But the C-141 was useless for any planning because of the noise level. They were large cargo aircraft configured with a few passenger benches. We had to wear earplugs. There was no way to discuss issues, to plan, to receive updates or work out plans. Occasionally Macomber would be

called to the cockpit, where somebody at State would brief him on the latest with a few sentences. He would return and try to shout to us over the din. He finally gave up on that.

Q: Was there concern at the time about the White House reaction?

FRITTS: Not that I knew; all that came about later. The priority was to get into the area, find out the facts, and react. I don't know what Macomber was receiving or doing at that time on White House or State press guidance. The White House issue and other controversies came up later.

But I'll go on with the story. When we arrived in Cairo, our U.S. Interests Section Chief, Jerry Greene (?), was at planeside. He told Macomber that the latest word from Khartoum was that the Sudanese were negotiating with the BSO terrorists and that the hostages - our two plus several foreign ambassadors and the honorary Belgian charge d'affaires a.i. - and the terrorists would be flown to Cairo under safe conduct and all released to Egyptian authorities. Macomber thus decided to stay in Cairo to advise the Egyptians. He didn't want to be en route to Khartoum if the hostages and terrorists were en route to Cairo. In the meantime, to augment the staff in Khartoum, he sent Alan Bergstrom, a former political officer in Khartoum, and me onward to buttress the embassy. A commercial flight in Cairo had been held pending Macomber's arrival. Alan and I boarded and took off for Khartoum.

Unknown to us, a *haboob* or dust storm, had swept across Khartoum. By the time we arrived in the area, visibility had been reduced to zero with dangerous winds. I realized something was wrong because as we got closer and closer to Khartoum and lower and lower, the plane began to buck violently. I sensed we made several unsuccessful approaches, but after one particular wrenching gyration, we finally landed. An embassy officer, Ed Braun, was there to meet us and related that everyone in the terminal had hit the deck at one point when our plane emerged out of the gloom lined up on the lights of the terminal rather than the runway. We then went to the embassy in downtown Khartoum.

Q: When you arrived at the embassy, did you know what you were going to do, or was it just to be there?

FRITTS: Just to be there and play it by ear. The embassy occupied the upper floors of a commercial office building adjoined by others on the main street. Because of the *haboob*, power was out and also, I think, the Sudanese Government cut power to the Saudi embassy and the area included us. I thus climbed five or six floors up the back steps, carrying my suitcase and garment bag over my shoulder. The only lighting on the stairway was battery-operated dual emergency lights - very dim. I finally came to the floor where the embassy began. The administrative officer, Sandy Sanderson, was standing there with his glasses on a string hanging around his neck. I couldn't quite see his face as he was back lighted by the emergency lamps, but I could tell he was crying. He said, "We've heard there was gunfire in the Saudi embassy. They may be dead. You're in charge."

Q: Good God!... So what does one do? Out of breath at the top of the stairs?

FRITTS: Well, I asked whether we had confirmed the deaths and, if not, how could we do it? His answer was uncertain. I said that finding out was the top priority for the embassy and Washington. He then sent a Marine to advise several of our embassy officers who were monitoring events outside the Saudi embassy.

My next thought was how could I be most useful? Others might behave differently, but I decided it was not to come in and take a high profile approach. I told Sanderson to remain in charge as he had been for the past two days, that I didn't know the embassy, the staff or even the city. Nor did I know Sudanese government officials nor they me. The American embassy staff was very small - only a half-dozen American officers, two or three secretaries - all in shock and without rest. Most of our Sudanese FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) were hunkered down at their homes. I decided the best thing I could do initially was just do whatever was helpful.

You'll recall that when I discussed the Operations Center, I said the Department and embassy Khartoum were linked by a crude direct TTY line that printed letter by letter. It was very slow and limited to only several sentences at a time. While talking with Sandy and others, I saw the TTY keyboard and small screen on a table with a chair in the corridor. It was unmanned and only glanced at intermittently when an officer happened to pass by. I knew how thirsty the Department was for information and its frustration with the dead time between questions and responses. So I said, "I'll start with this." Because of consultations, I knew who was who in the Department and thought I knew what they needed or would need. I manned the TTY for most of the next 36 hours. It became our embassy cockpit. It also freed up those who needed to be operational with the Foreign Ministry, the police, the Army, the media etc. I developed an increasingly in-depth dialogue with the Department, including sets of short evaluations, impressions, what next, etc. Versions were also being passed to Macomber who was still in Cairo.

The *haboob* was still howling. They normally last hours; this one lasted three days. Even the following noon it was black. Dust and grit were everywhere - in your eyes and teeth. Every flat surface was layered. We were covered in gritty dust. The dim embassy lights were still battery powered. It was a scene from hell.

Meanwhile, evidence accumulated that Noel and Moore had been killed, but no one had been inside the Saudi Embassy and actually seen the bodies, so it wasn't definitive. No one at our embassy wanted to accept that they had, in fact, been killed. Finally, it seemed to me time to bite the bullet and I typed out a message to the effect that they were "presumed" dead and future USG actions should be based on that premise. I understand the reaction back at the Operations Center was emotional.

After further negotiations, the Sudanese gained access to the Saudi Embassy and viewed the bodies. The remaining diplomatic hostages were released and the Sudanese took custody of the BSO terrorists. The honorary Belgian diplomat, half-Egyptian, had also

been killed, probably, we found out, as part of a past personal issue with one of the terrorists.

Q: What else do you recall from that awful time?

FRITTS: One human vignette I recall vividly is that the BSO operatives "permitted" Noel and Moore to write "last words" to their wives, who were together throughout at the residence. The murdered mens' notes, sealed in incongruously embossed Saudi embassy envelopes, were given to Sanderson by the Foreign Ministry. He asked me if I would deliver them? I said, "Sandy, I've never met Mrs. Noel and Mrs. Moore in my life. I'm even here as a live substitute for Moore. They've got enough to handle without factoring me in. You know them well, they know you. It's better if you deliver the letters." He left for the task in tears. He returned to say how appreciative the wives were for all everyone was doing, including me by name. And he commented that neither wife had shown any tears.

A couple other vignettes also stick in my mind, such as the overnight vigil.

After much too long, the bodies were retrieved from the Saudi Embassy basement, where they had been gunned down against a wall. Sandy identified them and he and Braun assisted in the preparation of the remains and putting them into the caskets that every Embassy has for emergencies. They lay "in state" in one of our embassy houses overnight and the next day. We had a Marine Security Guard in Dress Blues in formal attendance plus the American and ambassadorial flags. It was like a wake - embassy officers and Sudanese staff would come and go and come again. I think a few VIP Sudanese stopped by as well, even though the condolence book was at the embassy.

Then there was the departure ceremony. With the *haboob* over, Air Force One or Two, which had staged to Cairo, arrived with Macomber. We and the Sudanese arranged a tarmac exit ceremony for the coffins and the widows attended by the government and diplomatic corps. In one of those poignant paradoxes you often see in Africa, the coffins, carried by the Marine Guards with the wives, me and the other embassy officers following, were accompanied by Sudanese troops slow-marching to a Sudanese military bagpipe band playing Auld Lang Syne as a dirge. I never hear that tune at New Year's, but what it saddens me. In Washington, there was a memorial service at the National Presbyterian Cathedral, which Audrey attended to represent the embassy. She met Lucille Noel and Sally Moore there.

Q: What did Macomber do?

FRITTS: He only overnighted. Of course, he met with President Nimeiri and other key officials. I attended, but Bergstrom did the reporting cables. Nimeiri and the Sudanese were incensed. They felt the attack had besmirched their international reputation and personally insulted them. That Qadhafi was the main force behind the attack, at least in part to punish them for renewing formal U.S. ties. Macomber's emphasis was on the trial and punishment of the murderers and we thought we had firm assurances. A trial and

conviction of anti-American Arab terrorists by an Arab state would be a first in the Middle East.

On a personal note, I had a memorable "exit meeting" with Macomber. All of us had been sleeping, such as it was, in the embassy. I used a dust ladened sofa in Ambassador Noel's office. With the new arrivals, every sofa and chair was occupied. For Macomber, we rigged up an actual bed (sort of) in our tiny dispensary.

He would leave the next morning. I went to see him just as he was about to nod off after days of precious little sleep. "What guidance do you have for me?", I asked. And he said something like, "What guidance do you want?" And I said, "Well, in these circumstances, how should I approach managing the embassy?" He replied, wonderfully, "However you see fit."

You know, there's an "in box" exercise for Foreign Service applicants where they arrive at a post to replace an officer who's died suddenly. They have to go through the contents of an in-box and determine priorities. Well, I now had two in-boxes and it was for real.

Among the papers in Noel's box was a photo, taken and developed at the embassy, of his taking the oath as ambassador the day of his capture by the desk where I now sat. He had come to the Sudan on an interim appointment and been confirmed by the Senate in absentia. Curt Moore had delivered the oath of office. The two men and their wives were wrapped in laughter and friendship. Hours later, both men were dead. If I had arrived in Khartoum directly from Jakarta, I might have been with them.

I learned later that Moore had possibly been at least vaguely aware of being under surveillance, but had discounted it. Noel had also been advised to be cautious, but, with his deep experience in Khartoum, had said that very day, "Nothing will happen to me in the Sudan". He was right about the Sudanese, but wrong about the BSO, Libya and, maybe, Yasser Arafat.

Among the papers in Moore's box was a hand-written welcome letter to me. It ended with "So at the close of three and one-half of the finest years of my life, I welcome you to Khartoum and hope you will be able to make the same statement when you leave."

Q: So how did you decide to approach managing the embassy?

FRITTS: Carefully. The small embassy was in psychological shock and depression. Although the Americans did not know Cleo Noel well, they knew his reputation. His few months at post had been impressively reassuring. They virtually revered Curt Moore. The Sudanese FSNs appreciated both men as friends of the Sudan and everyone knew that Noel and Moore were as close as brothers. The embassy was shattered - absolutely shattered.

As noted, I'd never before been in the Sudan or Africa nor had anything to do with the Arabic world or Israel-Palestine. I'd had only a few shallow days in Washington. I had no

presumed credibility by country or regional experience. But I was now the senior officer at post. I spent nights going through Noel's and Moore's working files and the embassy files in-depth back six months to a year. A good deal of the sensitive stuff had not been shared with others and I could piece some of it together. What was most irreplaceable, of course, were their contacts and access gained over the years and previous tours. The political officer, Sam Peale, was outstanding. He had become a close friend of Moore and was devastated by his death, but soldiered on. Next senior to me was Sandy Sanderson, the administrative officer, who had a lot of people skills, but hadn't handled policy matters. The USIS director did great work with the influx of Western media. He also felt and expressed readily and often that he should be Charge as his USIS rank was higher.

The first week or two was just terrible; each day worse than the one preceding. Aside from lack of knowledge and contacts, it was a challenge to resuscitate and inspire officers from such a trauma. I set initial personal and embassy goals, at first day to day and then longer. I soon realized the American officers found solace in focus. They also had been bonded by a crisis that encompassed me. It was March and they began to respond to my game plan of rendering honor to the fallen by having the embassy rebound as a fully functioning professional entity by July 4, 1973. If successful, we could top it off symbolically with the first formal July 4 celebration in an Arabic state since 1967. If we could do that, I would have done what I could as Charge. The embassy would then be a proven, ready and able vehicle for a new ambassador with shoulder patch to move forward. Sounds rehearsed, but it was embedded in my mind and recallable today.

In retrospect, I consider Khartoum the formative period in my Foreign Service career. It justified the approach I had always taken of wanting responsibility and across-the-board experience. Frankly, when I left the Sudan, I felt I could handle any task the Foreign Service could assign.

Q: Did you modify policy?

FRITTS: Circumstance modified policy. Our top goal was for the Sudanese to try and convict the murderers. I knew that task over time would become complicated and as a new Charge, I wouldn't have much clout with the Sudanese. But I did represent the USG and the Sudanese knew that my reports would influence Washington. I also knew we were handicapped in not having the contacts to keep track of what we didn't know - the crucial behind-the-scenes stuff. We'd have to build, drawing in part on the receptive sympathy of many top Sudanese. Officially, our "carrot" was a USG willingness to build a mutually rewarding "example" of U.S.-Sudanese relations. The implied "stick" would be to render the Sudan again an outcast from the West, a recent situation sufficiently unpleasant that the Sudan had broken ranks and reestablished U.S. relations.

However, my first task was to reconstruct the captures. I interviewed as many participants as I could, including Sudanese officials, army and the police, plus the diplomats at the ill-fated reception. The Saudi ambassador had decamped to Saudi Arabia and the Jordanian charge, as I recall, was disappointing. Scared, I think. In contrast, the Soviet ambassador was very forthcoming and detailed, including his escape over the

garden wall. He surprisingly and outspokenly guaranteed the full support of the Soviet Government to punish the violations of diplomatic immunity and embassy sovereignty. Didn't happen.

Q: How did you find President Nimeiri?

FRITTS: As a newly arrived charge, I never had direct meetings with him, although I met directly with the Vice President, the Army Chief of Staff and a cluster of others. My main contact was with the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Fadl Obeid, and occasionally with the mercurial, somewhat anti-American foreign minister, Mansour Khaled. Fadl Obeid and I were not personally close, but we grew to respect each other. He was a decent man trying to do decent work under difficult circumstances. Nimeiri, of course, was caught between an American hammer and an Arab anvil.

Q: Well, you said the number-one issue was what to do with the assassins.

FRITTS: Absolutely. Our goal was for the Sudanese Government to put the terrorists on trial, convict and punish them. It was an issue of principle and retribution, but also considered useful as an international precedent, particularly for other Arab states. The Sudanese Government started out strong and ended, over a year later, compromising and weak. Although finally convicted, the punishments didn't fit the crime. By that time, I had been reassigned to Kigali, Rwanda.

Q: We'll come to the punishments, but tell us a bit about the trial first.

FRITTS: It was a tortuous process. The Sudanese's Government's initial chagrin and outrage became progressively modified by internal and foreign policy concerns. The first step, which took months, was a magisterial inquiry, sort of like a grand jury. After fits and starts and a series of our demarches to the government, the magistrate finally lodged charges of murder against the principal BSO assassins.

We covered the inquiry indirectly. I thought it better not to have me or an American in the room to monitor it. At that time, English was still acceptable and widely used professionally. But even for Arabists, trial language would be specialized. Instead, an FSN attended and our reports drew from his notes, plus surprisingly good coverage by the media, some of it Western. I also debriefed selected Sudanese attendees and other sources, sometimes while ostensibly playing tennis or other innocuous activities. However, our FSN was threatened several times and we needed an expert fix on the Sudanese legal system, even though it was still quite British. We wanted to know how to challenge the continual delays which were often couched, true or not and increasingly not, as procedural rather than political.

I thus hired a Sudanese lawyer who attended the process privately. He would visit me at home on the legal issues and background maneuvering. He would also suggest occasional initiatives I could undertake and sometimes did.

Inconceivably, the Department wouldn't authorize me to pay him for some reason and told me to void the contract! He was, of course, in personal jeopardy should his role become known. I ignored the Department, told him to trust me, and we'd work it out. As it turned out, I was reassigned and found out only months later he had never been paid. I was incensed and made it my business from Kigali to hype the shame aspect. Eventually, it was done.

Q: And the conviction?

FRITTS: Months further, after I had gone to Rwanda, they were convicted in a trial on charges of murder. The good news was that our foremost policy goal had been met - the conviction of anti-American terrorists in an Arabic state. The sentence was life imprisonment, which the Sudanese Supreme Court commuted to X years. The bad news was truly bad. They were eventually turned over surreptitiously to the PLO to "impose the sentence" and spirited out by plane to Cairo. I think then-Ambassador Brewer only found out about it after the fact. The USG pressured the Egyptians not to release them and they were put in a form of progressively loose house arrest in a Nile mansion. Eventually, they evaporated. A travesty!

One of the controversies in later years was that the White House and State eased the pressure, partly for Middle East foreign policy reasons and partly because the major State principals were progressively transferred in a normal career sequence. Kissinger is cited as having a bigger picture in mind and State as viewing the matter as "an" issue, but not "the" issue it had been. I can't speak to that as I was in Kigali well before the trial ended.

Q: As for controversies, I earlier asked about the role of President Nixon...

FRITTS: It’s argued that President Nixon's public announcement, while Noel and Moore were still held and alive, that the U.S. would not negotiate with terrorists for hostages precipitated their execution.

I have no proof either way. Nobody does. However, my slant is different. I think they were doomed at the outset in that the operation was undertaken expressly to kill Moore as a way to reestablish BSO credibility in the wake of a BSO fiasco in the takeover of the Japanese embassy in Kuala Lumpur several months previously. Those hostages had been successfully released and there was widespread international media comment that the BSO was a paper tiger. In contrast, Cleo Noel was taken by chance. The BSO attacked Moore's farewell reception and Noel just happened to be there. The BSO found that they actually had two Americans rather than one. If I had not argued for consultations in Washington, it might have been three.

I also think Moore was a victim of mistaken identity. As the terrorists ran through the Saudi Embassy, I understand they were shouting for "Moore from Jordan, Moore from Jordan". I think they confused him with a Curt Moore who had been an AID accountant in Jordan when the PLO and BSO were rolled up by King Hussein. In their CIA conspiracy world view, they assumed the Curt Moore in the Sudan had been under cover

in Jordan. Either they made that mistake or their superiors conjured it up to justify the operation and murder.

Q: How about the role of Yasser Arafat?

FRITTS: Another continuing controversy. About a decade later when I was in Consular Affairs, the Rand Corporation was commissioned, possibly by a Congressional committee, to do a study on Yasser Arafat, including his and the PLO's role in the assassinations, as a prelude to a U.S. policy decision on whether or not to grant a visa for Arafat to attend his first United Nations General Assembly.

The terrorists were in touch with their headquarters by radio and one belief is that Yasser Arafat personally gave the order to execute Moore and Noel. Others say the information is inconclusive. Some aver he was possibly in the room and could have nodded. I don't know. We'll probably never know, unless someone who was there talks and, even then, we won't be sure.

In contrast, there's no controversy about the role of Qadhafi and the Libyans. The arms were brought in through the Libyan pouch in Khartoum. The Libyan charge helped plan it and departed Khartoum hurriedly the day before the operation went down. Several other Libyans were also involved.

Q: The very soft treatment of the assassins - what did this do to the embassy? I only met Curt Moore a couple of times when we were in Personnel at the same time - but I know that for years I felt very bitter about Nimeiri and his role in not coming up... Just as a Foreign Service officer, I just felt he had proved to be unfriendly to the United States.

FRITTS: I think the widely held view in the Foreign Service was not so much to blame Nimeiri, but to blame the Department and, particularly, Kissinger for not keeping enough pressure on the Sudanese. But I was gone and don't have any personal knowledge.

Q: Did the embassy function normally during the trials?

FRITTS: Yes, we pursued our policy of demonstrating that the restoration of full relations with the U.S. was a useful thing. We ratcheted up our official presence and programs. We assigned an AID officer as the precursor of an AID office. A number of State-DOD delegations began to negotiate military assistance agreements. Our USIA operation expanded. We had several Congressional (CODEL) visits, which had not occurred for years. We encouraged American private foreign investment and the Sudanese doors were open. General Electric (GE) looked things over as did several smaller American exploration oil firms. We initiated closer and more sensitive political exchanges. We thus began to restore and do the panoply of political, economic, commercial and public diplomacy kinds of things that go with friendly bilateral relations. We wanted Sudan to serve as a model for the area.

Q: Were you augmented by anybody from Washington?

FRITTS: Not really. A security guy came in from our embassy in South Africa. He revamped our security effectively and sensibly. But the then-embassy, in the top floors of an adjoined downtown office building, was completely indefensible. We had occasional troublesome hostile surveillance and military escorts. We didn't travel much outside Khartoum. We couldn't travel south to Juba, for example. We were very chary in our public activities, but the small staff measured up extremely well.

Q: Was the south in revolt?

FRITTS: Providentially, no. A big plus was that the Sudanese and the Southerners had just signed an agreement in Addis Ababa to end the conflict and integrate the Southerners into the Government and the army. Hopes were high. We were involved in trying to make the agreement work. Sam Peal was in close touch with the Southerners. And initial signs were quite positive. As I made my official rounds, there were high-ranking Dinkas, including, I think, a Dinka Minister of Economic Affairs, whose name I've forgotten, Bol, maybe. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was in Khartoum not long afterward to bless the agreement. I remember at the airport ceremony being surprised at how short the Lion of Judah was in person.

Q: What was the Sudanese Government like at that time?

FRITTS: The Nimeiri government was more moderate than it eventually became. In restoring relations with the United States, Nimeiri took a lot of heat from the radical Arab states and from militant domestic groups, such as the Islamic Brotherhood. The Sudan needed an opening to the West to restore economic momentum and the U.S. was responding readily.

As a people, the Sudanese have a very high sense of personal honor and the government felt its national honor had been besmirched. Thus, there was a high sense of acute embarrassment. Moore and Noel were also widely respected and known. Indeed, there was a gratifying initial outpouring of Sudanese indirect public expressions of embarrassment and bereavement, especially from those who had known the two men for years. The government believed the assassinations had been designed specifically to embarrass it. The Sudan and Libya had had difficult relations for years, including border clashes. On the other hand, the government did not want to be perceived as giving in to the Americans in any way that could be used further against them. The regime felt itself already exposed and vulnerable to overthrow by conservative Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the charismatic Sadiq al-Mahdi. Anti-government demonstrations were periodic. Several occurred across the roundabout from us. If large and serious enough, the Sudanese Army would fire live ammunition over the demonstrators' heads. They'd flee leaving their slipper shoes behind which we'd count and divide by two for crowd size.

Q: How about the Sudanese Government? What was your impression of their abilities? The Sudan had been the crown jewel of the British colonial service, and I was wondering

how–

FRITTS: Well, the tragedy of the Sudan is the continuing saga of what might have been and should be a viable, prosperous and accomplished country. Although mostly desert, there is massive irrigation potential from the Blue and White Niles. It has excellent tourism prospects by evoking its African-Arab meld, Victorian imagery, ancient monuments in Meroe, and the Red Sea coast. And there's some oil. Plus a huge territory - the largest in Africa. And, at that time in Khartoum, the still functioning remnants of a good educational system, and fairly wide knowledge of internationally useful English. Many Sudanese agronomists and engineers were proud of their training as graduates of the University of Arizona and Arizona State. The peoples were impressive in character as well as skill. I've often said that of the countries I know something about, the Sudanese and the Burmese are the two that least deserve the governments they've got. But the Sudan just never has worked.

Q: How about some of the more militant Arab countries, like Libya, Syria, and all? What sort of roles were they playing in the Sudan?

FRITTS: With the exception of malevolent Libya, not much. Khartoum was a somewhat disdained African backwater by the "pure" Arabs. I had limited contact with militant Arab diplomats since we had no official relations. The militants were actively working against our interests in general and on the BSO trial.

Q: What about Egypt? What sort of role was Egypt playing?

FRITTS: Egyptian-Sudanese relations are historically strained, probably since Pharonic times and, more recently, from the Sudan being the junior partner in the colonial Anglo-Egyptian condominium. Egypt was closely watching the Sudanese-U.S. resumption of relations. If it worked out in Khartoum, then Cairo would probably be next.

Q: But then at that time, Egypt wasn't playing... We didn't look upon Egypt as being a partner in helping us get somewhere.

FRITTS: Well, Egypt was a big Middle East player and, even though we had only an Interests Section in Cairo, it was a big operation.

Q: Well, how long were you there?

