

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

AMBASSADOR ROBERT C. F. GORDON

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INTERVIEW

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you become attracted to foreign affairs?

GORDON: Well, I was born and raised in a very small town in Southwest Colorado. And my father had been in the Spanish-American War and had left and come back through Mexico where he stopped off and worked in the American Embassy in Mexico City for awhile on his way back to the States. And he used to talk about it. I loved travel books, and maps, and so forth. As a result, when I went to college, instead of going to the University of Colorado, I went to the University of California at Berkeley because it had a major in international relations.

So I sort of had this idea in the back of my head, not knowing really what it was, since high school days. And then I went on to Berkeley and got a degree in international relations in 1941. It was not until nine years later, for various and sundry reasons, that I actually entered Foreign Service.

Q: Did you get caught up in the war?

GORDON: That, partly, though I was not in the military. Even then I had poor vision. It could be corrected to 20-20, but the military wasn't interested in that. You had to have better eyesight than that. So I actually worked for Bethlehem Steel during most of the War.

Q: What brought you into the State Department?

GORDON: I went into private business with two friends. We went into the steel fabricating business and what you might call the scrap business because we had to generate steel to be able to buy steel. And after about two years of that I decided that was not my bag. So I went back to Berkeley graduate school to get a master's degree and try to figure out what the hell I really wanted to do.

And then there was some recruiting for an interesting program called the intern program, which was a second way of recruiting into the State Department, whether it would be

civil service or foreign service. I actually entered the State Department in the intern program in the fall of 1950. I stayed in there, back and forth between Foreign Service. It was the days of McCarthy and RIFs in the Foreign Service.

Q: RIFs means reduction in force.

GORDON: They were firing people depending on your seniority, basically. And so I was Foreign Service, civil service, and they were having a RIF so I ended up in civil service again. I survived that and then came back into Foreign Service. By that time I had gotten up to a very good GS level, so I became an FSO, in the pure sense of the term, about 1954 under the so-called Wriston program.

Q: What type of work had you been doing as you were doing this back and forth work in the State Department from 1950 to 1955?

GORDON: Until the spring of 1950 I was an intern and moving around all over the place. And then I was in the Executive Secretariat, SS. I was called the Department Briefing Officer and I used to give briefings on what was going on, and take questions for groups visiting Washington, and I also traveled around the country giving foreign affairs talks with question periods to World Affairs Councils, and the like. And I also was on the staff to the 1954 meeting in Geneva which ended up in the division of Indochina at the 17th parallel, as I recall. That's when we met with the Russians and Chinese, the so-called Vietnam Conference of 1954. So I was on that and I would go back and forth and was also part of the staff to NATO meetings in Paris at that time. So I did just all sorts of things, whatever I was called on to do.

And then I got interested in the Middle East part of the Department and I handled that area in the Executive Secretariat. During this period I also attended the American University of Beirut for four months. And in late 1954 I went down to Near East Affairs, NEA, as it is now, then it stood for Near East, South Asia, and African affairs.

Q: It sure shows a broad sweep at one point.

GORDON: That's right. At that time I became the staff assistant to the Assistant Secretary for that area.

Q: Who was that then?

GORDON: It was George V. Allen who was a career officer and had been ambassador in India and Iran. As I say, the A stood for African affairs. There were four offices. One was Near East Affairs, which is the Arab-Israeli area. There was South Asia, which was India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Nepal. The third office covered Greece, Turkey, and Iran. The fourth was African Affairs. The Office of African Affairs consisted of two FSO's and three civil service officers because there were only three countries--Ethiopia, South

Africa, Liberia. Only three that were independent; the rest were all colonies at the time. And then from NEA I went off to Baghdad.

Q: Baghdad, this was 1956 you went to Baghdad?

GORDON: Right.

Q: What was your position there?

GORDON: My position was in the political section. I did some regular political reporting but, basically, I was the working-level representative of the embassy the Baghdad Pact Organization--an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist organization which held its first ministerial level meeting in the spring of 1956. Just like we have our US NATO, a much bigger operation, of course. We have a whole embassy in Brussels accredited to NATO. The Baghdad Pact Organization meetings were held in Baghdad. It was the central headquarters. I did most of the reporting to Washington on all aspects of BPO affairs and the presentation of the American position on these matters.

I, basically, ended up as sort of a special assistant to the ambassador because he was the US representative to the Baghdad Pact Organization meetings at the ambassadorial level which took place every two or three weeks.