FRITTS: Ambassador Bill Brewer came out later in the fall and I took my station as DCM. After a few months, it was time for home leave. I took receipt of a powerboat from Beirut to use on the Nile on our return and put it unused on skids in the front yard. Audrey and I got on the aircraft with our children at the usual midnight cooler hour so the plane would have enough lift and we flew off towards the United States. We anticipated a wonderful home leave with the crisis and tensions behind us. Our family was always quite firmly bonded together. As the plane took off, Audrey and I held hands, said how much we liked the Sudan, and we would have a lot of fun on our return.

Q: What happened?

FRITTS: We arrived in Washington and went to a Foreign Service cocktail party at a friend's house. We hadn't been there more than five minutes when the FSO hostess gave me a squeeze and said, "Congratulations." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because - well, don't you know? You're becoming an ambassador." I said, "Where?" She said, "Rwanda." I said, "How do you know?" She said, "I saw it in Personnel." I said, "Beats me." That ruined the party and our night's sleep.

The next day I went to the African bureau executive director who said, "Welcome back, you did a great job," all that stuff, and I said, "What's this I hear about Rwanda?" "Oh," he said, "You're being nominated as ambassador to Rwanda." I said, "I don't want to be ambassador to Rwanda. I want to go back and be DCM in Khartoum." And he said, "Well, you'd better talk to David Newsom about that." David Newsom was the assistant secretary for African affairs. I had only met him to shake his hand during consultations. I couldn't get an appointment with him till the next morning. He was one of the most respected and admired senior officers in the Foreign Service and later became undersecretary for political affairs. But I was angry, thought a transfer dumb, and that I was needed in Khartoum.

Audrey and I had another sleepless night.

Newsom is, by nature, calm, contained and poised. I went through my litany more-or-less professionally. "Well," he said, "You're being named ambassador because of your wonderful work in Khartoum." I said, "I don't want to be ambassador in Kigali. Khartoum needs me. I've put the embassy back together. There's a new ambassador there. Things are shaped up. I want to go back there and do my job as DCM." And he said slowly, "You're going to be ambassador to Rwanda." And I said, "What if I refuse it?" And he said very slowly, "If I were you, I would think rather hard about that before doing so." And I said, "Well, when does the request for *agrément* go out?" He said, "*Agrément* is back already." I think my jaw dropped. "*Agrément* is completed and I've never even been informed?" "Well," he said, "I guess there was some oversight."

Q: God!

FRITTS: So we went to Rwanda.

Q: You've said how you felt about this. The whole idea in the Foreign Service is becoming an ambassador. It's a key career thing, but at the same time, this is not the way to get it.

FRITTS: Well, I found out I was an experiment by Kissinger, who was in the process of shaking up the Foreign Service. One aspect was to assign so-called promising young officers as ambassadors of small embassies. I became the then-youngest FSO ambassador in Foreign Service history - briefly.

Q: Bob Paganelli was another one, I think.

FRITTS: That's right. My record lasted about a year until he or someone else younger was named. In my case, the *New York Times* had an article saying that Secretary Kissinger thought the Foreign Service too specialized regionally and that he would transfer a large number of FSOs to so-called "out of area" posts by the summer. Make them all more "global" and thus broaden expertise.

Further down in the article it said that the first example of his "unconventional approach" of younger more junior ambassadors was naming me to Rwanda. It also quoted some anonymous senior "fiftyish" FSO who said, "Who ever heard of a class three officer being picked as ambassador?". So that's how I went to Rwanda at age 39.

Q: So did the Kissinger initiative on younger ambassadors last?

FRITTS: No. The power structure of senior officers was opposed, in part, because it reduced the number of ambassadorships for them. Being the first appointed and thus the first assigned back to the Department, I adopted a low profile on return. As an East Asian (EA) Bureau office director, I didn't use the "ambassador" title, didn't put it on the door, and didn't use it in memos. Just downplayed it all. After all, none of the EA Deputy Assistant Secretaries or Assistant Secretary Holbrooke had then been ambassadors. It was all in vain. The "young" ambassador program was wiped out - for all the bureaucratic, envy and system reasons you can assume.

One could tell from the beginning that it wouldn't last. I was not sworn in on the Eighth Floor, as was routine. Instead, I was sworn in on the Sixth Floor. "They" wouldn't give me access to the swish rooms. It was the system striking back. The only person I could get to swear me in was a deputy assistant chief of protocol. The Department wouldn't pay for any of the snacks and beverages. It was pretty much a third-class train. In reporting from Kigali, I was careful about when to use the first-person pronoun. Everybody knew these cables were from an unprecedented "junior" ambassador.

Another indication of lack of status was that I never met Secretary Kissinger, who had no real interest in Africa or in junior officers like me, despite his initiative. Indeed, two of my best-kept secrets during my tenure in Rwanda were that I only met President Nixon once (in a Japan Desk context) and I never met the then-Secretary of State. When I was in Washington on consultations, of course, the Rwandans thought I was doing wonderful things at the "highest levels." Well, I wasn't. For me, the decision-makers and resource-givers were at the deputy assistant secretary and office director levels.

Q: Again, this is not exactly a place that you'd spent a lot of time brooding or contemplating about - Rwanda. Did you know anything about it before?

FRITTS: Not at all, but I began reading, although materials were limited. But I will comment, Stu, on your implication. Sure, Rwanda was small, but my mind sort of

comparable to a Navy destroyer. A small command far away. Terrific!

Q: When did you go out?

FRITTS: In March 1974, exactly a year after arriving in Khartoum..

Q: I can't remember which of those twin countries is at the bottom and which is at on top?

FRITTS: Burundi is at the bottom, Rwanda is on top.

Q: All right. What were you getting about American interests, I mean, when you went to the Desk and all that?

FRITTS: Our overall mission was to support a moderate government in a Francophone African country. Our interests were the standard ones for Africa at that time. The U.S. had - and still has - an embassy in virtually every African country of whatever size and importance. We are the only country to have such a presence. The "universality" policy was initiated in the Kennedy Administration as UK Prime Minister's MacMillan's "winds of change" blew independence into some forty new countries. We pursued favorable votes in the UN, the protection and welfare of American citizens, human rights and plural governance, American private investment, and ecological conservation. Politically, we were a window on Idi Amin's Uganda, a peephole on Zaire, and a wary observer of Libya. Within the Cold War, we were a mutually competitive local nuisance for the PRC, the Soviets, the North Koreans - all of whom had embassies - and, occasionally, the Cubans who were activists in Africa. The Cold War was the rationale for much of our diplomatic activity throughout Africa. We ran a small AID program and began a Peace Corps program.

Q: So when *you out there, what was the country like?*

FRITTS: Rwanda is the size of Maryland, but with a then-population of about five million. It was one of the most densely populated countries in the world and also one of the poorest. The country had been colonized late by the Germans - only in the 1880s.

Like its southern Burundi neighbor, the population was composed of Tutsis in the minority and Hutus in the majority. Historically, the Tutsis had been dominant, but shortly before independence had been overthrown and slaughtered by the Hutus who subsequently controlled its post-independence governments. There were occasional tensions and murders, but the government pursued a policy of national reconciliation and a number of Tutsis had top jobs. Both groups shared the same culture and language with much intermarriage. Still, everyone knew who was what, even though it wasn't physically apparent. There was the stereotype of the tall thin Tutsis and short squat Hutus, but most, as one French journalist noted, were "people of medium height."

The major foreign power, in practice, was Belgium as Rwanda became a Belgian colony

under a League of Nations and subsequent UN mandates following WWI and WWII. One of the unusual and welcome aspects for me was to become a small power. When Rwandan Government officials asked me for this or that, I could say, "Well, that's not really in my line, go see the big power. Ask the Belgians." I was thus absolved from some of the issues that normally come America's way - such as military assistance.

Q: Was there any American community?

FRITTS: Yes, about 200 spread around the country – missionaries, business and holdovers from the colonial period who had made a life in Africa. Several were remarkable.

One was Joe Wertheim, a tea entrepreneur and expert, who created a tea plantation and, subsequently, a tea factory as well. He was the first American direct investor in Rwanda and received the first USG overseas investment insurance guarantee for a project in Rwanda. His operation still runs almost thirty years later after a continual series of crises, including Rwandan bad faith. government corruption, fires, theft and genocide. The tale of his smarts, persistence and integrity should be a novel.

Another was Rosamond Carr, now in her eighties, who has lived virtually her entire adult life in Africa and Rwanda and is the closest to a living saint most people will ever know. Living up-country in genteel poverty, her love of the people, Tutsi and Hutu, has been her only protection through recurrent revolution, destruction and bloodletting. She now runs an orphanage for nearly a hundred kids whose parents have been murdered in ethnic strife. She was played by Julie Harris in the film "Gorillas in the Mist" on the life of Diane Fossey. (Rosamond Carr's story is in her autobiography "Land of A Thousand Hills" 1999). Diane was played by American actress Sigourney Weaver, who is now a major donor to Rosamond's orphanage.

Q: Did you know Fossey well?

FRITTS: Yes, quite well. Diane was one of the woman primate behavioralists whom the naturalist Louis Leakey chose personally. The other two were Jane Goodall, who focused on chimpanzees in Tanzania and a third, whose name I forget, covered orangutans in Borneo. Diane's life and focus were on Rwanda's remnant population of endangered mountain gorillas.

She and a British or American student assistant or two, lived amidst gorilla habitat in a small camp, the Karisoke Research Center, at 10,000 feet on the slope of Mount Visoke, an extinct volcano. We could theoretically reach her by embassy radio, but she seldom had it on and it was unreliable. Communication was often by happenstance courier which wasn't easy. Although only ninety miles away, it was a four-hour trip by vehicle and then a two-hour climb up the trail on the volcano.

She was unique - a legend in her own time and obsessive over the gorillas, which she protected fiercely. The mountain and gorillas were "hers." I spent a good deal of time

trying to facilitate her work, in part by keeping her from being expelled. She would, for example, chasten poachers by kidnaping their children. The kids, by the way, loved it – three meals a day, small animals to play with, soft camp beds etc. They'd sometimes refuse to return to their parents.

Other incidents were more serious, such as leading retaliation raids against poachers to capture their possessions and equipment or driving off cattle, which impinged illegally and were destructive of gorilla habitat. The cattle were an important issue as they and their horns are the basis of Rwandan culture, prestige and male status. She also had her Rwandan assistants, who were known as trackers and devoted to her, alarm the gorillas, if the trackers were sighted by them. Her rationale was that as all the poachers were African, she wanted the gorillas to associate that Africans were dangerous and whites observers were not. It was not politically correct, of course, but her means to an end.

One time she was about to be kicked out, but I wangled a temporary stay and sent word to her that I had arranged an informal "last resort court" at a regular weekly informal get-together of President Habyarimana and his cabinet held at a guest house in Kigali. I sent a note and vehicle to alert her a couple of days ahead, not knowing if she would respond. She arrived in our vehicle at the last moment unkempt in her usual bush outfit. We gave her our guest room and an hour later she came out clothed in an attractive long white dress with golden belt, earrings and her hair arranged, etc. She looked gangbusters. We went over and she gave a presentation in fractured French and Swahili with a faded National Geographic documentary on the gorillas, using our embassy projector. The viewers were fascinated. I don't think any of them had seen a gorilla before. She was not only not expelled, but the government made additional concessions to protect the gorillas. A book, "Gorillas In The Mist" was published in 1983 and later became the movie. That story was not included.

Despite her brittle exterior, Diane had a soft spot for children. Audrey, our daughters and I were at Karisoke for several days once and she took the kids out to track a gorilla group while her assistant, Kelly Stewart, daughter of the actor, James Stewart, took my wife and me. We were antsy about that, but Diane was adamant, saying that human parents were primates and any misperceived protective reactions to close encounters could be dangerous. It worked out fine, of course. We learned from the kids that Diane, at one point, sat on a log with the girls while Digit, her favorite gorilla, came up behind and touched, stroked and smelled the girls' long hair. Diane told them gorillas have color vision and it was the first time Digit had seen blond hair. Quite an experience.

She and I had a policy disagreement as I (and her supporters such as the National Geographic Society and the African Wildlife Foundation) supported projects designed to prove to the villagers and poachers that tourism could make gorillas more valuable alive than dead and thus lessen poaching and infringement. Diane wanted none of it, but eventually came around.

Well after my time, she was murdered at her camp. The Rwandan Government said it was by a jealous British assistant. Almost everyone else, including me, believes it was by

a poacher Diane had punished by taking his amulet - a very personal and magical item for Rwandans. She was an amazing American who did wonderful work in her very own way. She's buried at Karisoke.

Q: How many people in the embassy? What was the staff like?

FRITTS: It was quite small, of course. The chancery was a converted butcher shop. There was still a meat hook attached to a ceiling, but the building was functional. We had seven or eight Americans, half a dozen third-country nationals, and maybe twenty-five Rwandans and African FSNs. Ethnically, we had difficulties at times in our African work force, not only because of the Hutu-Tutsi issue, but also because of a mix of Zairois and Ugandans as well as Rwandans. The Motor Pool "downed tools" once for a day because a Zairois mechanic from a tribe with a history of cannibalism threatened to eat his Rwandan supervisor.

We also had a more serious strike when the DCM, Peter Higgins, uncovered the fact that the embassy apparently had never given out any performance awards to our African employees. Naturally, I was aghast and we rectified what we thought was the oversight at our next general awards ceremony. Following the awards, I was pleased to see several of our younger - and better - employees returning from lunch downtown wearing new shirts and showing off their shoes.

But the next morning was a different story. My periodic walk through the general services area of motorpool and crafts was met, not with jovial talk, but sullenness and turned backs. Later in the morning, a strike was announced. What had happened? Peter got some insights, but a leadership group wanted to meet with me personally.

When we met, the group emphasized in great detail that I, as the ambassador and hence "Father of the embassy family" had violated Rwandan chief and family customs by not treating "all of my children equally" and, particularly, by not ensuring that the older got stuff before the younger. The leadership group, of course, were all older.

Q: What did you do?

FRITTS: Temporized. I listened, asked questions, used elliptical French, and said I would need to commune with Washington etc. which, of course, I never did. The group decided to go back to work, but sullenly, while we pondered what to do. Fortunately, Peter later "discovered" that every one of the leadership group had been overlooked in previous years for length-of-service salary step increases or similar causes for financial esteem. At our next awards ceremony several months later, we made everybody whole. I never asked Peter any probing questions about his "discoveries." I also learned the helpful lesson that what we Americans may think as enlightened management practices are not universal nor are our definitions of discrimination.

Q: Did you have any protection problems or anything like that?

FRITTS: No, not really, other than keeping Diane Fossey in-country. There was some petty crime, but American tourism was small.

As for the embassy homes, our guard force was so unskilled and illiterate that we couldn't trust them with any weapons or equipment. The administrative officer wryly wrote and published a local Request-to-Bid for spears, bows and arrows. Lo and behold, one morning in the motor pool there were about six purveyors demonstrating the manufacture of their wares and test firing them. Some of the arrows wove back and forth 30 degrees from the horizontal. A bidder won the contract and our house guards thence went armed, in a sense. I saw some irony in asking the government to vote on UN nuclear Armageddon issues, while negotiating locally for superiority in pre-industrial weaponry.

Q: What was life like in Rwanda? Were you able to educate your kids?

FRITTS: Yes, the usual Foreign Service approach of making the best of what exists. The only school was a Belgian school and our daughters, Susan and Robin, at first knew only a few words in French. Near the end of our tour they won prizes for the best pupils in the school, for which we applaud them to this day. They were young tykes, nine and twelve, whatever it was. They came home one day and said, "We're teased because we're Americans and don't speak French very well, we can't ask questions in class, we don't have many friends, there are no extra-curricular activities, there's no dancing and no boy-girl stuff. So we're just going to study and prove them all wrong." And, of course, they wound up with lots of friends and really enjoyed the school. Coping and excelling are not bad things to learn overseas.

Q: No, not at all.

FRITTS: Rwanda was stable and travel, while inconvenient, was safe. Rwanda was not very big and we traveled around a good bit by van, always with a 50 gal. gasoline drum in the rearmost seat. The roads were awful - sixty to seventy miles in three hours or so was a good pace.

Rwandans are dignified with a somewhat isolated mountain mentality - very stoic. They had been colonized late by the Germans, only in the 1880s. But they could also be conspiratorial and untrusting, particularly within their culture which set great store upon cloaking one's thoughts. And this impacted occasionally upon us.

I recall having a local issue which I thought could be resolved if I could get a better handle on what the real problem might be. But my government sources were evasive. I thus went to a retired older government official whom I had found a useful sounding board. He listened to my tale, said he would help (and did), and then explained a bit of intriguing Rwandan cultural behavior. He said that children in the West are punished if they tell lies. In Rwanda, they were punished if they tell the truth. A Rwandan, Tutsi or Hutu, one clan or another, one neighbor or another, he explained, must always guard against unwittingly giving information to a potential enemy. Thus, Westerners, being open, are considered childlike. I, of course, continued to be professionally American in

how I did things, but I wonder how the international trials of those responsible for the recent genocide in Rwanda can ever be completed successfully under Western rules of evidence.

Q: Were any other agencies or departments trying to put people into Rwanda or were you pretty well out of that?

FRITTS: We were quite self-contained - pure State Department, no AID, USIA, Commerce, and Defense Attaché, etc. People liked visiting us, but no agency wanted to be there. It was wonderful. Our agency support came mainly from Nairobi, particularly USAID, which had a large regional office there. I thus flew to Nairobi three or four times a year on consultation and the family as well, where we could go to real restaurants. We also weren't on Congressional itineraries. We were pretty much left alone to do our thing the way we wanted to do it. That was fine by me.

Speaking of the Congress reminds me that at one point the country was in severe drought and we arranged for emergency shipments of PL-480 sorghum grain, which was the principal Rwandan food commodity. Logistically, it was difficult, but we were the first country to respond, the Rwandan government let us bypass its own system, so we could distribute directly and fairly through Rwandan church and foreign missionary groups. The embassy staff and I monitored many distributions and it was very gratifying. We saved hundreds if not thousands of lives.

We knew that sorghum beer was also the Rwandan beverage of choice and began to hear that the Rwandans had discovered American sorghum grain produced beer of a remarkably high alcohol content compared to the locally grown. Thus, a considerable portion of our sorghum was going into beer production. Including for babies! Rwandans routinely gave babies sorghum beer that, I learned, has a very high protein content. We tried to prevent diversion, but not very effectively, and, and after all, the beer was being produced by individuals in small quantities and consumed on site. Nevertheless, I learned that we might have a CODEL to observe our emergency food aid. I could visualize the headlines in the U.S. to the effect that I was using taxpayer’s dollars to produce infant alcoholics! No CODEL came, thankfully.

I also used AID funding to support conservation, such as saving a residual herd of elephants by sedating and transporting the younger ones to a newly protected isthmus in Rwanda's Kagera National Park. Unfortunately, the older ones had to be killed as they could not be moved. As it was, an American wildlife photographer, Lee Lyon, was killed by one of the elephants on its release. She had a premonition of death and, to meet her reported wishes, I expended some hoarded good will with the foreign minister and she was buried by the park. Again, as most Americans don’t know, every embassy has caskets that come in handy. The consular officer, David Rawson who later became ambassador there, helped prepare the body. I sometimes felt sorry for colleagues in Europe - glitzy, sure, but exotic? Or challenging? Each day in Africa was different.

Q: Was the Tutsi-Hutu problem very prominent then?

FRITTS: I'm often asked these days whether I foresaw or whether the USG should have foreseen the recent Hutu massacre of Tutsis. During my time, we were well aware of tensions and the prior Hutu slaughter of Tutsis which, as I mentioned, had occurred in 1962. We knew that occasionally huts were burned and cattle stolen, that scores were settled and reopened, and we even had occasional ethnic problems within the FSN staff, which affected our hiring decisions. But the problems were local and not national.

In that regard, I found the president, Juvenal Habyarimana, a former Army Chief-of-Staff and Hutu, a very decent man. He was a practicing Roman Catholic of imposing physical stature. He had come to power two years previously after returning from the embassy's July 4th reception to find assassins waiting for him. He was very much imbued with trying to overcome the Hutu-Tutsi past and integrate things together. There were Tutsi ministers in the government and a lot of slogans to the effect "We're all Rwandans", downplaying clan and other ethnic loyalties. Indeed, I noted in my farewell-from-post analysis that if Habyarimana could stay in office for several years on the path he was on, he could become a credible mediator of African conflicts. It was thus a surprise to me two decades later to learn of the mass ethnic polarization and his alleged role. However, there is some evidence that he and his plane were blown up as a pretext for the genocide, at least, in part, because he had signed a power-sharing agreement with the former Tutsi refugee army that had invaded from Uganda several years before and is now the government.

Q: How about American missionaries?

FRITTS: There were American and other missionary groups hither and thither. We visited them frequently and their mission stations were often the only available stopovers with food, beds and fuel (which we prestaged or replaced). They had useful insights into their communities as to what the problems were and helped to guide some of our aid decisions. They loved the opportunity of talking with people with outside news, beyond the BBC, VOA or Deutsche Welle.

I had great respect for the missionaries and their commitment and devotion. I was also concerned by the expectation of many of them, who were second or third generation, to have their children follow in their footsteps. I felt there was no future for white foreign missionaries in Africa - and there wasn't.

Rwanda was nominally Catholic and Rwandan bishops and priests had great influence in the prefectures. It was useful to attend religious events, of which there were many. For Protestants, Audrey and I became well versed in Catholic Masses, the large ones were held outdoors with congregations on the hillsides. Very colorful.

Q: On the missionaries, it's one of the great problems. It's sort of a Christian colonialism, in a way. The same trouble in Korea when I was there, too. I mean third, fourth generation of missionaries.

FRITTS: It's a way of life.

Q: Was there much of a diplomatic community?

FRITTS: To a degree. A handful of African states, plus the Belgians, Brits, French, Chinese, Russians, the two Koreas, the Vatican and a few others.

Q: And the Cold War intruded there, did it?

FRITTS: Sure. We did the usual Cold War reporting and demarches. And tried to break through the Soviet isolation. The Russian ambassador's residence was just behind mine with only a wood and bamboo fence between us. Every Wednesday night they would show an outdoor movie of the Great Patriotic War to their guests and staff. So every Wednesday night we had tanks, bazookas and bombs going off. As was normal then, we and the Soviets had little to do with each other - by their preference. I invited the Soviet Ambassador one night to a movie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, and said in a hand-written note that it was favorable to the Revolution, but, of course, he didn't come. We exchanged the traditional calls and courtesies, but he didn't speak much French. He did opine to me once that he didn't like "these African peoples" very much, but hoped to complete six years in Rwanda to qualify for a Rwandan Government decoration.

Q: How about the UN votes? How did that work?

FRITTS: Well, as with all my colleagues in Africa, we were expected to "improve" the UN voting patterns of our host country. Rwanda was better than some and worse than others. It was sort of in the middle, bearing in mind that hardly any country was over 40%, with the possible exception of Liberia. But we made our demarches and presentations along with personal diplomacy. I remember telling the Foreign Minister once that since the last UN General Assembly, I had done a, b and c for him and Rwanda and now it was their turn to show something for me. Rather than voting against us on some key vote, they abstained, which counted as an "improvement" in Washington. With the Soviet Union now gone, one can look upon all this much more dispassionately.

Q: What about Zaire?

FRITTS: Zaire under Mobutu was quite stable, relatively speaking. The Rwandans were wary of Zaire and its capacity for mischief toward its much smaller neighbor, which had been a virtual appendage during the colonial period. One positive initiative was the formation at this time of the Great Lakes Convention, encompassing Zaire, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and, I think, Tanzania. There was a lot of talk about economic integration, none of which had much substance, but the psychology was good.

I made several trips to the adjoining Kivu provinces in Zaire and was surprised to find that people there spoke a variety of Kinyarwanda. The area was a vestige of the pre-colonial Rwandan and Burundi Tutsi kingdoms.

As its turned out, it that swath of territory, much larger than Rwanda itself, which the current Rwandan Government occupies as part of its military intervention into what is now again the Congo.

Q: Uganda?

FRITTS: Uganda was under Idi Amin. He complicated Rwanda's life and our life, because he had a throttlehold hold on Rwanda's transport lifeline - the road from Mombasa and Nairobi in Kenya to Kigali, about 800 miles or so. Truck convoys to and from Rwanda were started and stopped by Ugandan policy whim and corruption. Rwanda was thus often in short supply and/or its exports and foreign exchange on hold. In the embassy, we would be thrown back on our own resources for periods of time.

A small anecdote about that was the delayed arrival of my new official car from Mombasa due in Kigali by truck. Weeks went by as it became "lost" somewhere en route. Finally, I heard it was in town, but Peter Higgins said it needed fixing up in another location and to be patient. Each time I asked, he said it needed a little more time. Two weeks or so went by. It was still being "fixed up". So I finally said, "Peter, what's the story?" He took me to a warehouse by an open field outside of town. There was the brand-new official Chevrolet with its interior completely gutted. All the seats out, carpets and pieces of upholstery draped over bushes, side panels off. Everything. I asked, "What happened?" "Well," he said, "The car was on a truck from Mombasa to Kigali and the truck driver decided to make a little extra money, so he used it as a chicken coop - buying and selling chickens along the way."

Q: My God! Tanzania, did that play any role?

FRITTS: No, there were no Rwandan bilateral issues and no Tanzanian embassy. There was also virtually no trade with an also-impoverished Tanzania. It would have been different if the proposed railroad from Dar Es Salaam to Kigali had been built by the Germans, but WW I stopped it, literally, in its tracks.

At the border, the bridge over the river was used in the 1960s, and more recently, as a place to count massacred bodies going down river and provide some numerical estimate of the numbers killed. I went across the bridge several times, just to step foot into Tanzania.

Q: Who was ambassador to Burundi?

FRITTS: David Mark, I think. David and I had some common issues as his government was Tutsi, rather than Hutu controlled, and each government was suspicious of the other, although both professed "renewed" friendship. He and I thus visited back and forth a bit.

Q: You said there were two Peace Corps Volunteers. What were they doing?

FRITTS: We had just begun the program and their arrival was experimental for the

government and for us. They were involved with education at the University of Rwanda in Butare, which is an easier starting point than community development. After I left, the program became reasonably large.

Q: In retrospect, was Rwanda worth it?

FRITTS: Sure. We did everything a large embassy did, but on a smaller scale. I was in up to my ears. I was working nights with all the sorts of things one does in the Foreign Service when you think you have a mandate, are trying to do good, and represent the U.S. in a foreign land. Did we have any crises? Yes, but none that concerned the Seventh Floor, the Congress, or the American media of the time. We had to be self-reliant.

It was special. We had the gratification and chagrin of seeing quite quickly when we did well or poorly. Small embassies are microcosms. They were challenging training grounds. And especially valuable for younger officers.

Professionally, it also worked out well. I had a good corridor reputation and tried to build on and trade whatever goodwill I had accumulated in only fourteen years in the Service. When I did bark, I was sustained. I had no more than the usual complaints about the "home office".

Q: Then you came back to the Department.

FRITTS: Yes, Audrey and I believed strongly in our daughters going to an American public high school in order to be truly American. We came back, bought a house in a fine school district, and got the children into school. We would be in the U.S. for seven years, a relatively long time in the Foreign Service.

Q: Seven years from about when to when?

FRITTS: Oh, 1976-1983.

Q: What did you start doing?

FRITTS: I spent the first year in the Senior Seminar at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) which, of course, provided great exposure to what was going on in America. It also bridged (thankfully) the presidential transition from Ford to Carter. With a reshuffling in the State Department. Dick Holbrooke became the new Assistant Secretary for East Asian (EA) Affairs. He tapped me for one of his office directors.

Mine would be a new combination of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, and Singapore, plus the political part of the regional Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The acronym was TIMBS. It was the only EA multi-functional multi-country directorate and included eleven posts. Dick had added Thailand and Burma, because he wanted to send a signal to the Thai that they had become too dependent upon American political access and economic largesse. Thailand would now be treated as a "regular"

country. It was sort of a super-directorate of fascinating countries.

Dick also offered me the choice of Japanese Affairs (EA/J), but I had previously been directly involved with Japan, in Tokyo and the Department, for over six years. Not much had changed. It seemed to me the burden of U.S.-Japan relations was to handle the same issues over and over in different guises. I knew the policies and the jargon too well. I wanted a new region and Dick gave it to me. Actually, he was relieved as I later learned he wanted to give EA/J to Nick Platt, but somehow felt he had to ask me first. Some thought I made a mistake given the importance of Japan to the U.S. I don't.

Q: Well, now, in the first place, how did Dick Holbrooke operate?

FRITTS: Holbrooke was an activist - brilliant, aggressive, innovative, creative and disruptive. He had little patience for previous policy or prudent advice. His approach was unsettling to the Foreign Service and also to foreign diplomats. He was highly conceptual and visionary, could be absolutely charming or totally insulting, the latter often unnecessarily. He could be courageously supportive of some officers and ravishingly cruel towards others. He was a consummate strategist and achiever.

For me, he was exciting to work with, but also disconcerting. I'm organized and structured. While admiring his talents, I didn't seek out his company and didn't fawn on him.

Holbrooke had an eye for talent and recruited a stable of outstanding deputy assistant secretaries, particularly Bob Oakley, to whom I reported. Oakley was also an activist and, while totally loyal to Dick, knew his faults and helped us work around them. I never worked with anyone with as many ideas as Bob Oakley. Added into the coterie were Mike Armacost (NSC) and DASs Mort Abramowitz at DOD/ISA and, later, John Negroponte, who succeeded Oakley. A lot of intellectual firepower and all went on to bigger things - Armacost eventually as Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Bush Administration.

The group would meet with Dick two or three times a week in the evening to kick ideas around and coordinate policy. Other office directors and I would occasionally attend. In retrospect, the sessions were seminars on how to create and affect foreign policy, not with foreign states, but by outmaneuvering the NSC, DOD or State bureaus and our own Principals on the Seventh Floor. I learned a lot and also became considerably less in awe of high officialdom.

An anecdote on dress. The Carter Administration took symbolic pride in its populist origin "the man from Plains, Georgia," etc. Coats and ties were considered very much ancien regime. Dick and the other appointed luminaries affected jeans, scuffed boots, and open-necked shirts. The dress miffed and insulted ambassadors and visiting officials. They found it rude and immature. I recall Dick talking to the Indonesian ambassador with his boots up on a table with the soles pointed at the ambassador, a gross insult within Indonesian culture. Dick learned and toned down over time. I was amused when he later

joined a major New York investment bank and I'd see photos of him in three-piece suits and watch fob.

As I said, Dick was not alone. High-appointed State officials rubbed new cowboy boots to look old, abhorred closets full of suits and so forth. Even on the Seventh Floor. The images were costly while they lasted.

Q: How did you find the Carter Administration?

FRITTS: Much the same as I found Holbrooke. I think the Foreign Service found the Carter Administration creative and disconcerting. The assumption was that whatever policy we had been doing had to be wrong. That we were not trusted. We were not "their" people. We had only given lip service to human rights, had coddled up to dictators, and pursued policies tinged with immorality. Most Foreign Service officers found that hard to swallow. In retrospect, of course, such "outside" attitudes always existed, but I think they became axiomatic after Carter. Reagan also ran a populist mantra against "the Beltway."

Now it's normal and has much to do, in my opinion, with the loss of prestige and trust in public service and our difficulties in Foreign Service recruitment. Also a great waste of time and resources as every administration reinvents wheels.

On the other hand, within a short period of time, many Foreign Service officers, particularly those of us working for Dick, found ourselves freed from inhibitions and structures that had been static and stultifying. If you had an idea, you could get a hearing. Indeed, pressures for new ideas were intense.

Q: Let's begin with the big picture. You'll recall the fall of Vietnam in the spring of '75. It had been an article of faith for a long time, at least for those who supported our role in South Vietnam, that the other countries around would act like a row of dominos and start to fall. Now you were dealing with the potential dominos a rather short time after the fall. Was there concern about Vietnam, an aggressive Communist Vietnam, or had that kind of dissipated?

FRITTS: There had been great concern, but Dick less so and he believed it was time to reorient our policy in Asia to a post-Viet Nam mode. Policy-wise, we would, of course, emphasize and deal in providing regional reassurance of a U.S. security, policy and economic presence and, when necessary, buttress. Dick also believed the dominoes didn't and wouldn't fall if we properly valued the he forces of nationalism as well as the fiber of leaders in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), although the Thai were beset. The Viet Nam-stimulated exodus of refugees was also regarded, correctly, as a politically hostile and intentionally destabilizing campaign directed at the region. The Vietnamese thus helped our political stance. We devoted a lot of resources and diplomatic capital to demonstrate that the U.S. was an Asian power in for the long haul and we could be counted on. The effort was successful. The policy was often beset in trying to harmonize it with political concerns over human rights, including East Timor in

Indonesia. As well as the Golden Triangle of narcotics production and trafficking in Burma and Thailand.

Q: Another argument is that both the investment that we put there, but also the time allowed during the 10 years we were involved in South Vietnam, gave the countries time to develop a backbone and a stiffening, economic and political.

FRITTS: That's also true.

Q: Well, going back to the domino theory, were you conscious of our trying to build up Thailand and these countries around to resist a possible resurgence of Vietnamese aggression?

FRITTS: Sure. With ASEAN, we began to try and institutionalize processes of joint consultations and programs that would lead to habits of political cooperation and cohesion which, in turn, would assist our strategic, military, economic and political goals in the region. Remember, the Cold War was still on. There was a strategic position and political web in Asia we sought to maintain.

Q: Some persons have the feeling that, in a way, what we call Indochina now, except for the refugees, had dropped off the map of our interests, and that since we'd lost that one, we ought to get on with something else?

FRITTS: Do you mean after the fall of Saigon?

Q: Yes.

FRITTS: Not from my perspective. Vietnamese refugees were a major issue. There was concern over regional stability and shoring up ASEAN. The POW-MIA aspect was big. Then we had the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia to overthrow Pol Pot with a perceived threat to Thailand. Thailand thus became big on our scope politically and it was also a major focus of American investment. Many Americans had served in Thailand as an ally in Viet-Nam war. Thailand thus regained a very high visibility in Washington. In addition, all the ASEAN states were nervous over the depth of U.S. strategic-military posture and commitment in the wake of Viet Nam.

Q: Was there concern on the part, particularly, you say, of Indonesia or Malaysia, at all, that the United States was really withdrawing from the region?

FRITTS: Certainly. And those concerns were our concern. To a degree, the ASEAN countries probably heightened it in order to extract more from us. Lee Kwan Yu, however, was particularly concerned about a U.S. precipitate naval withdrawal. He offered to provide repair facilities in Singapore. We turned it down then, but accepted it some years later when the Philippines shut down our bases.

Q: Were we a catalyst toward the ASEAN association or were we sort of an outsider

looking in, at this particular time?

FRITTS: We were both. Our public stance was that the ASEAN states were very competent and could manage their own interests in the region without big brother beating on them. We thus stressed their formal structure and our only informal consultation. In practice, not much was done unless we worked behind the scenes to encourage, goad and mediate. We thus maintained a public consultative facade while providing political substance behind the scenes. That dual role was welcome within ASEAN, particularly when one ASEAN state or another had to be out-maneuvered by the others, who didn't want to adopt a position officially or formally. Sometimes they copped out with "Let the U.S. do it and take the heat." We also overstepped ourselves occasionally and, fairly or unfairly, got smacked down, usually by Mahathir in Malaysia, but also occasionally by Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore. The Thai and Indonesians were more subtle.

A major policy was to ease ASEAN into a political as well as economic forum as a regional counter to what we also perceived as a potentially aggressive Indochina group dominated by Viet Nam. The ASEANs shared our view, but didn't want to draw attention from Viet Nam by any political "ganging up." Accordingly, we and other Western powers plus Japan, were careful. We consulted with ASEAN as a group only on the periphery and after the ASEAN sessions were formally over.

We also sought to induce ASEAN to move into political substance rather than be concerned only with economic issues. That was difficult because of interlocking bilateral tensions, including intra-ASEAN attitudes toward Viet Nam, and hidden pretensions of regional leadership by the players. The Indonesians felt they were entitled to a leading role by size and destiny, the Filipinos because of their historic background, size and U.S. relationship, the Singaporeans felt they're so smart they ought to be on top, and the Malaysians weren't about to cede a leadership role to anyone, especially Singapore or Indonesia. The Thais sort of floated above it all, beset with a series of non-violent military coups d'etat. The common wisdom was that ASEAN could and would do nothing politically.

But we kept pushing discreetly as topics of opportunity came into view. We introduced political aspects gradually - sort of "down the garden path." A breakthrough occurred when we got "regional security" accepted as a legitimate agenda item for the annual ASEAN summits. We also initiated the first U.S.-ASEAN Dialogue at the Foreign Minister level as a side meeting of the ASEAN sessions. That was a break-through.

Human rights and corruption were always issues as were viable economic development, including foreign and American private investment. And the Vietnamese boat refugees.

Q: The boat people were a major problem, weren't they?

FRITTS: Absolutely. Boat refugees were the major crisis of the period throughout the region, including Australia, Hong Kong and Japan. We were engaged virtually daily. Our goal was to maintain receptivity to first asylum - the ability for refugees to stay in the

country where they landed without being deterred at sea, pushed off or expelled or treated inhumanely once landed. Our major carrot was to provide "guarantees" that the receiving countries would not be stuck eventually with residual refugee populations, of which many were ethnic Chinese, always a volatile concern. We and other non-ASEAN countries relocated tens of thousands of refugees. There were constant crises and constant struggles, internationally and internally.

Then Fidel Castro expelled thousands of Cubans from Mariel and the refugee shoe was put on our foot. The U.S. became a receiving country of first asylum. The ASEANs correctly pointed out that our moralistic stance of humanitarian obligation somehow changed when the U.S. became a refugee target. President Carter said initially "Y'all come" and then reversed himself when Florida and other refugee states exploded politically. We began to intercept refugees at sea in the Caribbean, which ASEAN leaders found analogous to their recurrent off-shore deterrence practices. In theory, they had a point. In practice, not. Americans with tacit official support were not robbing, killing, raping and enslaving refugees at sea as Malaysians and Thai were. We were accused of a double standard.

Q: How well did you find the East Asian Bureau worked with the Bureau of Refugees?

FRITTS: We worked well together, with a lot of mutual respect. A number of Foreign Service officers with Viet Nam experience were there. They were very committed. We were agreed on the policy goal of maintaining first asylum. We wanted to save lives. We had some tactical differences about the most effectual ways to achieve it. The refugee folk tended to want to pound doors and issue decrees. We felt it important to handle matters in an overall context. We came together in crises, such as massive push-offs of landed refugees, forceful interceptions at sea and real or threatened forcible repatriations from the camps.

The Refugee Bureau was highly assertive and rightfully so. In fact, when I moved up and over to consular affairs (CA), we had recurrent issues with the Refugees Bureau. But I brought some credibility from TIMBS which helped to contain and resolve them.

Q: There was also, for the first time, a Bureau of Human Rights. How were your relations with it?

FRITTS: Virtual bureaucratic war. The Human Rights Bureau under Pat Darien was almost impossible to work with. Not to put too fine a line on it, she and her deputies assumed we were immoral and untruthful and that neither we nor our ambassadors were carrying out instructions with sufficient zeal. The Human Rights Bureau people prided themselves on their access to private voluntary groups, which they chose to believe were more reliable than we or our embassies. They also had privileged access to kindred spirits in the Congress. Any classified cable on human rights which the Human Rights Bureau could exploit was leaked to key Members and staff right away. It was all quite poisonous - both ways. One of my colleagues once opined that in previous administrations, Pat and her deputies would have had their security clearances pulled. Or maybe be in jail.

An irony was that our then-major adversaries and mass violators of human rights were just about untouchable e.g. the People's Republic of China, Viet Nam, the USSR and the Eastern European countries. The U.S. had little leverage. Those governments didn't care about our views on human rights and the NSC was careful to calibrate those relationships. So Pat focused on the friendlies, such as in ASEAN (and other regions). For those of trying to maintain a balanced approach, it was frustrating and we attracted personal invective as well as professional tensions.

Even so, the Carter Administration's legacy of a stronger foreign policy emphasis on human rights is admirable, even though it had historically been part of the American moralist approach to foreign policy. And it became further internalized. When speaking to public groups on foreign policy, I find they're usually surprised that I saw little difference in the scope and tone of my instructions on human rights issues, whether under Carter or Reagan.

Q: Why don't we now cover the countries of TIMBS, starting with the smaller ones. What was the situation in Burma and what were our concerns?

FRITTS: Our relationship with then-Burma, now Myanmar, had two policy prongs: anti-narcotics and human rights, often in conflict. The salient and recurrent focal point was the helos provided by the U.S. to the Burmese Army. Initially unarmed, the Burmese put guns on them as, after all, they often got shot at on anti-narcotic ops. But were the helos being used solely for anti-narcotics operations, such as crop destruction? Or were they also being used to suppress the many and varied insurgencies. In virtually every case, of course, insurgents were also into narcotics in varying degrees. It was a fascinating mélange - tribal groups such as the Karens, autonomous warlords such as Khee Shan, and even a remnant of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang army. We knew that parts of the Burmese military and government were also in cahoots with selected producers and traffickers among the insurgents. Some of the army's attacks on heroin laboratories were staged, for example. There were continual shadow plays. It was the Wild West of the Far East.

Q: On the narcotics side, did you find the government responsive?

Only to a degree that the Burmese Government found our focus and aid useful in an anti-insurgency context. For us, at best, political and, at worst, military. Burma was also then and is today insular and isolated. Our embassy was restricted and didn't have much access to officialdom. Nor did any Western embassy. Our ambassador had never met Gen. Ne Win, who lived in seclusion. We had intelligence on the Golden Triangle, the narcotics area enveloping the borders of Burma, Thailand and Laos, but it was as unreliable as it was complex.

One way to keep in touch and induce the Burmese Government to respond was to organize narcotics inspection visits. Mathea Falco, head of our anti-narcotics bureau, developed quite good contacts with the Burmese. Too good, the human rights folk said.

A major player on Burma was Congressman Lester Wolf, Chairman of the House and Senate Joint Committee on Narcotics. He led several CODELs to Burma. The helos staged out of up-country sites and flew us into the narcotics and insurgency areas. It was a great experience. We were able to talk with otherwise inaccessible Burmese civilian and army types, often at senior levels.

One policy issue we fought was Lester Wolfe's idea of a "preemptive buy." It actually originated with Knee Shan, a major drug lord, and picked up by Wolfe's staffers. The idea was for the U.S. to buy the Golden Triangle's heroin production in advance and thus keep it off the market. Deceptively simple. It took us some time to convince Wolfe that heroin poppies should not be handled as a subsidized American farm crop, whose main historical result had been to increase production geometrically. Also no one had or would ever have a clue as to actual total production. So we'd still have an illegal crop.

Khee Sahn became angry after Wolfe decided not to pursue a "preemptive buy" policy. On his next trip, the embassy learned that Knee Shan might attempt to shoot down the helo carrying the Congressional Delegation (CODEL) helo. We thus flew above 5000 feet. Wolfe told me to keep quiet and didn't tell his Congressional colleagues (Congressmen Hyde and Dornan) until after the flight was over. They were quite miffed with him. Years later I heard Dornan as host of a call-in radio show talk of his courage in flying "alone" over Burma as the assassination target of a drug lord. What a self-promoter…

Q: Who was ambassador to Burma when you were there?

FRITTS: Maurice Bean for part of the time. After he left until now, we've had only charge's d'affaires in Rangoon or Yangon, as it's now called.

Q: Was there much we could do in the human rights line?

FRITTS: The usual demarches at working levels. And the recurring issue of whether the helicopters were being misused.

There wasn't much leverage. We had only a very small aid program outside narcotics. And narcotics control was the key priority for us. Japan was the major donor with projects linked to former WW II reparations. The Japanese had little interest in tweaking a major trade program for human rights goals. Indeed, human rights in Burma became increasingly worse over the years. Make that decades.

Q: How about Thailand, the other new addition to your directorate?. I'm surprised that they lumped Thailand with Burma..

FRITTS: Well, Dick used the structural change to illustrate policy shift. And narcotics issues were common problems along a common border with many of the same players. More specifically, as I noted, Dick believed that during the Viet Nam war Thailand had

come to expect too special a relationship with the U.S. He wanted Thailand, then a separate directorate with Burma, to revert to being a "regular" country with a "normal" U.S. relationship. He thus folded it into TIMBS, making us almost an Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) directorate. He considered adding the Philippines as well, but felt he couldn't do so politically or bureaucratically because of the importance and visibility of the U.S. bases. So, I got four fifths of ASEAN plus Burma. However, we did a lot of the ASEAN political policy and support work.

The new combo lasted a little over two years until the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia to overthrow Pol Pot. Thailand was perceived as under threat, which the Thais also made as dramatic as possible. We and DOD began to scrounge tanks and other military assistance from National Guard units. The workload on Thailand soared. Mort Abramowitz, then ambassador to Thailand and a good friend of Dick's, wanted more focused attention and back-stopping than we could provide handling five countries. So Holbrooke called me at half time of a Super Bowl game - called Paul Cleveland and me - and we went immediately to the Department on that Sunday afternoon and split the office, broke up the files, etc. The Thailand-Burma directorate was open for business on Monday morning. TIMBS became IMS.

Q: And the smallest of them all – Singapore. H*ow did we view him Lee Kwan Yu by this time?*

FRITTS: Well, Lee Kwan Yu and Henry Kissinger recognized each other as intellectual peers. There was not now quite the same regard by Brzezinski or Vance for Lee Kwan Yu nor he towards them. But he still liked to tell us what to do and not to do.

We also had bilateral issues with Singapore, because of their restrictive treatment of Americans and other foreign tourists, ranging from spitting and haircuts to mandatory death sentences for drugs.

And there were recurring ethnic, investment and trade tensions between Singapore and Malaysia plus Singapore and Indonesia which we tried to dampen.

Singapore was very fortunate in having an exceptionally capable ambassador in Washington, Punch Coomaraswamy. Punch, an ethnic Indian, had been the former Chief Justice of the Singapore Supreme Court. He was a smart as any Singaporean, while exceptionally personable, low-key, erudite and humorous. He knew everybody at all useful official levels and defused a lot of American angst.

Q: How about Malaysia? What were our concerns with Malaysia?

FRITTS: Malaysia was always difficult. Indeed, dealings with Kuala Lumpur were the most difficult and feisty of any so-called friendly government in my career. Anything and everything were challenged in some way. They were closer politically to Viet Nam than their ASEAN partners and thus their statements often contained zingers toward the U.S. Prime Minister Mahathir reacted particularly strongly to anything he deemed as pressure,

such as on human rights. They would ratchet up pressure over refugees whenever it suited their purpose and force us and other Western states to accelerate our off take. Elsewhere in the region, a bit of cajolery can go a long way. Not in Malaysia. Everything required going through hoops.

Q: Well, let's talk about Indonesia. What was going on? You'd served there some years before and now were back..