Q: Well, how really serious was the Baghdad Pact as an entity?

GORDON: That's a good question. We were not a member, strangely enough. We were "associated" with the BPO. The members were the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Iraq. We never did become a member. Partly, I think, it was not to get too involved any further in the Middle East--particularly the Arab-Israeli dispute.

All those countries had their own reasons for joining the Pact. Iraq, basically, felt it would strengthen its hand regarding Israel. Pakistan thought it would strengthen its hand concerning its conflict with India. Turkey and Iran were strongly anti-Soviet and both hoped to receive additional military aid from the US and Britain after they joined the BPO.

The BPO had no military forces but it did had an intelligence operation. The BPO did some counter-subversion work. But, basically, The BPO provided a forum for an exchange of views on money matters and it met every six months or so at the ministerial level. The first meeting was in the spring of 1956. Ambassador Loy Henderson went as the US representative to the first meeting in Tehran and I went to serve as his spear carrier. This was in Iran. Then, later, there were meetings in Karachi and in Ankara. Everything was going along fine, they were cooperating, exchanging information, working on economic projects, such as communications, transportation and power until the morning of July 14, 1958.

Q: Before we get to that, I'd like you to give your impression of how you saw Iraq when you arrived there in 1956 to '57, before the 1958 revolt. How did you see the situation?

GORDON: I think most of us saw it as a country which was not democratic at all. After all, there was a king, and a crown prince, and a very powerful prime minister, Nuri al-Said. The Iraqis managed a more efficient use of their oil resources than in most countries. In addition they were putting in big irrigation projects and resettlement of people into areas which were better suited for agriculture. And when you got down to the bottom line from the US point of view, we had every reason to believe that Iraq was, basically, associated with the United States in its views toward that part of the world-- which was to minimize to every extent possible any influence of the Soviet Union or the Communist Party. And they were very effective in that, so we were very satisfied with that state of affairs at that time. Of course, Iraq strongly opposed the creation of Israel and US assistance to it.

Q: From what you were gathering, because these interviews are designed to pick up the personal side, the observations, and perceptions, but how did our embassy feel towards Nuri al-Said, for example?

GORDON: Well, the embassy, and the government in general, were very approving of Nuri al-Said because he was cooperative with us in various plans we had. Remember, this was the period of the Cold War still, and anything we could do to suppress communism in that part of the world we did. And he felt the same way we did, so, therefore, we considered it a very happy arrangement and a very happy marriage. I think we tended to overlook the unrest among the Iraqi intellectuals and in the military. We weren't aware of how strongly they felt because, I don't care what anybody says, we were all caught flat-footed the morning of July 14, 1958 with that revolution. I don't care what they said, there's nobody that said it was coming because we were caught completely by surprise. Also the military, I think, felt isolated from the Arab countries. Obviously, the other Arab countries were not at all in favor of the Baghdad Pact because they felt we were the great Zionist devil or the friend of the Zionist devils. I think that's one of the reasons that motivated the military to pull this coup.

Q: Well, was it also that we were keeping our eye on the communists and not looking at, you might say, the more nationalists or Islamic side of things?

GORDON: To a certain extent. And, again, I think we were certainly not aware of how much dissatisfaction there was in the military, the Army, primarily, with the King, the Crowned Prince, and the Nuri regime. They felt there was no real representation of the people. But more importantly, they were unhappy with the association with the United States and Great Britain because it isolated them in the Arab world. I think that was one of the main reasons and we were not aware of it.

I became a little bit aware of it just a few days before the revolution when a professor came through, a man by the name of George Lenczowski, a great expert on the Middle

East that I had known him at Berkeley. I had a couple of young Iraqi friends. One was sort of the equivalent of the Director of the Bureau of Budget here, now teaching at St. Andrews in Scotland; and the other man who was the first Eisenhower Fellow from Iraq. They came by my house for dinner with the professor and they relayed how very unhappy they were with the regime and no room for opposition. They were unhappy but I just thought they were somewhat radical. They were, but they represented an element that you didn't see too much because it wasn't necessarily healthy for them. You had to get to know them pretty well before they would level with you.

Q: You were dealing with the Baghdad Pact, did you have any relationship or did any of your American military colleagues get close to any of the military?

GORDON: It's surprising that they didn't have any advance knowledge. We had a MAG, a military assistance advisory group. And we had Army, Navy, Air Force attachés. After all, the whole attaché system is an intelligence operation, as we know. And then on top of that we had an American major general and quite a military contingent accredited to the military side of the Baghdad Pact. And none of them picked that up, either.