FRITTS: I would have thought that Suharto would have given way to somebody else in the interim, but it hadn't happened, would not happen on my watch, and, indeed, would not happen until some 25 years later. Indonesia is a terrific country of great strategic and economic importance to the U.S. But it's also a country that senior policy-makers traditionally take for granted and lesser policy-makers love to hate. We were thus embroiled in recurrent controversies – East Timor, human rights, military assistance, economic aid, foreign investment and the pulsating surges by boat of Vietnamese refugees throughout the region and overland into Thailand.

Q: So what about East Timor, which is now - we're talking about September 1999 - very much in the headlines. Was that a factor or anything we paid attention to?

FRITTS: East Timor had not been an important issue when I served at embassy Jakarta. But it became very important for TIMBS on human rights grounds – a key tenet of the Carter Administration. We were called to the Hill frequently to testify. I think it was Bob Oakley and Dick Holbrooke who originated the Solomonic dictum that the U.S..." accepts the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia, while recognizing that a legitimate act of self determination has not occurred." Kissinger was accused of having turned a "blind eye" or given a "green light" to the invasion.

Now in 1999, it's clear that the Indonesian military and the militia it supports are engaged in massive violence and human rights violations in East Timor. But in 1977-79, the anti-Indonesian allegations about East Timor were highly exaggerated, often lacked credibility, and were a convenient political platform for persons opposed to our overall policy toward Indonesia.

It may sound odd as we look at today's events, but I think our perspectives then were accurate. In addition to other sources, ambassadors Galbraith and later Masters were experienced in Indonesia and fluent in Indonesian. They visited the island and wandered about independently as did other fluent embassy officers, such as Harriet Isom. As a woman, she had some unique access. Many of the allegations were overstated and unsupported. Even so, it was not a happy place, despite the economic resources Indonesia poured in.

Nevertheless, we were often in the position in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee of arguing exactly 180 degrees from those who were recounting atrocity stories. Many of the proponents were American professors from Cornell University, who had links into East Timor and the various Portuguese priests. One of them has just won

the Nobel Peace Prize.

At that time, in our view, the situation was winding down. The Fretilin leader was under loose house arrest and almost all the insurgents had surrendered or faded away. Life on East Timor was generally calm, even though the Indonesian Government was often high-handed. The recent collapse of Indonesia's economy and the fall of Suharto have now reenergized the independence movement.

Q: You mentioned Cornell. Almost every one I've interviewed who's dealt with Indonesia, going back to the Sukarno times, talks about Cornell as being the worm in the apple.

FRITTS: It was a hotbed of historic revisionists. For me, it separated academics from objectivity.

Q: Yes, but they seem to have been able to capture... I guess nobody else paid any attention to Indonesia, and being the only sort of academic institution there that even thought about Indonesia, they seemed to be able to stand front and center stage in the policy debates.

FRITTS: To a degree. I'm now on the faculty at the College of William and Mary. There and elsewhere, I've come to realize that scholars focused on a single country or area are as or even more prone to "clientitis" as supposedly is the Foreign Service. Their all-too-common stance is that U.S. policy toward their area or country is wrong, ignorant, and out-of-touch with "the people." In too many cases, I suspect their stance is oriented more to their longer-term scholar career access prospects than knowledge. I didn't know that at the time. I naively worked hard at producing what I thought were objective facts. The academics weren't interested and any State Department views considered as self-serving as I considered theirs.

Q: Although you were focused on Southeast Asia, were you picking up things within the East Asian Bureau about the promise of the Carter Administration beforehand about withdrawing the U.S. military from South Korea? I mean this had been an election promise, and it was scary as hell to a lot of people, and it should have had reverberations all over.

FRITTS: I was aware only on the periphery. It would come up in the night-time senior sessions with Dick Holbrooke, which I attended occasionally. Usually there were Bob Oakley, Mort Abramowitz, deputy assistant secretary in International Security Affairs (ISA) in Defense, Mike Armacost from the National Security Council, etc. Mort was fighting inside DOD against a draw down, but he had to be loyal outside in support of President Carter's announced intention. Everyone thought a draw down would be disastrous for peace in Korea and confidence in the region. I came to admire Mort Abramowitz a great deal both then and later, when he became ambassador to Thailand. He was a true professional in balancing loyalty with policy advocacy. He took a lot of heat and his career was hurt by it.

Let me add that Mort Abramowitz was a superb ambassador to Thailand. With the assist of his wife, Sheppie, they were visible big-time in support of the Vietnamese boat people. They deserve the highest humanitarian accolades.

And Mort got one. I may be wrong, but I think it was the Medal of Freedom, about the highest honor given by the American Government, for his role in saving thousands of refugee lives. However, as you'll recall, the Carter Administration ended with the Iranian hostage situation and President Carter held no public ceremonies. As a result, the medal was never awarded. When the Reagan Administration came into office, they found things lying around, including his medal. Because it was a President Carter remnant of unfinished business, a Reagan staffer merely sent it over to State in a brown envelope in the inter-departmental mail and that's how Mort received it.

Q: Oh, boy.

FRITTS: The story is only hearsay, but my source was good. If it occurred, it was a great injustice.

Q: You were doing Southeast Asia from when to when?

FRITTS: From 1977 to 1980 – three years.

Q: And where did you go then?

FRITTS: To the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA).

Q: So, 1980, how did you get into Consular Affairs, known as CA ? How did that come about?

FRITTS: I knew my tour as IMS country director was coming to an end. A friend in Personnel tipped me that Barbara Watson, the assistant secretary for consular affairs, was looking for a new principal deputy assistant secretary. I put my name into the hat, was interviewed by her, and later notified I'd been selected.

The move was a surprise to Dick Holbrooke as he very much operated a patron-client system. Generally, EA officers went to him to finagle favorable onward assignments. I didn't think I was a favorite and also thought it beneath my dignity to make a pitch to him. Indeed, his executive assistant phoned me once, certainly on instruction, to intone that I wasn't hanging around Dick's office enough at night being visible. In my view, Dick's deputy, Bob Oakley, was whom I worked for directly. Bob was brilliant and efficient, had the Department and interagency clout I frequently needed, and also filtered out the excesses of Dick's impulsive creativity. I was working long hours, but also had a great family. I didn't want to waste hours as a courtier, particularly as being around Dick was always an unstructured experience. I attended when asked or thought it useful, but it wasn't recreation.

After my interview with Barbara, she called Dick to check me out. Dick, in turn, then called me in a sort of mild shock. He said I was the first EA officer to go out and negotiate an assignment "independently." After that, I felt he regarded me higher as our paths crossed in later years and as his fine contributions to U.S. foreign policy expanded.

Q: Your tour in consular affairs was when?

FRITTS: From 1980 into 1983.

Q: Talk a bit about assistant secretary Barbara Watson and how she operated. She was a fairly important actor in the State Department in those days.

FRITTS: My tenure in the bureau of consular affairs (CA) was under two assistant secretaries, initially Barbara Watson and then Diego Asencio, who succeeded Barbara when she became ambassador to Malaysia. Barbara, as you know well, set the then-longevity record for a CA assistant secretary, about seven years, up until the current one, Mary Ryan. She was the first African American woman to have a high position at State. She was revered by many, respected by most, and feared by some. She had deep Washington experience, an imposing personal presence, a fine command of language and strong links to the Congress. She was capable and skilled, but habitually cloaked her thoughts. She could be tough, but seldom show her hand. Her favorite saying was, "You catch more bees with honey than with vinegar." She was very careful about CA relationships on the Seventh Floor and with other bureaus and agencies, very cautious about decisions, and hugged the sidelines on foreign policy issues affecting CA, preferring to let them play out. I was her principal deputy for a little less than a year, when she was nominated as ambassador to Malaysia. Departing CA was very traumatic for her. She "owned" the bureau and it was her persona. She knew Malaysia would not be the same. In fact, she avoided leaving her CA office for as long as possible, always finding excuses for delay. As it turned out, her ambassadorship lasted only a few months as Reagan defeated Carter.

I respected Barbara and she was an effective defender of the traditional consular profession. Being in charge for a long time, she developed a number of likes and dislikes about officers, a number of whom she dead-ended. Some unfairly, I thought.

Q: Wel*l, why was Barbara Watson, who had so much clout, so careful, do you think?*

FRITTS: Well, "Honey and Vinegar" was her mantra. Whether she felt that the bureau was not strong enough or because as a woman and a minority she had to be prudent, or because she got bounced out of office once in an election crunch, or maybe she was just wise. But times were changing.

Barbara had an enduring impact on consular affairs. She defended the function when under siege, which was often. Her prestige and presumed Congressional access were somewhat daunting to in-house and interagency adversaries, particularly as she found ways to leave deft images of her Congressional favor. She made it difficult for those who

wished to undermine consular affairs, budgetarily or otherwise, to proceed. She was a fine political public servant during her extended tenure as CA assistant secretary.

But times were changing.

Q: How so?

FRITTS: I came into CA with a strong belief in its formal missions. But I also felt CA did not meet its potential as a player in foreign policy. It needed to be more foreign policy relevant and assertive. Its deep technical expertise should not just exist in a vacuum, but be used for policy purposes.

After a short while, I found there were consular officers, mostly younger, who had the policy skills and smarts as well as consular expertise. They were tired of being second fiddle to the powerful geographic bureaus on issues where their knowledge was better or at least equal. I thus began to nudge and move the bureau into a higher profile on foreign policy. I advocated that movements of peoples should not be handled as afterthoughts of policy, but as legitimate foreign policy interests. My view became stronger the longer I was there and continues. Indeed, I'm still at it. I speak publicly on migration issues and teach a course on international migrations and conflicts.

Q: That's at the College of William and Mary?

FRITTS: That's correct. Barbara was not too pleased with my initiatives. In part, I think she saw it as creating waves or, at least, ripples, which were not her style. There also certainly were officers who resisted my push and whispered into her ear. She took me to lunch on two occasions I recall and, in an understated velvety way sheathed in steel, inferred I was overstepping my bounds. I'm not sure I would have lasted in CA if she had not gone off to Malaysia.

Q: I'd like to go into more detail about when you came in, what you perceived, where you perceived the Consular Affairs Bureau and consular officers in general, what they were doing, what they could do better, how it could be sort of brought to a different level, and what you were trying to do.

FRITTS: There were then, and still are, although attenuated, tensions between the geographic bureaus, which perceive themselves as being at the cutting edge of policy formulation, doing "substantive" work, and the functional bureaus, which tended to have a higher proportion of civil service and were looked upon by the geographic bureaus as specialized technical support. The geographic bureaus handled policy within the context of countries and regions. The functional bureaus were new and handled what came to be known later as transnational issues - economics and international finance, human rights, science and the environment, political-military, etc. But consular affairs had been around since 1782. Most FSOs had had their initial duty tour on a high-pressure traditional visa line somewhere and many hadn't liked it.

The geographic bureaus considered policy as their ordained prerogative. That view began to change as economic affairs became more critical and with the obvious rise of what came to be called globalization as a major foreign policy challenge. Indeed, State was recently reorganized to reflect them. But at the time I'm talking about, those were new ideas and by no means generally accepted. And certainly not on the human migrations side. The typical geographic bureau view was that CA should do whatever it was told at whatever level and without riposte.

I also found the CA culture defensive. Some officers took perverse pride in digging in their heels on technical grounds as a sort of firewall between the purity of their perspectives and the policy drumbeats of the Department. I felt both views, geographic and CA, were often dysfunctional.

The issue came up in varying guises, but even more so when Diego Asencio became CA assistant secretary. He was a former ambassador, something of a national hero following his extended hostage experience in Colombia, had an activist bent, and was somewhat unconventional in how he approached CA issues within the bureau and without. Diego also unleashed me to become Mr. Inside to his Topside and Outside. A few fiefdoms were broken, younger officers of talent took heart, other bureaus found us a player, and CA began to change.

Q: Did you feel when you left, around 1983 that the corps of consular officers was beginning to be more assertive and policy oriented?

FRITTS: Very much so, and it was not only anything that I particularly did, but, I'll say it again, times were changing. We had become a policy player on the Irish Republic Army and the Ulsterists, South Africa, Soviet-proxy organizations, such as the World Peace Council, the Soviet Bloc – across the board. CA now had some policy respect. Our efforts aside, the conceptual reason was that foreign policy challenges were becoming more and more transnational (a new term then), rather than just geographically focused. There was increasing recognition that, particularly with the catalysts of the Vietnamese boat people as refugees, which threatened to destabilize Southeast Asia, plus the Cuban Mariel exodus to the United States, that movements of people were a permanent major foreign policy catalyst of issues. Control or manage the movements and you can manage policy outcomes. Indeed, the later fall of the Berlin Wall; the liberation of Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union can arguably be traced to the emigrations out of East Germany and Bulgaria, which Gorbachev decided not to confront forcefully. My view was and is that mass migrations are both a cause and result of international conflict. They should be viewed as an adjustable factor in foreign policy rather than any ad hoc aftermath. If that premise is valid, then CA is a policy bureau. In my view, getting active was no sacrifice to the integrity of the traditional consular role. We made better inputs to the conduct of foreign policy by having our oar in at the beginning of policy debate rather than being defensive against decisions at the end. But it was difficult to move CA into anticipatory analysis and policy advocacy. The bureau was also notorious for detailed legalese in memos I knew wouldn't be read by Principals; indeed, wouldn't even reach them. We needed officers who thought policy and could put it into concise, readable,

relevant prose.

As I dipped down, I found there were younger officers who welcomed opportunities to engage. As time went on, I was gratified to find more and more who had the smarts and drafting skills to be policy competitive. I had occasional resentment, of course, from some supervisors of those officers, but there were benign ways to handle that. I've had pleasure in later years in seeing those officers in senior Foreign Service positions across the board, not just in consular affairs.

Q: There are three general functions of consular operations. One is the protection of Americans, called American Services - the problems of Americans overseas - two is visas, and three, passports. Let's deal with the passport one first. To my mind it almost ceased to be much of anything but a pretty cut and dried thing, because new laws made it very difficult to lose citizenship. Thus the whole focus became getting passports out in time to people

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FRITTS: It's true that the passport function was the least policy-oriented function. The challenge was to develop a credible, technologically modern and fraud-resistant document and distribute it to citizens in a timely and cost-effective manner. In the millions. One thing we did was to get Congressional and Treasury/OMB support to hike the fee by two or three times and retain part of it to help cover costs. The fee hadn't been changed since the '50s. While not much involved day-by-day, I realized it was a highly visible public face of State to the American people and the Congress. And that the public's view of foreign policy credibility could be affected by our image.

Q: Moving to the visa function, here is a place where CA and our posts have hundreds of contacts with Congress every day. I would think we could be influential very early on in any reform of nationality and immigration laws. We must have had very good contacts in Congress.

FRITTS: We did – on both sides of the aisle. And with Diego's lead we influenced the Special Commission on Immigration Reform, which led to the 1986 Immigration & Reform Act. Diego jumped into it with lots of substantive ideas and a desire to leave an imprint on immigration reform in a manner to enhance U.S. foreign policy. Being the son of an immigrant from Argentina, it also meant much to him personally. As I said, he came into CA with a hero's image and media acclaim. He therefore had a "name" and was politically untouchable. Real assets.

He formed a small select CA group on immigration reform, including B. J. Harper, Dick Scully, Dick McCoy and a few others. B. J. Harper and Dick Scully were respected national experts. Also fine persons. B.J. was Foreign Service; Dick Civil Service. They were a great tandem who had worked together for years. Their rare forte was to anticipate and forestall unintended consequences by devising new policies or redesigning others' initiatives. The little group had major impact. Diego spent a lot of time on the Hill

networking, testifying, working interest groups, etc. We were fortunate that the chairmen of the Senate and House immigration sub-committees, Senator Alan Simpson (Republican-Wyoming.) and Congressman Ron Mazzoli (Democrat-Kentucky.), were very intelligent and public policy motivated. They listened to us and were respected in their party caucuses. Simpson was just pure fun to work with, offering continual quips and punchy insights on people, politics and policies. My only role was to keep up enough that I could be thrown into a breach if Diego were abroad or elsewhere. Barbara Watson would not have taken the high level active participation that Diego did.

Q: V*isa fraud is an endemic problem. Was that high on your screen?*

FRITTS: One of the things I took to hand, to a degree under Barbara, but more so under Diego, was a CA-wide Anti-Fraud Program. One of CA's problems was that the culture saw itself not unreasonably as three separate entities - passports, visas and citizens services. But the separations were sometimes dysfunctional. For example, we had three separate anti-fraud programs, which went their independent ways, often wastefully and somewhat capriciously. Part of the impetus was my belief that unless we had effective, coherent, anti-fraud programs, the bureau could be discredited by some scam, not only in the eyes of the public and Congress, but also on the Seventh Floor, which would derail any emerging credibility on the policy side. I thus put myself in charge and empowered Donna Hamilton - who was also frustrated - to pursue it. The effort was looked upon with askance by many. But with persistence from Donna, Michelle Truitt and a few others, there was real progress. Indeed, the GAO at one point announced a formal review of our anti-fraud efforts. A team came over, looked around and canceled the review.

Some years later officers who were involved would come up to say how they welcomed the process for what it had accomplished, not only in anti- fraud terms, but in bringing CA more together.

Q: Were there any fraud trends that became acute?

FRITTS: The fall of Iran with the overthrow of the Shah was a challenge. Tens of thousands of Iranians flooded primarily into European posts with a great deal of money for bribes, sophisticated fraud techniques and, sometimes, influential American sponsors and interested parties. The U.S. was the destination of choice. Some posts were virtually inundated. The Iranians were proficient in visa-shopping from post to post, trying to find cracks and niches for approvals. Attempted bribes, both of FSNs and officers, were frequent. One officer endeared herself to me by adopting the technique of shaking hundreds and even thousands of dollars out of visa applications onto the floor for the applicants to retrieve in full view of others in line. Naturally, we also had fraud allegations against our own people. Investigations uncovered a few miscreants, mostly FSNs.

We also had an in-State problem as many of the Iranians were well connected with prominent Americans inside and out of government. We thus had a

number of appeals and irresponsible charges against officers who refused to issue certain visas. The NSC and parts of the Congress were quite insistent that we provide a favorable visa climate for Iranians fleeing Iran. Our consuls and I plus Diego came to see it as increasingly unnecessary and a perversion of law. We went high-profile and, much to our surprise, got the policy revised. We tightened up, but still made liberal allowances for persecuted minorities, such as the Bahais and Iranian Jews.

Which reminds me. We took a lead role in implementing the departure of Falasha or so-called Black Jews from Ethiopia to Israel via U.S. auspices. They were fascinating historically as a supposed "lost tribe," Queen of Sheba and all that. The program was quite successful and the Israelis swallowed hard, but accepted the racial difference even though, I think, not fully accepting the religious foundation. Some years later I was in Israel and felt good about all the Ethiopians I saw working there.

Q: The Congress has traditionally followed visa issuances closely. Did you find that true?

FRITTS: Every ear we issued or denied visas in the millions and the Congress challenged those decisions by the thousands – along with threats by Congressional staffers seeking to bend the laws for constituents, including foreign friends of constituents. One learned quickly that while favorable decisions were presumably a good thing, they better be justifiable and legal. To knowingly issue a false visa is a felony and a jail term. Negative decisions, of course, led to Congressional and citizen charges of stupidity, sloth and bureaucracy. But we knew that any benefitted Member would be the first to plead innocence and lay blame on a consular officer if a flap occurred. It was important to be responsive for review queries, but absolutely imperative to maintain the integrity of visa decisions. Consular officers, because they were so frequently importuned by Americans and foreigners to subvert the visa process or bend the laws, resisted reviews. Keeping balance in the field was thus a management issue, too.

Q: How did this work? How did you handle cases where there was a lot of pressure in Washington to issue a visa?

FRITTS: There were two kinds of cases: A few with major foreign policy impact and the thousands from the Hill relayed from constituents. Sometimes the Member or Senator was his or her own constituent.

The foreign policy cases pertained primarily to U.S. adversaries and controversial insurgents, usually combined with human rights concerns. Occasionally, visiting the U.S. for access to the UN would be the issue. U.S. leeway was quite restricted by the UN Headquarters agreement in favor of access. Yasser Arafat, for example, was a repeated focus as were South American insurgent leaders. Interagency debate could be contentious within and among State, Justice, INS, the intelligence agencies and the White House. There would be pitted political dialogues with the Congress between those who wished to keep the person out and those who wished him/her in. CA, the keeper of the visa flame, was by definition a hurdle. State, except for us, might believe the visa imperative for

expedient policy reasons. CA might believe issuance illegal. Sometimes the Secretary might have to make the decision, but wouldn't want to. He wanted the CA assistant secretary to do so in order to neutralize political flak. What I tried to strengthen was CA ability to think the issues through in broader contexts and have an impact, rather than just provide reflexive legal cover.

For the blizzard of daily Congressional queries, we had standard referral system where the post would be instructed to review the case and report why it made the decision it did. About 90% of the queries came from young staffers and were boilerplate.

On occasion, a Member or Senator would get a bit in their teeth. I recall when the chairman of a House subcommittee wanted a visa issued to a particular Italian chef to work at a K Street restaurant in which the Member had blind ownership. The business was about to fail and he thought this particular chef would be its savior. He put a lot of pressure on Diego, who really wanted to issue the visa. There were several one-on-one sessions with no staff present. Diego finally told the Member there was no way he could get the visa issued without violating the law. The Member got the message.

Q: Why the tension? Weren't visa officers responsive?

FRITTS: Only up to a point. As you will recall, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) gives consuls supreme authority to decide visas - "adjudicate" is the technical term. Neither the secretary of state nor an ambassador can just order a visa issued. Political ambassadors often don't understand that their writ is limited. Visa officers can be quite jealous of their prerogative and don't hesitate to blow whistles.

Another factor was that the CA advisory legal folk, in my view, were too often inflexible. So much easier to advise "No" than "Yes." On the other hand, the laws and formulae are extraordinarily complex; equal at least to the tax Code. Individual human conditions are infinitely variable. I remember a big go-around on whether an Englishman, who had been barred from the U.S. because of a homosexual conviction and become permanently ineligible on grounds of "moral turpitude," had become eligible following a sex change operation to a woman. And while we tried to ensure a close degree of consistency worldwide, one size never fit all. There's always room for interpretation. That's why we have consuls overseas. But some applicants are adept at "visa-shopping" - looking for posts with reputations for flexibility or an inexperienced officer.

Q: You talked about the Congress. Was there a difference in dealing with Congress between Diego Asencio, when you were working with him, or with Barbara Watson when you were working with her? Congressmen all the time want to get visas issued to friends of constituents or something like that. Did each handle it differently?

FRITTS: As with all things Congressional, Barbara kept much of that close to her chest, so I wasn't much involved. But the little I saw struck me as prudent and conservative. It t'were done, t'were done skillfully.

Diego was different. He was by nature a negotiator and trader. He liked to challenge orthodoxy. He valued personal good will and had several personal relationships inside the Congress, even before he became CA. He was always willing to look at cases brought by high-ranking congressmen and especially by those who oversaw our budget and operations. He saw quids and quos as the grease of government. But at the end of the day, his decisions were about the same, as in the case of the visa-for-a-chef I mentioned previously. But his in-house ruminations and questions left some officers discomfited.

In a lesser vein, I recall Diego once delayed for weeks a favorable response to a request by Tom Tracey, the Assistant Secretary of Administration, to issue a dozen diplomatic passports for Marines working temporarily at Embassy Moscow. Tracey came under increasingly irate pressure from DOD. But Diego held firm because he wanted to have our disreputable visa offices across the street painted and Tracey had refused to authorize it some months earlier. Diego waited out the DOD escalations on Tracey and then finally agreed to sanction the passports, if Tracey would fund the paint job. After the deal, which Diego thought would be a morale coup, he announced his finesse at an open luncheon meeting of the Consular Association. Instead of appreciation, there was a firestorm of protests from officers whose delegations wound up in my office. They believed the integrity of CA and diplomatic passports had been sullied by the "sale." It heightened suspicion that Diego would trade other things as well.

Q: Well, it sounds like you found an easier working relationship with Diego.

FRITTS: Very much so. Diego shared my view in terms of the need for the bureau to become more policy oriented and responsive.

Q: Well, as you know, I was a working consular officer most of my career, and one of the things I learned rather early on was don't ask Washington for an opinion unless you wanted it negative. If there's a reason you want to stall and essentially not issue a visa, sure, ask for an opinion, otherwise go ahead and issue it.

FRITTS: That principle can apply to a lot of issues, not just consular.

Q: What about the third CA function - American services and the overseas protection of Americans? Were there any major initiatives or crises that hit CA during this time?

FRITTS: Well, the Iranian revolution occurred and we had the usual task force facilitating the exodus of Americans. Later on, of course, our Embassy colleagues were taken hostage, but their release was not a CA issue. We served on a number of other similar task forces, Grenada, Panama, Cuba and others.

A frustrating and recurring issue was the, in effect, kidnaping of American citizen children by foreign spouses, often but not exclusively from the Middle East. All we could offer was quiet diplomacy. There were successes, but not enough.

I felt that overseas citizens' services was probably the most fun and rewarding consular

activity. I believed strongly then, and do now, that the protection of Americans overseas, with all its variety, is the basic justification for the American Foreign Service. I consult with the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk and I emphasize there that the first two conflicts this country fought after the Revolution were to a large degree to protect Americans overseas - the War of 1812 and the Barbary Coast wars. In this day and age, senior military planners must know that one of the top priorities in an ambassador's mind is the safety and well-being of the American citizens in any particular country - that they be evacuated, if necessary, that they not be taken hostage, and if they are taken hostage, that they be released either peacefully or forcefully. I believe, having watched other countries and their treatment of nationals, that the United States is by far the country which takes the protection of its citizens most to heart and won't sacrifice them to our foreign policy interests. It's a hallmark of our American culture and what Americans expect. And it's CA which holds the lamp. So much for "The Speech."

Q: Did you have problems in the field in driving this point home? Because I've seen times where ambassadors have been very reluctant to take up the plight of an American in jail when it reached the point where it really needed fairly high representation because there were always other policy matters involved and all.

FRITTS: Sure. And, at times, properly so. But there's always flexibility on the scene of how to carry out instructions effectively.

Q: In that regard, were there any tensions between CA and its requirement to protect Americans who were in jail, often on drug charges, with the Bureau of Narcotics and other enforcement agencies?

FRITTS: Not much with the agencies. Congress, however, exercised close oversight of visits to imprisoned Americans. Their relatives and friends kept the pressure on. Also usually claiming that the prisoner was innocent.

Those visits can become professionally controversial when the Americans in prison are thugs. To what degree should we use political goodwill and diplomatic resources to protect those who have violated laws, international and local, in heinous kinds of ways? Such as drug trafficking and murder? That's difficult for many officers and ambassadors to accept. But it's our duty.

For example, we had numerous American prisoners in Bangkok on narcotics convictions. Our mandate was to ensure that they received at least a minimum of acceptable living standards and necessities, which we would supplement, such as vitamins. These guys were not innocents and some were extremely violent. But Congress mandated a minimum frequency of prison visits worldwide because of perceived CA inattention here and there, particularly in Turkey. Relatives of prisoners always worked the Congress for better treatment.

But the Congressional requirement was global. We kept trying to reduce the amount of time that consuls had to give to prison visits where conditions were O.K., and in some

places, excellent. In Sweden, I recall, we had to send a consul quarterly on a ten-day journey by rail to a town in the Arctic Circle in order to visit one American prisoner. Several times when the officer arrived, the "prisoner" was "on leave." A nice trip for the officer, but a waste.

We negotiated treaties or agreements with some countries to permit Americans to serve out their terms in the U.S. It amused me how many American prisoners, if given the offer to returning to the U.S., even from Mexico, refused to do so. Any prisoner with funds from the "outside" had perks few Americans had in our prisons, such as conjugal visits, including prostitutes, catered meals, TVs, special furniture and even outside excursions. Without funds, of course, foreign prisons could be tough – but so, in most cases, were the crimes.

Q: How about evacuations of Americans in danger?

FRITTS: Often and frequent. And we do it well.

An interesting aspect is the moral issue when Americans citizens refuse to evacuate a dangerous situation when encouraged officially to do so. What is the USG responsibility for those who choose to remain in-country, be they missionaries, businessmen or young hikers? Although not then in CA, I recall the bombing of Tripoli in about 1984, when we encouraged Americans in Libya to leave because of a pending military strike against Libya. Many Americans decided to stay because they were employed by Libyan oil firms and received Libyan Government assurances they would be well treated and even receive bonuses. They stayed and we bombed. No American casualties, but I'm sure it affected our targeting.

If we encourage Americans to leave a country and they refuse, and they then become captured, injured or killed, to what degree can we say, "Well, we warned them, but they wouldn't leave"? The answer is no matter they made bad decisions, they're American citizens and the USG, particularly an American ambassador, remains fully responsible for their protection and welfare. In briefings at the Joint Forces Staff College, military officers find that stance hard to accept, but it's an ethical fact for military as well as civilian authorities. And if the media or Congress perceive us as callow in that regard, we will be forcefully reminded.

Q: I think you were probably the first political officer to be the Principal DAS. Did you find that you were a bit of a fish out of water or had trouble getting accepted?

FRITTS: Well, actually, I was neither. I had been an economic officer by cone.

The first political officer to be Principal DAS was Hume Horan, whom I succeeded. Hume did things differently than I did. He was, in essence, an advisor to Barbara Watson on foreign policy matters. In contrast, I was operational and wanted to put CA into policy institutionally.

As for acceptance, sure, one had to earn credibility, but there are techniques for doing that. The fact that no consular officer had ever been Principal DAS implied that senior consular officers were somehow second rate and not capable of driving policy. Like many stereotypes, there was just enough truth to perpetuate it. Many otherwise capable senior consular officers had neither the experience nor the desire for high-profile policy engagement. However, when I left CA, I felt we identified a cadre of officers who had the talent and ambition to do more. The need for such skills was increasingly apparent and the culture began to shift. In fact, several years later a consular officer became Principal DAS and it's been that way ever since. I feel some gratification that she and her successors are officers whom I plucked up. A certain legacy, perhaps.

Q: How did you find relations with officers in the field? I think consular officers feel closer to CA as sort of a professional home than do officers relating to the geographic bureaus.

FRITTS: That's true and we tried to reinforce it. After all, consular officers have most if not all of their career assignments made by CA. Other officers usually serve in several geographic bureaus.

But there was a downside. In serving as DCM and ambassador, I emphasized integrating Consular Sections into the Country Team as full participants. Frankly, it sometimes didn't take, which I also later saw when inspecting our posts. Too many consular officers, including Consuls General, would complain about being outsiders, but they didn't want to be bothered with policy. They wanted to be left alone to run their business without "interference." Granted, they were often beset by already heavy workloads.

But I felt they could and should do both. I appreciated, however, that some officers found great psychic satisfaction, as a research scholar would, in the detailed theological interpretations of issuing visas. They wanted to be left along to be arcane experts of a discrete function. That was fine in its place, but I didn't believe they were or should be future leaders of CA. And time proved it.

Q: How did you find CA management, because during the period not too long before you came in, the consular operation was probably the only element of the Department of State that organized and manipulated complex data. And personal computers were still rare. I think the computerized budget analysis was called the "Consular Packet" or something like that. Was this a handy tool?

FRITTS: I felt that the determination and allocation of CA resources to needs was about the most complex of any bureau of that time. Between visas and passports, we ran two global service businesses, which manufactured and processed products – passports and visas – for distribution by domestic and overseas offices. In the millions.

Some computerized techniques were innovative for their time. Only recently I ran across separately two retired senior Office of Management and Budget (OMB) officers who each commented that he always gave CA presentations high marks and presumed to give

us what we asked. Wish I had known it then!

Q: Were *you involved in preparing the CA budget and were there lots of internal tensions in dong so?*

FRITTS: No, I was not deeply involved in preparing the budget. We had a very strong executive director.

Q: Ron Somerville.

FRITTS: Ron Somerville, who was very effective, skilled and crafty. I sat in on the review sessions and made my points, but was not much engaged in the internal tugs-of-war. Ron took most of that heat. It was my job to take the team to OMB and justify our line items with them and with Hill staffers. Diego worked the Seventh Floor, the Hill committees and testified.

Q: During this time you had several secretaries of state - Vance, Muskie and Haig. Did you feel there was any change when the Reagan Administration came in or didn't it really involve CA?

FRITTS: Once Diego was informed he would remain as CA, we were relatively immune. Indeed, the disinterest in consular affairs was about the same under all three of them.

Along that line, I wrote what I called my "Strike Three Memo" to Muskie and Haig at times when I was acting assistant secretary. I don't think either ever saw it. It challenged the Department's chronic lament that it had no domestic constituencies and thus lacked Congressional clout and public support. I thought that view false, that we had a lot of public interaction and could leverage it. As we've noted, CA had thousands of productive contacts annually with American citizens and the Congress on passports, protection and welfare of Americans overseas, and facilitating visas. We were the public services face of the Department. I solicited from posts and within CA a bundle of human-interest vignettes. Most showed officer initiative far and beyond the call of duty – many were heartwarming, others tear jerking. I thought it a persuasive pitch for a joint program by the bureaus of Public Affairs and Congressional Affairs. If exploited, I felt we could create the image of the Foreign Service and the Department of State as a truly American outfit run for Americans and thus assist our foreign policy pursuits. But nothing came of it. I later sent it to Secretary Shultz when I was Deputy Inspector General. I'm confident he never saw it either. Three Strikes and Out. A wasted opportunity.

Q: As for the Secretaries…

FRITTS: Vance departed shortly after I went to CA. Barbara Watson believed she had good access and I know she respected him. But other than that…

Secretary Muskie had very little impact, from my perspective, upon either CA or the Department. His work habits were lackadaisical and he tended to look as a senator would

upon the Bureau of Consular Affairs - an office to be used for the Secretary's constituent services. He was there only a short time.

Secretary Haig was also a relative short-timer. But he was in the seat during the process leading to the 1986 Immigration & Reform Act. Diego briefed him a couple of times. His interest was minimal. At one point, Diego was away when a Cabinet meeting was scheduled to discuss a draft of several proposals. I briefed Haig for about an hour on the principles and inter-agency controversies, which he sort of suffered through. But he was sufficiently uneasy that he directed me to attend the Cabinet session with him in the White House, which, of course, I was pleased to do. While fun, I was somewhat appalled, because the more vociferous Cabinet members were the least knowledgeable. Even those I thought knew better, like the Attorney General and Secretaries of Commerce and Agriculture, merely pontificated on pet themes and theories. It confirmed why American Presidents don't rely much on Cabinet government.

Q: Well, in around '83, you left. Whither?

FRITTS: To Ghana as ambassador.

Q: F*rom when to when?*

FRITTS: 1983 to 1986.

Q: Before you went out to Ghana, what were you getting from the Department, from the African Bureau, about our interests in Ghana and what needed to be done?

FRITTS: Ghana had a very long history of a close relationship with the United States. It was the first country in Africa to become independent, in 1957. It was the first country to receive American Peace Corps Volunteers. Ghana under its first prime minister, Kwame Nkrumah, had become what was called the "Black Star of Africa." During those early years of promise, he had attracted many of the best and the brightest of the American African community to look upon a new day in Africa with Ghana as the potential leader of a unified Africa. None of that came to pass, of course.

By the time I was preparing to go out, there had been a number of governments in Ghana, often short-lived, led by military generals, and even under occasional parliamentary processes, there had been endemic corruption and malfeasance. That had led to a coup earlier in the year by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, who had taken power briefly and then turned it back over to a civilian government. A few months later, in Rawlings's view, that government had also not measured up, so he staged a second coup on the same grounds as the first. He then executed two previous military presidents and imprisoned the latest elected president. He was embarked upon a revolution under what was called the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC). It was radical socialist in its approaches to the country's economic, social, and political problems. Rawlings saw Libya and Cuba as models. The Soviet Union had rising influence. Rawlings was intrigued by radical revolutionary regimes in Africa and the world.

So our previous ambassador…

Q: Who was that?

FRITTS: Tom Smith. He had worked very closely with the previous parliamentary government overthrown by Rawlings. Tom was crestfallen over developments. He waited and waited for the opportunity of a normal farewell call on Rawlings as the new head of state/head of government, but it never happened. He even missed his daughter's graduation from his alma mater, Harvard. U.S.-Ghanaian relations were at a very low point.

Q: What did you see as what you were going to do when you went out there in '83?

FRITTS: Well, there's a process of developing an ambassador's mission statement with goals and objectives, but I didn't want to develop a whole new policy approach before even stepping foot in the place. The situation was also volatile as Rawlings in his "second coming" had only been in power for several months. As you know, ambassadors try to write their own instructions, which they then seek to implement. I thus gave myself some breathing room, saying essentially that I wanted to assess the situation on the ground first and would report in 90 days or so with a prescription as to what policies we might pursue.

I was very fortunate that the assistant secretary for African affairs, Chet Crocker, whom I didn't know, was more than amenable. I wrote up a formal memo of instructions within a conceptual policy framework. Of course, I had worked it out within the African Bureau and incorporated those aspects which made sense to me with other bureaus, departments and agencies.

When I saw Crocker shortly before departing, he gave a cursory scan of the document and then gave me orally the absolutely best instructions any American ambassador could ever desire. His words were, "I don't think much can be done in Ghana. But go out, see what might be done, and don't take any guff." And he used a word other than *guff*. In other words, I had *carte blanche* to do my thing. He also said that if I concluded the situation was hopeless, then draw down the embassy staff and maybe close the embassy. If I thought something could be done, come up with proposals. In the interim, do what I thought was necessary and maybe just tell the Department afterwards. One could not ask for more. Going back to our earlier conversation - for me, another ship was about to get underway and with some independence. Real responsibility.

Q: Well, now, I take it that at this time, Ghana did not rank very high in American policy. It had been, since the late '50s, as you say, that the "Black Star" was there, but by this time, did it have any real constituency in the United States? Were we concerned about it? Did we have any strategic concerns?

FRITTS: Naturally we had the usual concerns we had throughout Africa during the Cold War. Under the PNDC, one could anticipate that Ghanaian votes in the United Nations

would be primarily with our adversaries. We knew that the climate for American investment was now even worse. There was no rule of law worth much. There were major human rights considerations, because there had been killings and purges and shutting down of a free press. Supreme Court judges had been murdered in suspicious circumstances. We were concerned over an expanding wedge of Russian, Chinese, Libyan and Cuban influences and that Ghana could become a platform to destabilize West Africa. Key members of Rawlings's entourage, including his chief of security, had fought with Samora Michel in Angola. The idea of radical revolution expanding in Africa and affecting our access to strategic resources and to military bases was all part of Cold War tensions. We also thought that Ghana had a special history and Ghanaians proven skills, which if freed and supported, could reverse its downward economic spiral and create a more open political system. Ghana was thus an integral part of U.S. interests in Africa.

Q: When you arrived in Accra, what was your impression of the embassy?

FRITTS: The embassy staff, frankly, was only a skeleton. Staff had been pulled out without replacements, who would not come in for some months. The carry-over DCM overlapped only 10 days and then departed early with prior Dept. approval. The few FSOs were, in general, inexperienced. It was one of those cyclical dips that affect many posts in the developing world. I felt singularly alone in trying to figure out who was who, what was going on, and what we should be doing. It seemed incredible that the world's superpower had such a dysfunctional disinterest, particularly at smaller posts in difficult places where, in fact, there are no back-ups. State was the problem. USIA, AID and DOD did better. Over time the State quality also improved as FSO bidders learned in corridor gossip that Ghana was not a pit. I helped recruit persons by saying we had career opportunities in an improving situation. My premise was that in Ghana, you could have impact. At the end of the day and tour, you could say, "Yes, this is what I/we sought to achieve and this is what was accomplished (or not)." You wouldn't get lost in a larger embassy where individual achievement was muddled, professional growth diffuse and psychic reward lacking.

Q: Watch officers on a destroyer again.

FRITTS: Maybe. In addition, the embassy location was in downtown Accra. Given the increasingly politically hostile environment, Ambassador Smith had made the correct decision to relocate to our more defensible and underutilized USAID building. We had thus begun to quietly renovate that building on the Ring Road outside of downtown. I accelerated the plan. Much of the work was by our own efforts with technical specialists rotating in and out. In essence, we built an embassy inside the AID building without the Ghanaian Government being alert to it. After several months, we delivered a note to the Foreign Ministry after it had closed on Friday, indicating we would reopen for business on Monday in the new location. Over the weekend, we moved the embassy lock, stock, and barrel from the chancery downtown to the renovated building. We had dropped off the note late assuming no Ghanaian official would read it until Monday and thus be unable to interfere or interrupt the movements of our vehicles carrying classified

equipment and files. We probably made a hundred sorties using motor pool vehicles and our personal cars. There was no incident, but we had Marines in civilian clothes riding along in case the convoys were challenged. We were proud of the accomplishment. We felt there was some danger in it all.

Q: Why would there be opposition? Why did it have to be done surreptitiously?

FRITTS: I didn't trust the Ghanaian Government at that time. They'd been in office less than six months. There were some very unsavory folk in the "Castle" – the seat of government – who were ideologues, impulsive and armed. Anti-American vitriol was official. I knew Rawlings had contempt for the Reagan Administration and my predecessor. The U.S., wrongly, was considered opposed to the PNDC. There was a wide-spread Ghanaian belief going back to the old Nkrumah period that somehow the CIA was the arbiter of U.S. policy in Ghana and that we were involved in seeking to overthrow the PNDC. My concerns were based on intelligence and other sources, that for us to give the Ghanaian Government advance notice could be twisted by their security group's paranoia into temptations to interfere, such as by detaining our vehicles which were carrying cryptographic equipment, classified material and so on.

Q: Did we also feel that our embassy had been pretty well exposed to listening devices and that sort of thing?

FRITTS: Sure. The embassy had received a design prize at one time in the '50s, I guess, as one of the then-new embassies, which reflected an idealized host-country architectural style and used local products. Our offices fronted onto a second-floor square veranda that overlooked an open courtyard. The walls were made primarily of local mahogany and plywood. We were enveloped by much taller government buildings. The logical assumption was that we had no communications security whatsoever, even for spoken conversations. So, yes, that was also one of the reasons we decided to relocate.

There was also an overall security issue as the chancery grounds had been open and were now only fenced off with wire. Being in the heart of downtown, we were exposed to mass demonstrations, if ginned up by the government. We were also on the main track to and from the soccer stadium and thus an additional potential target for unruly crowds, which could be induced. Some Ghanaians were also intimidated to visit the chancery for fear of observation from the government offices. The list of concerns was long.

Q: What was your estimate, after your reading up and getting started, on Rawlings? Who was he? Where was he coming from? Could he be dealt with?

FRITTS: Rawlings was an enigmatic figure. Over the course of my time there, I got to know him fairly well - to the degree that an official American could and, in truth, far better than any Western ambassador there.

He was a populist mystic – almost messianic. He had, as did many African revolutionary leaders, overtones of a prophet. Very nationalistic and patriotic. Quite idealistic, but

through an anti-Western lens. Also sincerely desirous, I thought, of improving the lives of ordinary Ghanaians, but the models he then found appealing were Cuba and Libya. And he was feted by Castro and Qadhafi with whom he developed kindred relationships.

His was an unusual personality. There was no normal flow of conversation – a lot of in's and out's and elliptical phrases. I sensed he often held back as not trusting what he might say. He was emotional, unpredictable and quick to judge on what I thought poor or limited information. In short, someone to be careful with. I thought how difficult it was for his ministers and staff. They weren't sure when they might inadvertently offend him. None of them ever said that to me, of course, but I observed their nervous behavior if, for example, asked a question from out of the blue.

He detested forms of Western protocol as being artificial and imposed. That was okay by me, but bent European ambassadors out of shape. For example, he generally would not receive credentials of new ambassadors and was choosy in whom he saw at departure. I presented my credentials to one of the members of his five or seven-person PNDC senior team, a Mrs. Annan, I think. A pleasant figurehead.

Q: So how did you get to know him?

FRITTS: A well-connected Ghanaian businessman sought me out to suggest that it might he useful if I were to meet with the "Chairman." I knew the businessman was reliable, as he had been mentioned to me by former ambassador Shirley Temple Black, a predecessor twice removed. He inferred there were those who felt a rapprochement with the U.S. was important. Naturally, I said "Sure." The result over some months was a series of meetings at the businessman's home in a close-by Ghanaian town and once at my residence. The sessions were always late at night and into the early morning. I sensed Rawlings was seeking to draw some measure of what I was while I did the same with him.

Sometimes I'd go to a location to meet him, spend four or five hours waiting around with a couple of ministers, and he wouldn't show. During the wait, several of his cabinet and security people would bounce in and out using hand-held radios to contact him as he and entourage prowled the night. He operated a lot at night and was concerned, probably correctly, about counter-coups and assassination. A nighttime curfew was in force and getting home could be risky for us as the police and military at the roadblocks were scared and often fortified their courage with drugs and beer. Because of that, on occasion he's escort us in his armed vehicle. Scared our guards, but also helped us in the Ghanaian street rumor mill. If he didn't show, I'd get word several days later of a rescheduled rendezvous.

From the very first, my wife, Audrey, was specifically invited to those sessions. I think it was because Rawlings didn't quite trust his own reactions and thought a woman's presence would have a calming influence. He had a sense of obligation towards women and could be quite charming at times – almost boyish. I felt her presence helped facilitate the discussions and also kept some of the potential thugs in check. After getting back to the residence, Audrey and I would use separate typewriters and write up inputs, which I

would combine for my cable report. We would finish about dawn. Audrey's independent analyses of the meeting and participants were invaluable. Hers was absolutely the kind of contribution Foreign Service spouses make to the conduct of American foreign policy.

By the way, the first meeting did not begin well. He arrived with a full panoply of bodyguards, gun on his hip, telling of having been delayed while attending the execution by firing squad of one of his former military friends who had been convicted - so-to-speak - of fomenting a counter-coup. Rawlings had personally recorded his last words with a hand tape recorder. In fact, he did it twice as the first time he hadn't pushed the "On" button. His interest had been to get a possible deathbed confession of who had previously murdered several Supreme Court justices, but no success. He commented that the condemned man had made a last request that Rawlings look after the man's widow and children financially. Rawlings said he agreed. That's when I first noted his colleagues being nervous in his presence.

Q: Sounds like this personalized Rawlings government with a ruling clique would have had the country living in considerable fear.

FRITTS: Well, fear for some, but just uncertainty for most. Rawlings first coup had involved considerable bloodshed in Ghanaian terms, but not much compared to other African countries then and now. As I said, he had executed two of his presidential military predecessors on grounds of corruption and imprisoned the elected president, who had only been in office for several months. The three murdered Supreme Court justices, including a woman, had been found in a forest, their bodies partially burned. Several journalists were murdered or disappeared. Some scores, official or personal, were settled with an occasional body in the early morning streets. It was relatively mild in African terms. That all preceded my tenure.

When I arrived, the second Rawlings coup was over and he was well into establishing the PNDC structure with borrowings from Cuban and Libyan models, such as neighborhood Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). Purges were continuing, particularly members of professional groups, such as lawyers, journalists and past politicians, who were arrested and imprisoned without trial. Although denied by the PNDC, the anti-American, anti-imperialism media line was run out of the Castle. There were still some murders in ambiguous circumstances. His close associates had begun to talk about drafting some kind of Basic Law. The view in the street was that he'd only be in charge a short while. Either be killed or get bored.