Q: CIA?

GORDON: We had a small CIA staff.

Q: Well, I suppose, of course, we were sort of the enemy, in a way, of those that did it. Would you say this was because of our ties to Israel?

GORDON: That's part of it. Then on the political side and on the military side, there was this Arab Socialist Movement, the so-called Baathist Movement and they were very much involved. Whatever opposition it was, it was the Baathists. I remember, after the revolution, when I had to go down and cross the lines on the other side of the city and negotiate the passenger list for evacuating our dependents because the consular officer -- can we turn this off for a minute?

[Tape recorder turned off]

[Ambassador Gordon resuming]

GORDON: The consular officer was Roberta McKay, a very effective, able consular officer. When it came time to evacuate all of our dependents and a good portion of the AID mission and so forth, and reducing our presence drastically, the Foreign Office was clear down at the other end of town so I was instructed to go down and negotiate these passenger lists, thinking that it would not be appropriate for a woman in an Arab country to go tromping around.

And so I found out if I wanted to get anything done there were two officers in the Foreign Office who knew me who also had secretly belonged to the Bath party, this Arab Socialist Union Party, and now were able to come out from under cover and they were the ones

who had the power to go ahead and clear these things. We did not break relations or anything, but it was a very, very touchy period.

Q: We're talking about July 14, 1958. And this thing came as a surprise. What happened to you at that time?

GORDON: The actual coup, as I understand, was one or two o'clock in the morning. They attacked the palace and killed the king and his uncle, who I think had been the regent while the king was under age, and members of the royal family. They did not get Nuri al-Said, who they found four or five days later and then killed him. They burned the British Embassy and the USIA.

So that morning I was getting ready to go to work about 7:15. My wife was going to drop me off and then she was going to meet some other American ladies and some Iraqi ladies. They were going down into the bazaar area just to poke around and see what they couldn't do without. We only lived about four blocks from the embassy. Normally, I just walked but I had to drive because she was going on. We turned the corner at the embassy right there at the back gate. Then I could see at the front gate there was a tank with Iraqi soldiers sitting up in it. I could not imagine what it could possibly be. So I just told her to turn around and go home.

I walked by and they let me in. I remember walking up the steps of the embassy and John Gatch, (an Embassy Political Officer) was standing on the steps. I said, "John, what's happened? What's going on here?" He said, "There's been a revolution." We could see the smoke from the British Council building and the British Embassy. That was my first knowledge of it and his, too.

Q: There had been no sort of telephoning around?

GORDON: No.

Q: I guess you really hadn't had a system set up where people --

GORDON: No.

Q: Were the tanks and soldiers there to protect you?

GORDON: That was what they told us. And I guess that is true, even though I wasn't sure at times which way the gun barrel of the tank was aimed, in or out. They maintained that was what they were there for. And I must say that, in contrast to the British, we didn't have any problems. Nobody made a move toward us. It was a big embassy compound with the ambassador's residence and the chancellery attached to it. The DCM had a house in the compound. And our consular section was inside the compound, but the Econ and administrative offices were all across the street in a series of buildings that we had rented.

I must say for awhile I was among the most pampered members of the Foreign Service. My family was supposed to leave Baghdad on transfer to Egypt, we thought at that time, on the 15th, so we were all packed up and everything. When my wife and children were evacuated, the DCM very nicely invited me to stay with him inside the compound. And the medical officer, Dr. George Mishtowt, and he also was invited to move in. So the three of us were bachelors there. And Dr. Mishtowt's major responsibility was the children and dependents of the embassy. They were all gone so he didn't have much to do. We appointed him mess sergeant and we had very high quality food there for a couple of months. I've always said it was interesting that we had the one doctor and two patients in that house. I finally was allowed to leave in September.

Q: In the first place, the ambassador was Waldemar Gallman? Can you describe his style of operation?

GORDON: Yes. He was what I would call a real ambassador of the old school. He had come into the Foreign Service in the late 1920's. And like others, I think Loy Henderson is an example, and Cavendish Cannon, who had had their first post in Danzig or one of the Baltic countries. I probably saw as much of him as any Embassy officer did because it turned out it was just much more efficient for the ambassador and me to work, together, just the two of us, when I needed assistance or clearances.