Q: Sounds grim.

FRITTS: It was, but after a time I decided the previous government, although elected, had been corrupt and elitist. Some of Rawlings' populist instincts were compatible to degrees with American values. He believed, I think sincerely, that the mass of Ghanaians had not only been exploited by their leaders, but also by their own faults. He believed he was fated to restructure society more equitably. He believed in forms of simplistic participatory democracy. He wanted to improve the lot of the average Ghanaian and

restore Ghana to its golden age of immediate post-independence international image. He was embarrassed by what Ghana had become. The economy was a shambles. There had been years of decreasing GDP. But there had been no mass bloodletting and no inter-tribal atrocities. Ghanaians have a societal sense of decorum and personal respect, which inhibited the worst.

After a few months, I decided it would be possible to work with Rawlings and some of the people around him, who saw the prospect for economic recovery through rational Western concepts. If successful, I thought in time economic progress and American/Western influence could support or induce favorable political adjustments, including human rights. With careful, judicious initiatives, we might be able to make something of the situation.

Q: You mentioned the economy. Ghana was pointed out at one time as being a fairly self-staining country - it had solid crops like peanuts and cocoa and other things of this nature - that it should be able to do fairly well. Were we involved in that or concerned about their economy?

FRITTS: The economy and its infrastructure – roads, ports, railroad and communications were a complete, utter shambles. All the worst kinds of problems endemic elsewhere in Africa. In 1957, Ghana had been the first African colony to become an independent country. It had been generally prosperous with a reasonably well-educated middle-class. The "Black Star" had been the leader of Africa and its first prime minister, Nkrumah, among other disastrous views, saw himself as a pending "President of a United States of Africa". He even built an African presidential compound in Accra for the first meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In 1957, Ghana and South Korea had been virtual twins in economic and demographic data. Now in 1983, South Korea was an upward Asian "Tiger" and Ghana had only spiraled downward.

The cocoa producer smallholder had been squeezed almost out of existence. Bloated state corporations controlled the economy. Marginal employment and over staffing were six to ten times what was required. The budget was broken. There was hyperinflation. The economy functioned primarily by smuggling and small traders. The infrastructure had deteriorated. There was no foreign exchange for spare parts or to replace equipment. Railroads to carry bulk products had stopped functioning. Telephone wires had been stripped to use to tie bundles or smelted down. Roads were awful. And to top it off, drought and mismanagement had caused a serious food shortage. Malnourishment was rampant up-country and starvation had begun. To most observers, it all looked hopeless, particularly with a radical Marxist PNDC in charge.

Q: And the positives?

FRITTS: As I noted, there were several in the PNDC who viewed the economy rationally. One was Kwesi Botchwey, minister of finance and economic development. He and a few others favored a disciplined approach using the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank IBRD). They recognized that to have any hope of inducing

those institutions and any Western consortia, they had to have at least the acquiescence of the United States. That's what I came to believe caused my late night meetings with Rawlings. To see if they could get him to overcome his visceral distaste for dealing with the United States, which, in their shoes at that time, meant me.

Interestingly, I had served in Indonesia and seen first-hand how a small group of American-trained Indonesian economists, the "Berkeley Mafia", could be successful economically in a situation very similar to what existed in Ghana, even if Indonesia had been on a much larger scale. And there had been associated political improvements, including on human rights.

As for Rawlings, I felt many of his concerns were sincere and that over the course of time and experience, he could be brought to welcome progress if packaged appropriately – multilateral, basic human needs, export infrastructure, grass roots projects etc. I though his humanistic instincts could be directed, not by me probably, but by pragmatics around him.

Thus, in Ghana, I saw a chance.

Q: Why was there this distaste for the United States? I wouldn't think that we'd had a particularly heavy hand there. Was it coming from the London School of Economics socialism? Or was it Marxism, or what?

FRITTS: There was a belief among much of the Ghanaian populace that the United States and the CIA had been instrumental in the overthrow of Nkrumah, who was the founding father of the nation. It had become part of the historic fabric, even for those who believed Nkrumah had betrayed his promise and become a disaster. Nkrumah's role was resurrected by the PNDC; his grave was buffed up, etc. Soviet Bloc, Cuban and Libyan anti-CIA diatribes and disinformation were common in the media. Philosophically, much of the PNDC brain trust adhered to socialist or communist theory, including the standard analyses of former Western colonialism and current "neo- colonialism." The U.S. was depicted as the capitalist-imperialist center of the world. The Reagan Administration was looked upon as a cowboy renegade racist group whose concern was to overthrow non-puppet governments in the developing world. All this mythology and cant was constantly promulgated by the government controlled press.

Q: Were there elements of the population - I'm talking about within the capital city, maybe, intelligentsia that you could deal with that had a more rational view?

FRITTS: Absolutely. For most Ghanaians, the anti-U.S. anti-Western cant just flew over their heads. They had "been there, done that" before. Now they just wanted a functioning economy, employment, education, money to travel, a stable currency and goods in the stores. And political peace. The CDRs, for example, never amounted to much. Ghanaians were masters at only pretending to participate.

The general public regarded the U.S. and Americans highly. The U.S. had done much for

Ghana since independence, many Ghanaians had studied in the U.S., almost all knew that the first Peace Corps group was sent to Ghana, and many knew or had seen Americans first-hand. I often said to visitors that while we had a difficult political environment, we also had, in my view, the best human environment in Africa. And, frankly, there was no doubt in my mind that if the PNDC collapsed in some way, some of the PNDC officials who were most vociferously anti-American, would vie to be first in line for an American visa. I had to bite my tongue on that more than once.

I mentioned there were many Ghanaians, lawyers, professionals and politicians, who'd been involved in the parliamentary system. But I felt their leaders were discredited, fairly or unfairly.

Still, I wanted to encourage potentially independent institutions. The first goal was damage control, try to keep a few functioning and support a few new ones. For example, I did a lot of discreet work directly with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, which the PNDC had not abolished, but just ignored. Some times at the most basic, such as providing stationery and typewriter ribbons out of our own stocks. I worked with the lawyers' society in similar ways, looking toward a day when they might be able to function, although some of the persons in that organization were suspect in my own view concerning their personal integrity. We worked at trying to maintain women's and other professional organizations, to help keep them viable and quietly demonstrate some support. But we had to be careful, because if support were too much or too open, it would just reinforce the PNDC in-house paranoia that we were in the coup business.

As part of political image, I no longer wore coat and tie, except for the most formal functions even at my own embassy, as coats and ties were looked upon by the PNDC as Western bourgeois affectations, even though the Ghanaian Oxford-Cambridge elite had been among the best Western dressed Africans in the past. Their threadbare London suits were now seldom worn, but carefully retained. The PNDC and the government wore safari suits. Frankly, I also wore safari suits in part because the European ambassadors didn't. When serving in Africa, I always wanted to show that while many of us looked like Europeans, we weren't and, indeed, had once been revolutionaries ourselves. In that and other ways, I tried to indicate that I was not the representative of that great mythical ogre of the United States, but was willing to have an open mind and look for ways in which we could cooperate rather than ways to confront. But if the PNDC confronted us, we would confront them back - as Chet Crocker had directed.

That reminds me that sometime in my first year the PNDC renovated the home where W.E.B. Dubois had lived and worked for some years. There was an outdoor ceremony for the diplomatic corps where Rawlings gave a speech of praise, which also ripped the U.S. for slavery, bigotry and racial oppression. He then said he would call on an ambassador to talk about W.E.B. Dubois' life. The diplomatic corps froze. Of course, he tagged me, so I stood in place and winged some minutes on W.E.B. Dubois and U.S. progress in civil rights. Going out later, a Rawling's associate whispered, "It was a test. You passed."

Q: What about the Brits? I mean, this had been their colony at one point, and had they

pretty well given up with this, or were they playing a role?

FRITTS: The British High Commissioner wanted to be active, but London, like Washington, was fed up with Ghana. Both capitals, and especially the Brits as the former colonial power, felt we had devoted a lot of goodwill, effort and resources to Ghana over decades, which had been squandered. Now, once again, a Ghanaian government had adopted a hostile political stance citing neo-imperialism, consorting with our adversaries the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Libya, and giving lip service to "wars of liberation." London shared the Washington view that it would pretty well be switched before reactivating any aid programs to Ghana or put new investment resources into a country, which had so ill used them and was semi-hostile politically. However, the U.K. High Commissioner, Kevin Burns, felt much as I did. Probably an occupational disease, if you're there, you feel you can do something. So did the Canadian and, to a degree, the Australian ambassadors, until the latter's foreign ministry closed the embassy. The other European embassies didn't give a hoot. Their goal was commercial contracts, of which there were precious few.

Q: How about on the economic side? What did you do?

FRITTS: After several months, I did a think-piece which said there was some hope and set out a series of check-points for improved relations ranging across the board of our interests – economic reform, human rights, trade and investment, exchanges etc. Among other initiatives in getting started, I recommended a new small scale aid program, that we should induce and support the reintroduction of the World Bank and the IMF into Ghana's affairs, and, importantly, begin significant emergency food shipments. Ghana was in the midst of drought and hunger was widespread. The U.S. got in with the firstest and the mostest. After some initial difficulties, the government let us distribute our food commodities – grain and cooking oils – through church and other private organizations rather than state-owned corporations. It worked well and I was gratified by the absence of government interference and the work of the private organizations. Our "wastage rate" i.e. theft was the lowest AID had experienced in Africa. Not too many months later, Nigeria expelled almost a million Ghanaians. Rather than whine and moan for international aid, the PNDC organized basic refugee processing centers and in an amazingly short period the million had been absorbed into extended families. As I recall, we hadn't much to do with it. I was impressed.

I commented that Botchwey was already working the World Bank, knew what needed to be done, and I was convinced he could convince Rawlings in pragmatic terms of positive potential outcomes. The foreign minister, Obed Asamoah, was a very decent experienced person totally familiar with the United States and our values and policies, many of which he didn't like. But I felt we could also work with him pragmatically. The U.S. should thus begin a measured series of steps to indicate our willingness to work with the PNDC, while being precise in stating our concerns and responding to harassments and excesses as they occurred.

I also had in mind a broader context. If a radical socialist populist regime such as the

PNDC in Ghana were to embark upon a rational, Western-principled economic reform and development program - and show progress – it could have a demonstrable impact upon other African countries, which might be, encouraged to follow. Not a sure thing, but possible.

In retrospect, I take some pride in that assessment. If one looks at Ghana today, almost fifteen years later, it's pointed to as an example of economic resurgence and vitality. Imperfect, certainly, but a measured success. And a number of other African countries have similar programs, admittedly for a variety of reasons. Still, I really had to fight for the approach to Ghana, particularly with USAID and Treasury. But when the USG finally agreed to once more become involved economically in Ghana, it had a measurable impact upon the World Bank, IMF and country donors. When the World Bank president, or maybe vice president, visited Ghana some months later on an inspection trip, he asked to see me. I outlined the rationale that had led me to recommend a change in U.S. policy and discussed the potential progress and pitfalls as I saw them. Meanwhile, Kevin Burns got the HMG to get back in, arguing in part that if the U.S. were back, the Brits could not be conspicuous by their absence. Within a year, there was whole panoply of donor committees. Now, all of that was not my doing by a long shot. Botchwey, Asamoah and others were very presentable and very effective. But I did my bit and am willing to be judged on it.

Q: What was the role of the Ghanaian military?

FRITTS: There was a perception that because Rawlings was a flight lieutenant, that the PNDC was a military government. That wasn't true. Even though a number of Ghanaian generals had been presidents, the history of the Ghanaian military was not to become involved in politics. Its preferred response in case of political unrest was to return to barracks, lock up the guns, and lie low until the danger was over. The PNDC was a group of disgruntled noncoms and junior officers who rallied around Rawlings as a flight lieutenant. Thus, the Ghanaian military as an organization was not actively involved in the coups or the PNDC.

Instead, Rawlings had an aggressive internal security group in the Castle, headed by Kojo Tsikata, a Ghanaian and former senior guerilla leader in Angola. He was smart as a whip, ruthless, clever, experienced, well educated and effective. Some Ghanaians considered him the real brains of the PNDC and speculated how long Rawlings would last before Tsikata took over. Tsikata was, of course, tight with all our adversaries of the time – the USSR, Libya, Cuba et al. He was an experienced and highly competent revolutionary. A real nemesis.

The military was primarily army. I spent a good deal of time, as I mentioned, trying to support in varying discreet ways those institutions in Ghana which might help provide greater diversity, both in human rights and politically. I included the Ghanaian army as one of those institutions. We had had a long mutually valued relationship with the Ghanaian army since Ghana's independence. Historically it was apolitical and had no record of civil atrocities or anti-human rights actions. It was a garrison force with the

exception of periodic seconding to the United Nations for service in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Its commanding general, Quainoo, and many of his officers had received training at advanced military schools in the United States. I thus felt that maintaining a good relationship was a visibly demonstrable means of indicating that the U.S. was willing to work with those Ghanaian entities that retained some claim to credibility. Frankly, and perhaps most importantly, I was also concerned, particularly in the wake of what had happened to our American hostages in Iran, that the integrity of our embassy and colleagues be maintained against any threats from rogue elements within the Ghanaian Government and any of its paralegal, paramilitary organizations. I hoped to develop a relationship with the army such that if the embassy were to come under siege or attack, that the army would be inclined to argue in our favor and maybe come to our assistance. For the same reason, I worked very hard at cultivating good relationships with the Ghanaian National Police, providing them with minor assistance in resources and commodities. One might object to that on purist human rights grounds, but, again, pragmatically, I wanted to develop relationships, which, if called upon for our defense, might do so with some will.

And the police did.

Q: How*?*

FRITTS: The PNDC could call out stalwarts to demonstrate upon whatever occasion it wished. To a degree it wasn't all that worrisome because Ghanaians, in general, liked the United States and liked Americans. The anti-American diatribes sort of rolled over their heads. Many of them had friends in the United States or they'd known Americans for a long time. Older Ghanaians particularly remembered Americans from during World War II. They had very favorable views concerning our openness and the values that Americans like to pride ourselves on.

But there were radical elements that could be motivated for political reasons to undertake actions, and at times we had information that certain groups did have those intentions. There was antipathy by ideologues to the Reagan Administration, the policy to roll back the "Evil Empire," etc. We believed that adversaries such as Libya and Cuba focused on us and could be emboldened to encourage actions against us. I knew the role the Libyan embassy had played in the assassinations in Khartoum.

Our renovated embassy in the former AID building on Ring Road was only about 200 yards from the Libyan Embassy with an open field between us. That posed security problems. As part of a worldwide effort, we were able to improve our security. For example, we built a perimeter wall, new gates and other devices. There were, of course, the usual naysayers and criticism in the local government press.

But lo and behold, it was all-worthwhile. You'll recall that the U.S. launched air strikes against Libya as a response to terrorist acts against Americans in Germany. Ghana became the only African country to mobilize a demonstration against us, composed of

regime stalwarts, civil servants, etc. We understood from sources that some of its leaders had instructions to penetrate the embassy and take hostages. I had oral instructions from the Department citing the "White House" that I was to avoid a hostage situation by all means. I well understood that the Reagan Administration, which had come into office, at least in part, in response to the Iranian hostage situation, did not want one on its own watch.

Closer to home, of course, neither did I. We closed the embassy, implemented security procedures, put the Marine Security Guard into combat gear, and a core group and I hunkered down. The new wall was very effective. The Ghanaian mounted police were called out and kept most demonstrators at bay. Their horses were half-starved, but effective.

We knew some of the demonstrators were armed, some by political organizations associated with the government. A crisis moment came when a demonstrator shot a Ghanaian policeman, who was trying to move them back from the gates. The policeman and the demonstrator had about a two-minute confrontation and then the demonstrator shot and killed the policeman from about six feet. I saw it happen. The mounted Ghanaian police, observers to it all, were outraged, charged and pursued the mob. I felt our investments in time, effort and personal relations had paid off. We had broken windows and damage to a number of vehicles in our internal courtyard.

The British Embassy was further into town, so they had been hit first. Their embassy was in an office building on about the third floor. Both the British High Commissioner and I sent protest notes the following day, including damage done and compensation demanded. It turned out that the Brit was in the midst of a courtesy call from a new ambassador when a rock crashed through the window and landed at their feet. With great British aplomb, the High Commissioner's formal protest was a gem. His note to the Foreign Ministry began in the time-honored way – "The High Commissioner of the United Kingdom has the honor …" to do so and so. It concluded, "Attached to this missive is one of the missiles." They had wrapped the note around the rock in an official red ribbon and delivered it to the Foreign Ministry. I thought it a wonderful touch.

Q: Well, how did the government respond?

FRITTS: The Foreign Ministry expressed indirect apologies, but, of course, went on at length to say nothing would have occurred except for our criminal act of aggression against a friendly state, which resulted in the loss of life and so forth. They falsely denied instigating it by a holiday for civil servants. We were fortunate that, Ghanaians being Ghanaians, many of those encouraged to participate didn't. I think we got some modest financial compensation for the embassy windows, but not the cars. I also arranged quietly for the embassy through an intermediary to pass a financial sum to the policeman's widow in customary appreciation of his sacrifice. I knew the Ghanaian police would come to know of it and remember.

Q: You said that Washington was initially "fed up" with Ghana. What was the response

to such provocations?

FRITTS: I tried to keep myself in balance as well as Washington. For example, I initiated a quarterly "Report Card" on the bilateral relationship. I kept a list of happenings - the good and the bad, the large and the small. I reiterated to the Ghanaian Government time and time again that improvements in our relationship and my ability to move forward on issues of mutual interest, such as aid, were dependent upon deeds to implement words. At the end of a quarter I'd kind of look the list over, fiddle with a sort of qualitative-quantitative matrix plus trends, and assess where things stood. It wasn't scientific, but it was inclusive and enabled me to stand back a bit. I think the reports also enabled the Department to swallow hard a few times.

I heard that these "Report Cards" on U.S.-Ghana relations became somewhat renowned, at least in the African Affairs bureau and were passed around. Some claimed to see them as precursors to some kind of output measure of diplomatic performance, even before computers.

Q: After you decided to restore an AID program, was there any impact?

FRITTS: Very much so. Once we made the decision to come back in, the World Bank and IMF also became engaged and other Western donors followed them. They followed our lead. The Ghanaians, of course, had hoped for such a sequence, which had provided me with leverage. Some of the ideologues also had to swallow hard. As other nations followed, we formed an aid donors group and began an economic stabilization program. One of the first in sub-Saharan Africa at that time.

There were continual problems and fits and starts, but rational economic reform decisions began to be made and the economy began to be reoriented. Bloated state corporations began to lay off excess workers. The producer price of cocoa was increased. Efforts began to rehabilitate the infrastructure in order initially to promote the development of export crops – the standard things that these programs help initiate. Progress helped strengthen the hand of the technocrats and began to undercut the anti-U.S. and anti-West stereotypes held by Rawlings and many of those around him.

However, one of the continuing issues I had with the government was that it had, in my view, reinterpreted non-alignment to mean that they were happy to follow a Western economic development program with our resources while kicking us in the political shins at opportunity, particularly in the media and at international meetings, to show their good social revolutionary credentials. So I felt we didn't receive sufficient public political credit.

However, we did have some successes on relating even to our adversaries and Ghana's friends where we carried the day. In general, if we had the facts and could act behind the scenes before something became public, we had a chance to forestall it. Once public, it was much tougher. However, though we paid a price publicly, over the course of time the government became less radical in policy even if radical rhetorically. In part it was

increasing government maturity – up to a point. I think Asamoah succeeded in reducing gratuitous insults by Ghanaian reps against the USG at the UN and other international meetings. We also became aware of guidance to the police and cadres to tone it down. So a process of limited moderation was underway.

I recall that when the Soviets shot down a Korean Airlines airliner, that the Ghanaian press launched scurrilous accusations fed by the Soviets. I organized a protest by the Western part of the diplomatic corps and we had the satisfaction of a grudging government disavowal and the journalist got transferred. A small victory, but representative of change.

I sensed that Rawlings had come to consider me a credible person rather than a stereotype. He found me, I heard, something of a surprising equalitarian with more policy leeway than he expected from a government he quite despised, particularly how we treated his friends Castro and Qadhafi, our constructive engagement policy in So. Africa, etc. Over time, his officialdom knew he respected me to a point and that helped immensely. There was even a phony newspaper poll which proclaimed me "ambassador of the year" and a photo of him and me in smiles taken weeks before. But the USG still took a lot of heat in the media and in speeches by PNDC Ministers, which kept me exercised. And much of our dialogue on international issues was pretty rigid. But we got things done, as is often the case in the developing world, by investing in personal relations. The Ghanaians are good at that and understand it. So are Americans.

Q: What did you feel that the Soviet Union was about in Ghana in those days?

FRITTS: The Soviet Union, of course tried to counter us and we them. For example, I recall when Ghana was reportedly going to provide landing rights for Soviet aircraft so they could monitor U.S. naval operations off the west coast of Africa. I bypassed the Foreign Office and went right to the Castle and the rights were not granted. A number of issues like that. The Soviets also competed on some aid projects, usually through the Eastern Europeans. But Eastern Bloc aid was either disguised commercialism or public spectacles like acrobats.

North Korea liked to send trainers for massed children choreographies at the soccer stadium. Ghanaian parents liked the uniforms, but didn't like all the time taken away from school.

The Cubans were very active in Ghana. Rawlings admired Castro, valued the attention he received from him, and modeled his administration to some degree on Cuba, such as the CDRs. The Cubans had easy access throughout the PNDC and reinforced Rawlings and others inclinations that the U.S. was an imperialistic exploiter of the Third World. Cuba was very active at that time, particularly in southern Africa, and I was often perturbed. I was sure that a lot of the media gunk could be sourced to Cuba.

Several of the then-Bloc states had embassies, but they were ineffectual. The Iranians and, of course, the Libyans were there. We were wary of each other.

Q: So *the Ghanaian Government responded in practical terms somewhat helpfully on some issues. But as you said, our adversaries were its friends. Did you feel sort of under the gun?*

FRITTS: We felt exposed as exemplified in the demonstration over our military attack on Libya. Cuba, Libya, Iran, China and the USSR, all the usual suspects, had access to the Ghanaian security structure and the overt support of the government. So we were attuned to it. On the other hand, I was fairly confident, particularly after the anti-U.S. demonstration that had almost gotten out of hand, and occasional meetings – no longer clandestine - with Rawlings, that the government as a whole - and he personally - would not countenance major action against us, if he knew of it. The danger was that radical elements and thugs could be importuned by world or other events to take direct action consistent with PNDC political rhetoric. We couldn't be lax.

Q: What about American exiles - maybe they weren't exiles –but American expatriates who'd gone to Ghana during the halcyon days. Was there such a community?

FRITTS: Yes, it was a poignant group. A number of African Americans had come to Ghana in the first flush of African independence to welcome a new world for Africa and for Africans led by Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah, now president of Ghana, but also expected to be the future president of a united States of Africa headquartered in Accra. They had also fled racial bias and discrimination in the U.S. But their dreams were unfulfilled. The unified Africa vision died and Ghana deteriorated politically and economically. Some had denounced their American citizenship. Many had married Ghanaians and their children were now adult. Their lives and futures as Ghanaian rather than American citizens had not worked out as they wished. They were still loyal to Ghana, but wistful that their hopes and dreams when young had been dashed.

Q: How was life- for you, your wife and embassy colleagues?

FRITTS: The infrastructure – roads, phones, water, and electricity was extremely run down. There were no functional Western hotels or restaurants. Stores and shops were dark and empty, with a few canned goods from Eastern Europe. We were dependent upon the local markets for seasonal foods and our small commissary for basic items plus quarterly shipments of stuff from Denmark. We had brought paper products and other consumables sufficient for two years. Audrey was a great planner. It worked.

I played tennis at a local club, which had fallen on hard times, and several embassy houses had basic tennis courts. There was a rocky golf course with sand "browns" rather than grass "greens." We had a small embassy club with a pool and basic amenities. A major outlet for us and other diplomats was Sunday family beach parties more or less potluck. The embassy also had a lease on a beach cove, which we used when security permitted and sometimes when it didn't. But the undertows were fierce and dangerous. I found a spot about ten miles outside of Accra where I could surf fish occasionally from a jetty, but I went as incognito as I could at dusk, because it was near a main highway and

my face was well known.

We traveled upcountry whenever we could, visiting local officials, chiefs, including the Asantehene of the Ashanti who kept still impressive court and American missionaries plus AID and Self Help projects. We would stay with our hosts or in basic government guesthouses, as there were no local hotels we could really use. Travel was difficult. We carried our own gasoline in 50-gallon drums in the backseat, which always bounced, leaked and smelled from the rutted roads.

The defense attaché plane was very useful. It would arrive every three months or so and enable us to fly to certain parts of the country and show the flag with local officials. And we had incidents. Even though we'd inform the Foreign Ministry of the itinerary, communications were difficult. Usually, local Ghanaian officials would adapt with their usual cheer. But the ideologues could be trouble.

In one particular instance I was most incensed when we arrived to pay a call on a regional governor, who was paranoid about an American military airplane, pilots in uniform and a so-called American ambassador and USAID officials. Under several dissembling guises, we were effectively detained under guard at gunpoint. I had everyone put the best face on it for a while, but the governor became increasingly insulting and unbuttoned his pistol holster in speaking to me. After several hours, I was at the point of organizing a walkout past the armed guards, when he received word from Accra that we were legitimate. But I canceled the meetings (it was then too late anyway) and we returned to Accra where I sent a protest the next day. He later became the secretary of agriculture. I never called on him officially.

There were a number of American missionaries in Ghana as Ghanaians are very religious. As I may have said before, while we had a difficult political climate, we also had what I thought was the best human climate in Africa. Average Ghanaians warmly welcomed us. The political stuff went over their heads. The country doesn't suffer from the degree of ethnic and tribal conflicts that many other African countries do. Nkrumah was successful in welding a sense of Ghanaian nationhood out of it all. Many educated Ghanaians, even some of those who would speak about the United States in most difficult terms publicly, on a personal level were very astute, accommodating and frequently witty.

Q: How about American academics? Was there much of an academic flowing back and forth, and was it of value and interest?

FRITTS: Practically none. At independence in 1957, American scholarship on Ghana was widespread. In reading up before going to post, I found a vast amount of scholarly work, but all outdated – political and sociological work from the early '50s into the mid-'60s and after that nothing. Ghana went off the academic scope as the economic and political climate deteriorated, the grant funds dried up and the scholars left.

Indeed, my successor, Steve Lyne, asked me at one point to recommend books he might read to prepare for Ghana. I replied that the only good stuff had been done during the

Nkrumah period and was outdated. Instead, I suggested, not wholly tongue-in-cheek, to be sure to re-read two books, neither one on Ghana nor Africa - "The Prince" by Machiavelli and "The Annals of Rome" by Tacitus. The former was insightful as to how Rawlings often operated, even had to operate at times, and the latter on how the group in the Castle operated.

Q: What was your impression of the academic system, the university and the schools leading up to it?

FRITTS: At independence Ghana had possibly the best educational system in Africa. The University of Ghana at Legon, was recognized within the British Commonwealth as a prestige institution. Its degrees were accepted as equivalents with Oxford or Cambridge. By my tenure, that had not been true for over a decade. Legon and the other universities were frequently closed, classrooms and buildings had deteriorated, furniture, phones, desks and books had been stolen and sold, and electricity was problematic. Even paper and pencils were unavailable. The situation was similar even in the formerly prestigious private secondary schools.

Professors and teachers were unpaid or received barter. Some teachers would not teach in classrooms, preferring to tutor the same students outside of class for cash. Many professors, Ghanaian and foreign, had gone abroad, some to Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. The professional classes in general, especially medical doctors, had deserted Ghana. Intellectual flight accelerated during the initial year or so of the PNDC. Hospitals barely functioned. The educational system was a mere shell. But Ghanaians value education highly, and many students persevered.

FRITTS: Indeed.

Q: Hadn't there been in Ghana an American aluminum plant or something?

FRITTS: Yes, the major American investment in Ghana was the Volta Aluminum Company (VALCO) aluminum plant in the southern part of Ghana, a joint venture of Kaiser Aluminum and Reynolds Metals. The dam on the Volta River was the largest earthen dam in the world. It had been a major aid project by the U.S. and the World Bank. Nkrumah had lobbied for it personally with Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy.

The project was controversial at the outset and considered even more so as time went on. In this day and age it would not have been built because of the environmental impact and the relocation of massive numbers of people whose farms and houses were drowned by the reservoir.

The company was under great pressure from the ideological PNDC for allegedly previous sweetheart deals, which were raping Ghana of its resources, underpaying its taxes, falsifying import documents, using foreign rather than Ghanaian bauxite, etc. While certainly exaggerated, I suspect VALCO may have done what it had to do to survive corrupt Ghanaian governments. Eventually, after much stress, the PNDC and Reynolds

successfully renegotiated the basic agreement to a balance they both could live with.

Actually, in my time, I found VALCO quite a straightforward operation with enlightened American and Ghanaian management. It was progressive in its personnel policies, while operating a major industrial plant in a part of the world whose infrastructure and workforce were difficult in terms of education, quality and consistency.

For example, it had by far the best literacy and vocational training program in the country. I've mentioned that a major drought existed. The lake level had fallen so far that the plant kept decreasing production and finally stopped entirely, generating only a fractional amount of electricity for national use – a single turbine. While most of the workers were laid off, the company used its duty-free privilege to import agricultural implements, fertilizers and seeds and other tools not then available in Ghana so its former employees could try to earn a living until such time as they could be rehired. That's not a usual American corporate practice anywhere that I know of.

Q: Wasn't VALCO concerned that it would be taken over or looted by undisciplined people?

FRITTS: It was always under PNDC pressure and media attacks for being part of a neo-colonialist conspiracy. There were also labor strikes stirred up by agitators or simply general worker concerns over layoffs and shutting down. There were occasional concerns over worker violence and/or provocations by PNDC zealots.

At the embassy, we had the usual kinds of early warning arrangements with VALCO with other American entities, such as up-country missionaries. But VALCO had some very accomplished Ghanaians in top jobs and recognized its best protection was as a Ghanaian corporate citizen, rather than an American-owned firm. The government was also heavily dependent upon the foreign exchange earned from aluminum and electricity exports. So as time went by, the PNDC and its increasingly sophisticated negotiators became increasingly pragmatic, despite PNDC-controlled media rhetoric. I generally kept out of the discourse and only worked in the background when VALCO thought the embassy shoulder patch might be useful.

Q: So *when you left Ghana in 1986, did you feel things had really moved in the right direction?*

FRITTS: Absolutely. U.S.-Ghanaian relations had been turned around, Ghana was embarked upon an increasingly effective economic recovery program, and its ideological bark was worse than its bite. Then the bilateral relationship collapsed dramatically.

Q: What happened?

FRITTS: A first-class spy flap. And I can talk about it because I think I'm one of the very few American ambassadors ever authorized to discuss a CIA Station publicly. The crisis also had major media coverage internationally.

A support person in our CIA station, Sharon Scranage, was turned to spy against us. Her male cohort, Michael Sousouides, was a close relative of Rawlings. A foreign power aided and abetted the affair and Ghanaian internal security was in up to its ears Scranage had left post on reassignment and received the usual polygraph test at CIA Headquarters. I understand the needle went off the chart. She then confessed her activity and cooperated in setting up a sting to entice and meet her Ghanaian lover and handler in the U.S. He was arrested at Motel 50, just down the street here on Arlington Boulevard. It was kept quiet and I knew nothing about it.

Several days later I was playing tennis with Ghanaians when the CIA Station Chief and several visitors came and sat courtside. I assumed it was not to admire my backhand. During a set break, I was informed they needed to speak with me urgently. Back at the residence, I was briefed on the arrests and that the USG would announce them shortly. I knew all hell would break loose. It wouldn't be a routine event such as with the Soviet Union.

Q: What did you do?

FRITTS: The first priority was to get our CIA people and compromised Ghanaians out of Ghana. Scranage had reportedly identified many of them as well as some innocents to her handlers. I couldn't take chances with lives and there was already a Ghanaian FSN in prison on spy charges.

I think we had about a week. We progressively evacuated all the Americans associated in any way as well as those not associated if Scranage said she had mentioned them. The exodus was an all-hands embassy effort. There's always chit-chat about State-CIA tensions and rivalries, but in this case everyone really pulled together. We had the CIA folk and their families gone quickly – maybe 72 hours.. They pulled their kids out of school and left their pets, household effects and full refrigerators behind. Over the following weeks, State, USAID and other Country Team members, including Audrey, fed the pets, packed and shipped additional suitcases, took in and protected heirlooms, and helped pack up effects. Real Foreign Service cohesion. We staggered the CIA departures to avoid raising suspicions. I'd occasionally go and hang out at the airport on some pretext in case any incident developed, but none did.

We also arranged to inform many of the compromised Ghanaians, who also left the country precipitately. Some real human tragedies, of course.

Q: What else?

FRITTS: I had to prepare the embassy in advance of the Washington statement.

In that regard, given potential Ghanaian government volatility, I had informed only DCM John Brims and another officer of why we were doing what we were doing. For the others I outlined only in general terms why the Station draw down was swiftly

proceeding. I held several embassy Town Meetings at which I essentially said, "Trust me." I believed strongly that if Tsikata and Ghanaian security tumbled to what we were up to, they would round up Ghanaians they suspected, have phony trials and execute them. There could also be incidents and attacks by thugs and PNDC stalwarts against the embassy, our American officers and staff, and even FSNs. Safety lay in getting our people out first and then seeking to manage reactions with the Ghanaian government. If I were to be openly candid within the embassy before the Washington announcement, the situation would not be kept secret.

By the way, when the eventual months long crisis was finally successfully over, the Department sent one its psychiatrists to post to interview everyone involved. At the onset and over the weeks and months, several officers and staff had suffered from the continuing tension and two had been transferred. I suppose today it's called post-traumatic syndrome. The psychiatrist faulted me for not initially bringing everyone into my confidence as it may have increased mental stress. She stated she was "sure" that if faced with a similar situation in the future, I would be open and inclusive from the beginning. I said, "Absolutely not." I was sorry for the stress, but my responsibility was to save lives and I would do it again if faced with what I thought was the same choice. She was shocked. So be it.

Q: How did you inform the Government?

FRITTS: The top task was to forestall any intemperate reaction from the within the Castle or zealot supporters by giving Rawlings a brief advance alert. That meant I had to see him on short notice, which was always difficult. Only an unconventional approach might do. So the next morning at dawn I camped outside the home of a government cabinet member along with the usual levee of Ghanaian relatives and others seeking jobs or favors. It's part of Ghanaian culture. I was moved to the head of the queue, invited in and sat down at his breakfast. I apologized for the intrusion and said I had to see Rawlings that very day. That I had an issue of major importance to the future of U.S.-Ghana relations.

When I saw Rawlings later that morning, I informed him of what had occurred, that an announcement of the arrests of Scranage and Sousouides would be made in Washington in a few hours, that unless we managed the matter wisely, there could be serious repercussions, and that I expected, of course, the fullest government protection for our embassy and personnel. He didn't do much batting of his eyes and I don't know how much he may have known. I think he gave me the right answers, but his speech was often elliptic. I then returned to the embassy to finally open up with the Country Team and prepare to hunker down. That afternoon, I learned that the Ghanaian security was making arrests in town.

Q: What was the reaction after the announcement?

FRITTS: Given the time differential between Washington and Accra, the full story was emblazoned in the Ghanaian media with a heavy overlay of the U.S. and the CIA

attempting to overthrow Rawlings and the PNDC. We had an urgent Country Team meeting, issued public statements, briefed the FSNs with the facts, sent them home, and shut down the embassy to await further developments.

Audrey and I were to attend a diplomatic corps activity the next day hosted by the Ghanaian Army. It was to observe a shooting competition at the main military base. I'd been busy most of the night and early morning, of course. And the army event had already started. Once the embassy was buttoned up, should we go?

We decided we weren't going to slink around. After all, it was the Ghanaians and their friends who had spied on the U.S., which had no interest or intention of overthrowing the PNDC. So later that morning we got into the car, drove into the military base, and then across a broad field up to the stands, with the flags flying on the fenders and every eye in the place upon us. Our stomachs were tight. But we got out and walked in with our heads high as if it were a normal day. The Ghanaian officers didn't know whether to shake hands with us or whether they'd be punished if they did. I put my hand out to General Quainoo and the usual Ghanaian politeness carried the day. But, of course, the adulation days of "best ambassador" and easy access were over.

Q: Well, let's go to what was done. What was this all about?

FRITTS: Scranage had been at the embassy several years in a support job. She appeared capable and was quite popular and good for morale. Evidently this Ghanaian, who became her lover, had captivated her. He had money and gave lavish Ghanaian parties with an in-crowd. She was seduced physically and morally by the glamour of being selected to go where no other Western foreigner went. They also worked on her gripes. She provided detailed inside information to him and thence to the Ghanaian Government and what I have to call a "foreign power." It was a very extensive and serious compromise, including far beyond just Ghana.

Q: When you say the foreign power, is this something we can -

FRITTS: Not really as I'm not sure if we ever stated it publicly.

Q: Well, why would this cause such problems in Ghana? I mean, this was, you know, our problem, not theirs. It strikes me as a self-induced tempest in a teapot on the side of the Ghanaians. With the Soviets, for example, we both go through the exercises and move on.

FRITTS: You're correct about recurrent spy incidents with the Soviets, the then East Germans and others being flash-in-the-pan routine. But in the Third World, nationalism, paranoia and sensitivity are much more volatile. As I mentioned earlier, most Ghanaians believe that the CIA instigated the overthrow of Nkrumah. It's part of local lore and even those who had no love for Nkrumah believe and resent it. The PNDC, having a radical Marxist, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist mantra, always saw a presumed CIA hand in world events.

A number of its true believers and Rawlings as well, believed or were led to believe, that the CIA was working with Ghanaian exiles in Togo to overthrow the PNDC. I was regularly called in on the carpet or the Ghanaian media would carry reports on CIA connivance from Togo. It was all delusional. As I frequently said, my task with Washington was to get anyone in any agency to pay attention to the U.S.-Ghana relationships, not beat back budding coup attempts. I remember a cabinet secretary reading me the riot act one day. I asked him to cite one single shred of evidence to support his view. His reply was classic, "The absence of evidence is proof of the conspiracy!"

In some conversations, Rawlings would state that I couldn't know what the CIA was really doing. Once he even added, "Even me. Intelligence agencies have more in common with each other than they do with their own governments". In his world, that was certainly true at least some of the time. And maybe elsewhere as well. He could be quite insightful.

The PNDC itself had come to power in a coup and executed two former presidents. And given what many of them believed to be an Nkrumah precedent, they saw a mirror image. I'm also sure the Cubans, Libyans, Soviets and others were egging the issue on and reinforcing it.

All part and parcel of the challenges in the developing world.

Q: Well, the fact that we had a CIA station within the embassy couldn't have been a great shock to anyone.

FRITTS: Of course not. In fact, some persons on both sides had worked on liaison matters under the previous government. The government knew we had a station, but probably felt it could live with it and didn't want to jeopardize the evolving overall U.S. relationship, which it needed.

Q: When you say the Government of Ghana, Rawlings must have known that this was going on.

FRITTS: Sure. After all, we knew they were watching us. I was aware of surveillance at times.

Q: Well, did this happen as you left post?

FRITTS: No, during my last year. Both we and the Ghanaians began trials of our respective arrestees; the Ghanaians matching us step for step. Thus, the issue was in the news all the time - photos of Sousouides in shackles, etc. Vignettes of CIA skullduggery in Ghana. On and on. A constant hemorrhage.

We eventually began prolonged negotiations for an exchange of "spies." We would hand back their man in the U.S. - Sousouides - for all our "persons of interest." There were

also a number of side issues. The negotiations were tortured, extended, and broke off on several occasions. At one time there was a semi-official threat against me personally when the Ghanaian chief negotiator said he would not guarantee my continued safety. To their credit, AF Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker and DAS Jim Bishop called in the Ghanaian ambassador, who was a very good man, and laced in to him. I think one of Crocker's comments to the ambassador was "If a small country like Ghana wants to make an enemy of the U.S., let it." It got their attention and the chief negotiator was switched to the foreign minister, Obed Asamoah. With him the process remained difficult, but professional. By the way, AF DAS Jim Bishop was superb as the Washington focal point. He handled the Washington end on a real-time basis and I had no second-guessing from Langley or elsewhere on my game plans. Just support and constructive ideas.

After about six months and many perils of Pauline, we reached agreement for the exchange and related matters. On a particular day, they took their arrestees to the border with Togo and the convicted Sousouides came across to Ghana. In order to positively identify the Ghanaians, the CIA had brought along several of the people we had gotten out previously. The Ghanaian press took telescopic photos of the exchange, including the exiles hugging the newly exchanged. It was not a good press day for the United States in Ghana. Naturally, I wasn't there, but was in touch with embassy officers who kept me informed in case any glitch occurred or the exchange was aborted.

I thought the crisis was finally over, but it wasn't.

Q: Why was that?

FRITTS: It had been agreed that the Ghanaians and we would announce the agreement and exchange at the same time, but the Justice Department violated the agreement and jumped the gun by several hours. The PNDC and Rawlings were furious when they heard the news on VOA and the BBC. Again, CIA and U.S. perfidy. We hunkered the embassy down again and took a break for Thanksgiving. I sent a cable saying that the Justice action had undone months of efforts and placed the embassy and my colleagues again in jeopardy. Actually, the night before the affront I had seen the Foreign Minister at a reception and we had agreed on "no more surprises" and to get on with our bilateral business.

Audrey and I hosted a large Ghanaian group for Thanksgiving dinner. As the specially imported turkeys were being served, I was summoned to call at the Foreign Ministry urgently. I delayed until dessert. Asamoah said the PNDC had decided the USG had not dealt in good faith and read the names of four embassy officers named persona non grata. They were to be out in forty-eight hours for interfering in Ghana's internal affairs. All blameless. I remonstrated conceptually and individually, but he said the PNDC decision was final. We responded, of course, by expelling the same number from their embassy in Washington and suspending – temporarily - our aid programs. Obviously, our new "surprise" had been answered.

A sidebar. After returning to the residence and finishing dessert with the guests, I called a

Country Team meeting where we did the necessary. I remember sending the Defense Attaché to Gen. Quainoo to tell him informally that I would keep the Ghanaian Army out of this. I then began a reporting cable.

Alone in the embassy, the phone rang from Washington midway though the cable. In those days phoning Accra wasn't easy. It was a State Operations Center watch officer saying the BBC was carrying an item that American embassy officers were being expelled from Ghana. What was going on? I didn't want him to be the purveyor of interpretative comment, so I said I didn't know, but the ambassador was preparing a cable as we spoke. "Fine", he said.

Q: So now what? Was it finally over?

FRITTS: Yes and no. This was November and I was due to leave the following June. During my tenure the bilateral relationship had gone from a pit to a pinnacle and was now back in a pit. Neither my status nor credibility were the same. Some people thought we had been interested in overthrowing a Ghanaian government – again. It was also apparent that Rawlings no longer considered me esteemed. That complicated access to the government as it meant officials felt some risk in too close an association or not having it cleared by the Castle in advance. Also, international economic aid programs were expanding and the PNDC didn't need me or the U.S. as much.

We had really been of critical importance to the Ghanaian Government at a formative period. The U.S. decision to work with the PNDC, build a relationship and convince others to do so through an economic stabilization program had been essential. Recovery was underway. There were now established alternatives to a singular role with the U.S.

The government also reverted to petty harassments and vitriolic media attacks, which had marked earlier days, despite pro forma statements of putting the issues behind us. Meanwhile, I was determined to uphold the honor and dignity of the U.S. and that meant not trying to ingratiate myself personally. As long as we were pilloried, we would be correct and business like, but I was also back to Report Cards. It would set the stage for my successor to be a good guy.

I never saw Chairman Rawlings again personally, although I did receive a letter from him some months after I had left Ghana, apologizing for not meeting with me on departure. But it was an exercise by the Ghanaian ambassador in Washington.

I've often commented that the role of an ambassador is not to be well loved or liked, although that's preferable, but to pursue hopefully enlightened U.S. national interests. That's our professional responsibility, not always shared to my observation, by political appointees who covet abstract bilateral relations and local popularity.

Q: Just on that, who took your place in Ghana?

FRITTS: Steve Lyne, a career FSO. It was almost a year before he went out. The GOG

wrongly interpreted the delay as a further expression of our displeasure. In reality, it was just one of those variants of the personnel process.

Q: Sometimes something of this nature, such as problems in a country, whether or not it's your fault, can be induced – sort of like being the captain of a destroyer –as happening on your watch and thus responsible. Did you think the system was saying, Well, I don't know about Fritts, there was trouble out in Ghana while he was there? I mean, you didn't feel that -

FRITTS: No, not at all. I received a personal commendation from the Acting Secretary of State and glowing evaluations by Chet Crocker and others plus a CIA award. I understand that to this day I hold some kind of record for negotiating the most one-sided exchange of "spies" – their one for our multiple – in the history of U.S. diplomacy. A few years later, I was the Department's selectee at the White House to be an assistant secretary, but a political appointee was chosen.

Q: Did you feel that the Central Intelligence Agency appreciated what you did?

FRITTS: Very much so. A lot of working level attention plus an award and lunch with the Acting CIA Director, Bob Gates, I think. It also created a corridor reputation, which served me well in some other tasks.

In retrospect, some CIA officers opined that they expected me as an FSO to be less cooperative and to care more about safeguarding State's image in the country. Sort of opt out with a low profile. I didn't see that as an option. Whatever status I had was to be used. In this case, negotiating an exchange and saving lives was not only humanitarian, but also a message that the USG, which includes the CIA, will not abandon those who, for whatever reasons, have placed their trust in it. Kind of a professional duty thing, I guess.

Q: Well, while you were going through this, were you at a certain point getting ready to get a new job? Did you know what you were going to do?

FRITTS: I had expressed interest in a diplomat–in-residence slot and Director General George Vest was kind in his praise of my work in Ghana and gave me first choice among the fifteen he had. I chose the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Q: William and Mary - you were there from, what, '86 to '87?

FRITTS: The '86 to '87 academic year.

Q: How did you find it?

FRITTS: I enjoyed it very much and, in fact, still am a faculty member. It's quite a different culture, at times almost foreign. And quite different from the Foreign Service.

Q: Thinking back to international affairs in '86 to '87, I can't recall any great trends. It was still before the collapse of the Soviet Union. But was there a different approach? Did the faculty look at things differently than you did?