But, basically, I prepared the US agenda for the meetings of the council which, as I say, met every two to three weeks. And if there were other items on the agenda I was supposed to get those and get all the background papers so the ambassador was briefed on every item. And so I had to work with him a lot. And he would say, "This is fine," or "I want a little bit more on that." So I was in and out of his office a lot. He and I went together to the Baghdad Pact meetings in Karachi and again we traveled together to the Baghdad Pact meeting in Ankara.

So I saw, as I say, a lot of him and I became very fond of him. He was a fairly strict fellow but it was a real pleasure to work for him. I certainly learned a lot working with him. He had had two prior ambassadorships, Poland and South Africa. He had a very big operation in Iraq because we had a big AID mission and plus the military. I remember at the big staff meetings we were quite a roomful.

Q: You arrived at the embassy and you had a really pretty nasty situation. You had a lot of Americans there and what did you all do?

GORDON: Oh, you're talking about the 14th? Well, the first thing was to try to establish what actually took place; if there was any anti-American element. Things seemed sort of quiet. We still had some of our stuff there because we had a radio that we tried to listen to. And I said I'm more concerned about what was going to happen in the next 24 hours than I was the revolution because we, in the embassy, some of us, were shown a top secret telegram saying that the marines were going to land in Beirut the next morning. Now I and some of my colleagues thought that that might generate more of an anti-

American backlash in Iraq than the actual fact that we had been associated closely with the prior regime. So nothing happened. There was no anti-American demonstrations.

I still don't know the story in all its details, but there were two or three Americans that were staying at the new Baghdad Hotel, the newest hotel. And somehow they were thought to be Jordanians. Anyway, they were grabbed and they were taken away in a truck and, as I understand, were just torn to pieces.

Q: I was looking up an account. One was Eugene Burns, a newsman, and the other was George Colley, from Bechtel.

GORDON: Right.

Q: But there weren't mobs, basically, roaming the streets ripping people apart?

GORDON: No.

Q: I have to say my perspective, I was a vice consul in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I also knew about the Lebanese landings and we were scared, too, because we thought there might be a tremendous uprising of Arab wrath, plus the revolt in Baghdad. But we sort of had the picture of mobs roaming the streets, ripping anybody apart who looked cross-eyed.

GORDON: I must say I was a little bit uneasy. I was just going to take my own car and drive alone without a driver. Anyway, we ended up taking one of the more beat up cars and a driver just because I didn't know about parking. And I did see the result of some mob action; and that was some Iraqis were still hanging by their necks from some of the lampposts on a couple of the streets I had to go through to get to the other end of town. And there were a couple of places where young boys cut down some of these people and were dragging them through the streets. But there was no big mob action, you know, thousands of people in the streets. Some of it was going on downtown and we just kept away from there. It sort of cooled down and never reached the part of town we were in.

Q: Well, why was the British Embassy attacked and we weren't?

GORDON: That's a good question. The British were far more closely associated with the Iraqi regime. After all, the British were the ones who really helped establish the Hashemite dynasty. That was established at the end of World War I after the Turks were thrown out of there. Just like Iran, they had a very close relationship, which we were aware of. But there was a sort of feeling that this was an area of predominantly British influence. I think because of that--they had been instrumental in establishing the Hashemite Dynasty--they were considered more of a target.

I don't think they were ordered to do that. The British Embassy was clear on the other side of the river, quite a distance from us. I don't have any reason to believe that those who

pulled off the coup, at the same time said go down and sack the British Embassy and their equivalent of our United States Information Agency.

Q: British Council.

GORDON: But then they had another one, too. You know, the British were very careful to maintain that the Council had nothing to do with the British Government. It was a private operation. And then they had a press office, to boot. I think that was the one that was burned. There was a distinction that nobody really believed; though the British made a big distinction between that. You were in Dhahran at the time of the revolution?

Q: Yes, I was.

GORDON: I came down and visited Dhahran in an attaché plane in the spring of 1958. I got a ride down because I had never seen that part of the world.

Q: Well, I had just arrived at that time. How did we deal with the new government? I mean, what were you doing and how did the embassy deal with Qasim?

GORDON: Well, I think they let it be known that there was no direct antagonism towards the United States. They were a little bit unhappy that we had started evacuating our people which, to them, indicated we were not sure of their ability to maintain peace and order. And they maintained they were able to do so and we need have no fear, and there was no anti-American sentiment that was going to manifest itself in any dangerous way. They were going to see to it that that was the case.

And so, as I say, one of the first things they did, they went out and locked up the Baghdad Pact headquarters and sealed it. And, as I say, my job, which was 98 percent Baghdad Pact, I just went over to the regular political section and started doing reporting telegrams on what was going on and what we could find out. So we started deciding who was going to be evacuated and who wasn't. All wives and children were evacuated.

Q: Was the decision to evacuate made at the embassy or was this Washington?

GORDON: Well, it was the embassy's recommendation, which Washington approved. It's one of those things that you have to get an okay from Washington.

Q: Oh, I know. But sometimes I've heard of instances where Washington gets much more nervous than the people on the ground. But in this case, it was felt in Baghdad that it was best to get the people out?

GORDON: Yes. And with the Marines in Beirut, it was one of those things that it seemed more prudent to get them out of there. A lot of the wives were very unhappy about going. Oh, boy, we had a hard time. And I was told later, not too much later, the ambassador was having a hard time with his wife to get her to go. He said, "You've just got to go. You've

got to go because I can't ask these other people to send their wives and children out and you stay here." "Well, why not?" Anyway, he prevailed and she went. I remember some of the wives were really unhappy about going and they didn't see any need for it.

But then, as I say, I stayed on until September doing regular political reporting, and press reporting, and anything that a political officer does. I knew where I was going because if the revolution had not come I would have left around July 20th for Point Said where I was to be principal officer for one year. After a year I was to move up to Cairo to be in the political section. I can remember talking to the ambassador and saying, "Don't you think I ought to go?" And him saying, "No, no. You stay right here. We need you."

So finally one day I went to him and said, "Mr. Ambassador, we've got a real problem here about my leaving." He says, "What's that?" I said, "Well, you know, I'm from Colorado and trout fishing season ends the last day of September. And here it is about the 15th or so, if I don't start to get out of here, I'm going to miss fishing season." He said, "Okay, go ahead." Because my job, as such, didn't exist anymore. I mean, I was a busy officer, you know, working day and night as you do in those situations. But I still remember he said, "Okay, you can go if it's that important to you." We all knew I was going to go. This just helped me establish the actual departure date.

Q: Did you go to Egypt or you went to Khartoum?

GORDON: I went to Khartoum. While in Baghdad I had a brilliant career there as far as promotions were concerned. I had two promotions in nine months. I was there when they created classes seven and eight so I was promoted from class four down to class five. And then eight or nine months later I was promoted back to class four again. So I consider that was two promotions in nine months, one from four to five and one from five to four.

Anyway, I got back to Washington and was poking around. It turned out that one reason they wanted to keep Port Said going was that, after the canal war and all the destruction there, the Eastern Europeans had opened up a lot of consulates there. So I thought that would be fine. And then Gallman told me, you know, you get a post of your own fairly early on you will learn a lot of things that will be valuable to you the rest of your career because you've got to do everything. I said, "Fine."

So I went to French language school which was the principal non-Arabic language spoken in Port Said. I was in the last class of the language school that was in Nice, France. And while I was there I was promoted to class three. My family had come to stay the last month at Nice.

About three or four days before we were to leave for Port Said I got a telegram saying I was assigned to Khartoum instead. No consultation, no nothing. Those days they just sent you telegrams. And there I was saying, oh boy, there's my car, everything sitting right on the dock in Port Said. All I've got to do is cross the border, technically, to go clear myself with the embassy in Cairo and everything would be there. Because we had such bad luck with my first assignment; because we arrived in the summer of 1956 there was the Suez

War. And that bottled up everything. We couldn't get our stuff through anywhere and we were months getting our stuff. And then we were months getting it out because of the coup d'etat and the revolution in Iraq. So I thought, boy, this was going to be neat. Well, I went to Khartoum and never saw the stuff for another four months.

Q: Before we move to Khartoum there is something I meant to ask. What was our evaluation of Qasim at the time you were there? I mean, how did you all see him?

GORDON: Well, we evaluated him as, obviously, an intelligent, effective guy. One measurement, you might say, to your question is his ability to organize this revolution, this coup, so quietly that not one word leaked out anywhere in a land full of people who worked for the king. So, therefore, he was given high marks for planning and knowing how to organize a complicated thing like the coup. He represented a radical Arab point of view, which was not in our interests at all, particularly vis-a-vis the existence of Israel. But, nobody feared that he was going to be like Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. It was nothing like that. I found them a civilized group of people to work with, as I think everybody else in the embassy did.

Q: So it wasn't as sometimes happens when the military takes over, they have their own agenda but they also don't really understand the niceties of diplomacy and all, and tend often to shut themselves off from contact with foreign groups, particularly ones they feel should be hostile?

GORDON: Sure. However, they also got rid of practically all of the civilian ministers of the government who had headed up all the departments--most of them were jailed. One minister spent two weeks, at least, as a refugee in the ambassador's residence.

Q: But this group, did they open up to you? I mean, were you able to go to them or was it pretty difficult?

GORDON: For what we had to do to get along, there didn't seem to be any real problem. But there was no great friendship at all with us, either, because we had been closely associated with the regime they overthrew.

Q: Anyway, moving to Khartoum, you were there as chief of the political section. What was the situation, as you saw it, at that time in Khartoum?

GORDON: Well, the whole time I was there the country was under a military dictatorship. And except for a few ministers, the council of ministers were all military officers. There were some--finance, foreign affairs, education, there might have been a couple of others--civilian ministers co-opted by the military regime. But it was a benign military dictatorship the whole time I was there. And the military officers who were members of the military council, they had nothing to do with any of the embassies. We did all our work through the civilian people. I did what I had to do through the Foreign

Office. And when we were negotiating a PL 480 for a program with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we also worked with Finance and Agriculture Ministry civil servants.

Boy, they had some really nice, bright people. Several were Oxford, Cambridge, London School of Economics graduates, highly educated senior civil servants. Whenever we needed to get a decision, rarely the ambassador would go see the Foreign Minister. Usually, it was done at the Director General level in the Foreign Office. That's who we met with if there was anything important.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

GORDON: His name was James Moose. He died yesterday.

Q: He died yesterday, yes.

GORDON: I was there April of 1959 to April of 1961. I think he was there 1958 to 1962, it said in the paper this morning.

Q: How was he as an ambassador?

GORDON: He was even more of the old type of ambassador, you know, than Gallman.

Q: I was asking you about Ambassador Moose.

GORDON: He was very much by the book. I can remember, anytime I would raise the thought of questioning Washington on something, he'd say, "No, they issue instructions and we carry them out." I said, "But I don't think it makes sense." He said, "We carry out what they say." "Yes, sir." And that was the end of that.

I remember one time there was a long telegram. It must have been 12 pages. It was a big thing that we had been asked to do. I remember the head of the code room came to me and he said, "You know, the courier is coming through tomorrow. It's going to take six or seven hours to punch this thing all out and punch it back up." You know, we didn't have scanners and that kind of stuff. It was still just a little better than the one-time pad system. And I went to the Ambassador and he said, "No, they said telegraph the answer." I said, "But this will be in there just as fast." He said, "No, they said send a telegraph reply." So we sent a telegraph reply. I mean, he was very much by the book. You know, the embassy might propose, but the Department disposed, if you will.

We had a great section there. There were four of us for the political, economic and consular sections. Cleo Noel was my deputy. It should have been the other way around.

Q: Cleo Noel?

GORDON: Cleo Noel, who was killed by the PLO when he had later become the ambassador. He was my deputy and he had already been there a couple years. He was an Arabist. And just because I happened to have made class three ahead of him, I was head of the section. It should have been the other way around, as I mentioned.

The economic/consular officer was François Dickman, one of the best Arabists in the Foreign Service. He later became ambassador a couple times in the Gulf. And the junior officer, in his first post, was Bob Oakley.

Q: Who is now ambassador to Pakistan.

GORDON: And has been ambassador to Zaire, and ambassador to Somalia. So we had quite a section there.

And to show the detail in which Ambassador and Mrs. Moose could organize things, when it came the annual Fourth of July, Independence Day celebration, we were like everybody else. We had a big cocktail party in the evening. There was a big garden out in front of the residence. The ambassador would call Cleo in, Cleo was the protocol officer, too. And they took that big garden and cut it into four equal parts on a piece of paper. Out of the embassy staff a certain number were assigned to each one of those sections so there wouldn't be anybody standing there with nobody to talk to. And the others were to go down this long walk to meet people and escort them up to the ambassador. Highly organized down to the last T.

Q: Here you had, obviously, from their later history, an extremely qualified political section, but you had a benevolent dictatorship. What the devil were you doing? I mean, what was all this talent working on?

GORDON: There were demands from Washington like there is all the time for reports on this, what about that, evaluation of the south, what is the situation of the civil war. I went down to Juba, which is right on the border of Kenya. (To show you how big a country that part of the world is, you got in an airplane at Cairo and flew 1,000 miles directly south and you got to Khartoum. You flew another 1,000 miles and you got to Juba, just on the border with Kenya.)

I flew down there. I got an AID driver, and carry-all to visit the area. I arranged this all through the Minister of Interior and stayed with local governors and sub-governors. But I traveled from the Ethiopian border, along the border of Kenya, Uganda, down into the Congo and back up, and then got out in Western Sudan and flew back with reports on what was going on down there.

Q: Well, what was the situation because the south is, basically, a black south versus an Arab north?

GORDON: Yes.

Q: What was the state at that time?

GORDON: Well, then there were already rumblings. That was the reason I had to check in so they knew where I was all the time. I would check in for the radio net when I would go from place to place. And if I hadn't appeared, well, then, people would start getting nervous. There was no fighting then, but there were rumblings and so forth.

One of the guys that put me up was a man by the name of William Deng Nhial. He was a sub-governor. He was the only black sub-governor that put me up. All these governors had guest houses and it was all arranged that I would stay there. And we had quite a conversation, one of the most interesting about the roles of blacks, and so on, and so forth. And he later became very active in the independence movement and was ambushed and killed.

There were always demands from Washington. What about this, what about the assessment on that? And we were always concerned about the Egyptians because this was the time of Nasser and we were afraid that Nasser's agents were in the Sudan stirring the pot against us. The Soviets and the Chinese Communists had big embassies. We were trying to assess the power of the civilians versus the military and we tried to influence the military to see things the way we did.

And from time to time the ambassador, very rarely, would go see General Abboud, who was the chief of the military council, sort of the president of the country. It was a military dictatorship and we had to work through them to get things done: AID programs, negotiating what we were going to do and what was feasible, including getting some aid down south and consultation concerning Sudanese positions on many matters in the UN.

And also we were always concerned about University of Khartoum students. Several times they demonstrated against us at the embassy. It seemed every place I went I ended up with rocks and pieces of glass on my desk. I mean, it was very active.

In the economic section, as I say, Bob Oakley would switch over and help Fran on his consular work or take over the consular section when Fran went on leave or something like that. We were kept fairly busy trying to assess the situation and trying, basically, to influence that military council to act in ways that were not detrimental to our own objectives. And we did that primarily through the civilian side.

Q: Did you feel you were fairly effective on that?

GORDON: I think so. And the senior civil servants were all great guys. They would come to our house for dinners and we would sit and argue about this and that, and even the Director General of the Ministry of the Interior, of all things. And then we had the man who is now the Prime Minister. He was a young fellow then and he, Bob and Phyllis Oakley all became friends. The Oakleys helped his sister get a place in an American

University. The father thought he wouldn't like this, but finally the old Mahdi said okay. I think Bob and Phyllis had a lot to do with getting her to come to the states.

Q: I'd like to move on. You left Khartoum in 1961 and then went to the War College in 1964.

GORDON: Personnel in 1961 to '63, two years. Head of European Personnel.

Q: I would like to move to your appointment as Deputy Chief of Mission, the DCM in Dar es Salaam. Was it called Tanzania in those days?

GORDON: It became Tanzania while I was there.

Q: In the first place, what was the country called at the time?

GORDON: It was Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Tanganyika had been its name clear back in the 19th century. I agree with you, we're way over the time, but probably the most fascinating, important work I did was in Personnel, the three or four tours I had in it. But it's nothing, basically, for overseas.

Q: I thought we would come back to Personnel a little later.

GORDON: Fine. Anyway, I went to the War College. And like all the FSOs at the War College, we all knew that we were going to have to have new assignments at the end of the War College. While I was at the War College, I was promoted to class two and so I became eligible for a DCM job by the criteria then existing. When Dar es Salaam came open they asked me if I was interested. I said I was, very much so, because it sounded like an interesting post. Although I had been in the Sudan and while they are both in Africa, they are quite different countries. Just like Morocco and Zambia are in Africa, but there's no comparison. And so I said I would be interested in that job and I got it. And within a month after the War College I was in Dar es Salaam as DCM.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

GORDON: It was William Leonhart.

Q: How would you describe him as an ambassador?

GORDON: He was a very hard driving man who felt that if the embassy hours were 7:30 to 2:30, but if he wasn't there until 7 o'