FRITTS: Well, within the academic world, there are "scholars" and "practitioners". The stereotypes are akin to the Foreign Service vs. the Civil Service. Those of us engaged actively in policy are practitioners. Surprising as it may seem to the uninitiated, practitioners are a lower order of life, even those with a Ph.D. There's also an assumption, particularly by those whose focus is a single country or region, that United States foreign policy is virtually always ill-founded, in large part because it isn't sufficiently accommodating to the scholar's favored country or region. Part of what a diplomat-in-residence does is to evidence by our lectures and dialogue that we are credible intellectually and that American policies may be more sophisticated and forward-looking than perceived.

Q: Did you find that you were giving a different aspect in classes and with the faculty, sort of a workman's way of looking at foreign affairs?

FRITTS: That's how faculty tend to perceive practitioners – as workmen. It improves to a degree if you can prove yourself. Students, particularly seniors, are quite different. They have a thirst for contact with someone who's actually "been there" and in the policy frays. I know many professors at the College who are doing wonderful things. They're excellent, conscientious and well motivated. But by the time students are seniors, they want insights from someone directly engaged on the scene on the issues of the day. I should comment that students at the college of William and Mary are excellent. It's one of the elite institutions in the United States, even though a public-assisted university, and has traditionally been a good source of FSOs.

Q: What about now – in this period? One of the elements that's been strong in the academic world, because it's got a theory behind it which I think allows academics something to chew on, has been Marxism in its various forms. How was this at William and Mary?

FRITTS: Well, I think that within academic freedom there's a desire to view any established discipline as legitimate. There were Marxist economists on the faculty when I arrived in 1991. But Marxist economics has now been discredited. Those professors have gone on with a new name, a euphemism I've forgotten, maybe "Alternate Economics" or some such. Having a professor identified as a Marxist economist is no longer viable in the U.S. academic system, because the discipline has ceased to exist by that name. Kind of like political geography.

Q: Did you find yourself getting into debates or discussions along the lines of saying, Well, yes, that's nice in theory, but this is what we have to deal with?

FRITTS: Sure. The major distinction is trade-offs. All foreign policy is the result of domestic and international trade-offs. And the response you often get back is, well, that's

"compromising with truth" and somehow unethical. The issues where it comes up most often are Viet Nam, Latin America, Iran and the Middle East. In virtually all cases, it's charged that our policies are blind to the future. The preferred "policy choice," for example, is that we overthrow the sheiks and wait for the Middle East to shake out into freedom and democracy in the long term. Well, we all know about the "long term" a la Keynes.

Q: What's your current impression of how students look at the foreign affairs field?

FRITTS: In contrast to common assumptions, I find the quality of the students - at least as I see them at William and Mary - exceptional. They write well, think well, and have overseas international experience far superior to my generation at their age. They're more sophisticated as well as committed and begin consciously to build their résumés in high school. There's been an W&M explosion of interest in international relations as a major over the past ten years. It's now leveled off. There's a good deal of interest in the Foreign Service, but also a strong belief that the Foreign Service is only one of varied opportunities to be engaged meaningfully in international relations. For example, they're very motivated about NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations. They engage in foreign study and exchange programs, not just once, but multiple times. There's a new W&M goal for every student, regardless of major, to have at least one semester or summer overseas in a disciplined academic program. They're just much more qualified than my generation.

Q: In '87, whither?

FRITTS: I went to the UN General Assembly to be an advisor on African affairs for the fall session of the General Assembly.

Q: What were you doing?

FRITTS: USUN traditionally augments its staff with former ambassadors in order to lobby General Assembly delegations on UN votes. I had the Africans to do what we normally do in the Foreign Service - meet them, gain access and try to induce favorable stances on issues important to us. I coordinated on tactics with our embassies. I helped with the briefs and attended sessions by the Secretary with those Heads of State or Government I knew something about. I also worked with our then Permanent Representative Vernon Walters on African matters.

Walters was fun to work with. I sat in on the calls and discussions he had with his African counterparts. Reveling in his reputation as a polyglot, he always began with a joke in French, Spanish or Portuguese. I heard each one over and over and I'm sure the ambassadors had as well. But they pretended to enjoy his enjoyment.

He called me in one day to recount that he had a personal goal to visit every country in the world, but had not yet been to Ghana. Could I arrange for him to do so some months down the line when he and other senior USUN officers fanned out worldwide to discuss

the results of the UN Session? I thought it a good idea as a means to reactivate positive U.S.-Ghanaian relations. The Ghanaian Permanent Representative, Victor Gbeho, was skeptical, but he worked Accra and I got African Affairs approval. The deal was almost done when Gbeho induced some committee to scuttle a USUN human rights amendment on some matter. The USUN officer present lashed out at the irony of an ambassador from a country led by "...military junior officer petty dictator" having the temerity to upset a U.S.-initiative on human rights. Accra reacted as you might expect and canceled any visit. I don't know if Walters ever got to Ghana or not.

Q: Did you find at that time... Chester Crocker had a very strong role and a different approach to the problem of South Africa.

FRITTS: "Constructive engagement."

Q: Constructive engagement. How did you find that? During this '87 session, how was that going?

FRITTS: Well, of course, I had worked in Ghana on trying to get Ghanaian understanding of constructive engagement. They didn't like it very much nor did any other African country. Some tolerated it.

Personally, although I refused to travel to So. Africa under apartheid for leave or recreation, I felt that constructive engagement was justifiable. The U.S. was important to both sides and we should use our influence to achieve outcomes. That's what America does and that's what our training is for. We've done it before under other names.

You'll also recall that we were opposed to the imposition of economic sanctions on South Africa. Our view was that sanctions wouldn't work and would only impact disproportionately on Black South Africans. Sanctions had also been shown to be generally ineffective as a tool of foreign policy. I argued that case, of course. In retrospect, it's quite clear, as cited by Mandela and De Klerk in later years, that sanctions in the So. African context were important to the change in course.

Q: What was your impression of African diplomats at the UN?

FRITTS: As for any group, there was a normal curve of distribution. Some were erudite, well-informed and effective – the Ghana ambassador Gbeho among them. The Botswanan was a leader. The Algerian delegation was excellent as a whole as were the Zimbabweans. These Perm Reps were the equivalents of any capable ambassadors anywhere. Some were only there by family or ethnic patronage or even politically banished and just filling the seat. Others sought primarily to avoid any initiative. So it was a usual mixed bag.

Q: On African affairs were there issues that we were particularly eager to get support for?

FRITTS: As you will recall, every UN General Assembly session votes on over a hundred issues. Many come up annually in various guises. Israel, for example. And South Africa. The Middle East. Law of the Sea. Human rights. Others are new, such as on the environment and the crises of the year. The Department and USUN would select 15 to 20 of them as Key Issues and we worked primarily those.

Q: How effective do you think we were, or was everything pretty well cut and dried? I mean, in a way, people knew how they were going to vote?

FRITTS: USUN publishes an annual report in detail on the Key Issues and UN General Assembly voting patterns. Modifying African votes significantly wasn't on. But based upon personality, ambivalence or trade-offs, occasionally we could adjust some votes. But still, as I recall, the percentage of votes by the African delegations in connection with the Key Issues was never much above 30 percent, except for Liberia.

Q: Well, after that, whither?

FRITTS: After that I became a team leader in the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), heading teams on inspections of our posts overseas and bureaus within the Department. I did that for a year and a half. I was then asked to be the deputy inspector general and did that for about two years.

Q: Who was the inspector general?

FRITTS: Sherman Funk, the first non-Foreign Service Inspector General (IG) of the Department. A new Inspector General Act, establishing the institution government wide, had just been implemented. The Department had fought vigorously to retain its traditional structure under a career FSO. The Congress also decreed that Inspector Generals should be nominated and confirmed by the Senate. They would have dual responsibilities - to report to the Congress as well as to the secretary of their agency.

The Hill view on State was that an FSO could not be trusted to be objective and there thus had to be a professional IG. Sherman had previously been Inspector General (IG) of the Commerce Department and he became the first State IG under the new system.

Q: Well, now, you were there at the beginning of this, weren't you?

FRITTS: Not quite. I was a Team Leader to start with. After it shook down a bit, I succeeded Tony Quainton as deputy inspector general or, as we said, DIG.

Q: What was your impression of how this new system fitted into the Foreign Service?

FRITTS: The Foreign Service resisted it strongly as an outside infringement and slap at its integrity. It was thus fortunate that we were well served by Sherman's integrity, experience, savvy and willingness to understand the differences between a domestic and international affairs agency, while still being independent. He was an inveterate worker,

listened well and was well regarded on the Hill. He leavened occasional doses of common sense to an IG staff too often focused on purist interpretations of regulations and paper trails.

The Department was successful in having the IG retain the existing Office of Inspections, while adding new offices on Audits, Investigations and Security. Inspections was primarily staffed by FSOs as in the past; the others by Civil Service. The Office of Inspections had been around for about 70 years. For most of that time, State was the only cabinet agency to inspect itself.

Q: Actually, the Office of Inspections goes back to 1906, when they used to have consuls general at large - six of them - go around and inspect..

FRITTS: Thanks. The concept, of course, goes back through Charlemagne to the early Chinese emperors.

Q: A*s I recall, the inspection system traditionally had been basically traveling advisors, helpful on career advice, voices of experience, that sort of thing. Of course, they kept their eyes open for disreputable behavior and dishonesty, but it wasn't their focus. Now it appeared much more adversarial. How did this new system work?*

FRITTS: Well, you're right. It was less cozy and more adversarial. For one thing, administrative inspections were now often conducted by professionally qualified professional auditors, many with CPAs, plus professional security investigators. State had not had that kind of high-powered technical competence before. Sherman also bought into the concept that inspections should continue to emphasize advice and guidance. Indeed, that our credibility in that regard would also help uncover wrongdoing.

First as team leader and then DIG, I worked to a consultative approach - that we were really there to provide means for officers to learn how to do things better than to chastise them for doing things wrong. I'm a firm believer in inspections. Posts, particularly the smaller ones in the boonies with often junior and inexperienced officers, benefit the most.

But the process is fragile. Inspections are amazingly dependent upon the willingness of officers to confide with inspectors about the post. If FSOs lose respect for inspectors or come to believe the focus is to collect punitive scalps, the inspection value will dry up.

Q: Well, there have been articles in the Foreign Service Journal *from time to time saying to the effect, don't believe these guys are your pals - if they come to talk to you, get a lawyer to be with you.*

FRITTS: That refers to the IG Office of Criminal Investigations. It was my first experience with criminal investigators. They have an understandably different mindset. Once an evidence trail begins, they pretty well assume – and want – the suspect to be guilty. Their goal is to confirm crime and, with good reason, they are suspicious by nature and training. Most FSOs have never faced arrest and tend to believe that innocence

is a protection. In my view, I agree they should have a lawyer. Too many felt that hiring a lawyer was a testament to guilt – and also expensive. Criminal investigators can be intimidating just by their questions. A better balance was needed and I think the Foreign Service Journal focus was appropriate, even if it complicated an already complex and restricted investigative process.

My main beef with our office of investigations was that cases rarely got closed unless by sanction or conviction. Officers thus went on and on under an OIG cloud. In part it was understandable. An officer being investigated at post X might be assigned to Post Y and then to Post Z as investigators traveled the world to interview persons with him at posts X and Y, now also transferred elsewhere. However, even when a case was closed for "lack of evidence," I found that officers were never really cleared. As far as OIG was concerned, they were still in limbo. For example, we vetted and certified that OIG had no objections to officers selected for DCM, ambassador, assistant secretaries and DASs or for the Senior Foreign Service (SFS). I asked to be put in charge of it. The investigators took it on faith that, given a chance, FSOs would protect FSOs. The investigators thus didn't like me in the chain. They would usually argue to the effect that an officer currently or previously under investigation for years just hadn't been caught yet. They also controlled the info in the memos they wrote. I struggled recurrently to get access to basic investigative reports, such as interviews, to be able to challenge interpretations. I found it a tiresome slog, but reasonably successful.

Although I was Sherman's deputy, the Office of Investigations reported directly to him as they also had in Tony Quainton's period. And Sherman accepted that. He frequently said he'd change it, but didn't. If he were away for an extended period, I was theoretically the decision-maker, but, not surprisingly, I didn't get many decisions to make. However, Sherman and I talked a lot and was he very good at eliciting advice. Which is partly why I as an FSO I was there.

Q: Well, did we find wrongdoing or "waste, fraud and mismanagement" as it's said and what did we do when found it?

FRITTS: Most of the problems were with variants of financial fraud – petty as well as major. Also misuse of public resources for private purposes and poor judgment. Along that line, although I didn't keep a record, it appeared to me that FSO ambassadors usually got referred to the Justice Department for prosecution on grounds of financial fraud. Their excuse would be to the effect that having reached a point of authority, they were only redressing a bit the out-of-pocket expenses the Department had forced upon them for years of their career. The political ambassadors came from backgrounds of authority where internal corporate controls on senior executives were scarce. Corporate resources were for the use of top executives – in the office, at home and on the road. Once in government, they had trouble separating public from private.

By the way, it was an eye-opener to me that a rather common reason we would stop the nomination of potential political appointees, even for ambassadorships, was failure to file income tax returns.

Positively, we guided and counseled to correct poor management skills and redress poor judgment. We also had authority to do Inspector Evaluation Reports (IERs) to redress wrongful reports by supervisors, either good or bad. I truly believe we generally left posts in better shape than we found. And officers, too. We didn't just blow whistles.

We also added a new and, I believe, much needed tool. Led by Ambassador Ed DeJarnette, we agitated for and got authority to write IERs on politically appointed ambassadors and senior officials, as well as career. It was fought, but Deputy Secretary Larry Eagleburger made the decision. He wanted objective feedback.

It led to some interesting confrontations with Team Leaders and on up the line. Political ambassadors considered themselves outside the State personnel system. Now, all at once, they were going to be evaluated by "bureaucrats." Most hadn't been formally evaluated on performance by anybody for years, particularly former CEOs or owners of businesses. Well-known politicians or former cabinet officers serving as ambassadors felt the same way. If criticized, they went to Sherman, their assistant secretary, Eagleburger and the White House. For the first time in years, some were not receiving adulatory praise, but being described politely but professionally as the equivalent of petty dictators, loafers and dunces.

For example, a former cabinet officer now ambassador read me the riot act for two hours seeking changes not only in her IER, but throughout our inspection report of the post. The first sentence, not surprisingly, had caught her eye – "Embassy XXX is more actively engaged in promoting and defending the interests of the (host country) than it is the United States." She didn't take it kindly.

The gut reactions of those criticized was to seek to have the reports squelched or threaten retaliation. But Sherman gave us full backing as did Eagleburger, whom I'm sure found the information useful in his White House leverage on the ambassador selection process. There was no formal feedback from him, but we became aware of occasional political ambassadors leaving post early or grapevine telephone calls saying that an ambassador had mended or tried to mend his/her ways. Same with career ambassadors, but that had always been the case. I understand this authority was ended by the Clinton Administration. Too bad. But without a Larry Eagleburger-type to protect it, it probably couldn't continue. Too many people with clout were embarrassed.

We also initiated a requirement for Team Leaders to provide informal briefing memos to ambassadors and DCMs on how they were perceived at posts, their management strengths and weaknesses, and suggestions on how to more effectively manage their posts and handle internal festering issues. These were "Eyes Only" and never entered the personnel system. OIG kept them in a very restricted file and they were not used for any administrative or management purpose.

Overall, I think we performed valuable services.

Q: Having been involved in CA, how did you find handling accusations and occurrences concerning the issuance of visas? There's always a great temptation not just for fraud, but also by American officials.

FRITTS: Well, as you well know, in many countries a visa to the United States is a commodity of high financial value. Consuls on the line are under great pressure to make quick decisions, often in only a few minutes. The system relies heavily on processing by FSNs of the host country. They come under great pressure to facilitate visas. Fortunes can be made quickly. Family ties are strong. Rings get formed. They're hard to track and, if an American officer gets involved or just overlooks it, for reasons of money, sex, empathy, fatigue or malice, it's even harder. Like any crime activity, as we become more sophisticated in identifying patterns and systems, the fraud rings move on to new techniques. It's a constant chase. Actually, I'm surprised how relatively few officers succumb. It's a testament to Foreign Service selection and training. But when it goes bad, it can go on for a long time before it's uncovered.

And the investigative process can also backfire.

For example, we had a morale issue at the Consular Section in Tel Aviv. OIG had become aware of a visa ring within the Consular Section. With the knowledge of the consul general, hidden cameras were installed to observe and tape activities by the suspected officers and FSNs. An officer and several FSNs were recorded in the act. To catch the miscreants, all the consular officers and FSNS were being taped. After the arrests went down, the innocent American officers and FSNS complained mightily that the imposition of cameras without their knowledge was a violation of their professional and personal integrity. The opposing view, of course, is that there's a limit as to how many people you can inform about surveillance and still have it effective. Those are trade-offs. The Consul General was taking a lot heat from his staff who wanted us to punish someone. As I recall, we counseled.

Another recurring issue involved efforts by ambassadors to get consuls to issue visas for political reasons e.g. - local VIPs, children of government ministers, all kinds of reasons. Ambassadors can't issue visas because under the law, only a consul may do so. The law specifies that it's a felony for a consul to knowingly issue a visa to an ineligible applicant. The Congress instituted that law ostensibly to insulate visa issuance from political pressures. Never mind that the Congress makes thousands of efforts every year to facilitate visas for friends of constituents. Thus, if an ambassador forces issuance of an illegal visa, it's a felony. Very hard to get political ambassadors to understand that their authority is so limited.

Nevertheless every ambassador, including me, thinks it important at times to issue visas to persons a consul turns down. Since the whole adjudication business deals in shades of gray, which I knew something about, I was usually successful with dialogue. Some consuls were offended just to have any conversation on the topic with their ambassador or DCM.

Q: By the time you left, did you feel that the initial opposition to the new inspection system died down?

FRITTS: Yes. Sherman gained credibility on the Seventh Floor and with the Foreign Service over two Administrations – Reagan and Bush. And he had good support within the Congress. Still the Congress always poses problems, particularly staffers.

I became much involved when a Congressional Committee sic'ced OIG into chasing a hare that several FSOS up for ambassadorial confirmation had channeled funds extra-legally years before to the Nicaraguan Contras. Sherman put me in charge of a team to investigate. It took months and was very arcane. After an exhaustive investigation, we concluded the charge was pure partisan politics by rabid staffers, who could not let go of an obsession that U.S. policy toward Nicaragua had been wrong and the FSOs were pawns in their political game. When we reported our conclusion that the diversion had not occurred, the staffers refused to accept it and attacked us and Sherman publicly. That's the heat you get in Washington.

Q: I take it this was coming from the - to put it in crude terms - the left wing side of liberal Democrats.

FRITTS: Yes. Our report was to no avail. The nominations were eventually withdrawn and the officers retired.

Q: So such is Washington.

FRITTS: That's correct.

Q: So you left, when, about '91, was it?

FRITTS: I retired in the early fall of 1991 and went directly to the College of William and Mary, where I'm a faculty member in the graduate Public Policy program. The grand title of "Senior Fellow". Meaningless, but useful.

Q: So you were still with OIG in '91?

FRITTS: That's correct.

Q: Did you get involved in the famous case regarding the passport file of William Jefferson Clinton?

FRITTS: Thankfully, I was not. My successor, Rocky Suddarth, had just taken over as deputy. Sherman was away, so Rocky got hit with it. I missed it by about thirty days.

Q: W*hat was your feeling about the Bush-Baker Administration, foreign-affairs-wise?*

FRITTS: I had great expectations for the Bush Administration, because I felt that for the

first time, maybe since John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, we were going to have as President a professional experienced in foreign affairs and the Federal Government. That was certainly vindicated by his success in putting together the coalitions for the Gulf War and elsewhere. Unfortunately, the President frequently seemed to deny his expertise on the profession. I don't think he helped the Foreign Service as an institution as we anticipated. For example, I know some people who were close to the president who felt that, if elected, he would establish real quality criteria for political ambassadors. He didn't. Opportunities were lost. I understand the patronage rationale, but the losses remain. However, we did write those IERs on political appointees.

I had high personal regard for President George Bush, in large part because when I was going out to Ghana, he was Vice President. Normally, outgoing ambassadors didn't call on him, but a friend on his staff fixed it up for a 15-minute courtesy call. I wound up being there for an hour and a half while we talked about African affairs. He was very informed and interested. But I had no personal or continuing relationship.

I had no meaningful contact with Secretary Baker.

Q: In conclusion, are there any topics or observations you'd like to make that we haven't covered?

FRITTS: Yes, several. Let me divest myself of what I think are some key misperceptions in international affairs. Sometimes in my public talks, I call them common wisdoms that are often wrong.

The first is the role of clarity versus ambiguity. As Americans, we believe and common wisdom supports the stance that achieving clear, specific and detailed agreements, which leave little to chance, should be the goal of effective foreign policy. It's a rational lawyerly approach and, after all, treaties are the contractual law of the land.

The State Department historically has taken a mildly more open approach, recognizing that there can be less formal even unwritten "understandings." That approach makes people outside our profession uneasy. It makes military people very uneasy. And they usually cite the supposed failure to include So. Korea in Atchison's speech of U.S. security interests in Asia, which, in the view of some, at least, helped precipitate the Korean War.

I think the best case for occasional ambiguity is associated with the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treat from the 1960s that was renegotiated recently. It's been the successful mainstay of our forward defense posture in the Pacific for nearly 50 years. A major issue was how to handle the possibility of nuclear weapons, given the Japanese aversion to nuclear weapons and its pacifist constitution. One clause, for example, says that the U.S. will not introduce nuclear weapons into Japan. What does the word "*introduce"* mean? We've had port calls by American aircraft carriers in Japan for decades. Do those ships carry nuclear weapons? Do they stop three miles outside Japanese territorial waters and unloading something onto to something? We also base air squadrons in Japan. We have

Army tanks capable of nuclear rounds. Is the ammo in Japan? The island of Okinawa is the site of numerous U.S. bases and an integral part of Japan. And so on.

For decades the Japanese political opposition has claimed we routinely violated the nuclear proscription. There have been numerous political demonstrations over the years against the treaty, U.S. bases and presumed American nukes. At times the future of the Security Treaty was threatened. If nukes had been found to be introduced into Japan, there would been major strategic and bilateral crises.

So what's the ambiguity? It is that the U.S. and Japan have a decades long tacit unwritten understanding that Japan will never officially ask the question that the U.S. will never officially answer. And it's worked.

The second is the touching American belief that any problem can be solved, including foreign affairs. Culturally, we're a nation of problem solvers. Our usual professional approach is to take a problem, break it into component parts, and squeeze them smaller and smaller over time so the overall problem becomes less and less important and disruptive to our national interests. The process is usually slow, messy and frustrating. There are backslides and redefinitions that then require revised approaches. Being Americans, the American public and Congress are impatient with process. They favor fast solutions, which are infrequently attainable. Thus, part of the image difficulty we face as a Foreign Service is that we cannot meet our national mythology with quick simple solutions to difficult problems.

Another hobbyhorse of mine is the widely held bromide that international understanding leads to peace. In my experience it's too seldom correct. Israelis and Palestinians, North Koreans and South Koreans, Hutus and Tutsis, Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians to name a few – all those groups understand each other quite well. They share the same culture, the same or very similar languages, the same foods, music, taboos, etc. Intermarriage is often extensive. In fact, they understand each other so well that they'll fight and die to avoid peace.

A final public misconception relates to a well-known dictum by off-quoted philosopher George Santayana. Winston Churchill was very fond of citing Santayana and most Americans can repeat the quote back. It goes: "Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it." But there's a corollary, which I'm too humble to call the Fritts Corollary, which can be phrased as "Those who remember history too well repeat it on purpose." Think of the Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Palestinians and Israelis, Tutsis and Hutus and even Greeks and Turks. With malevolent political leadership, remembering history too well is a tragic circle.

Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview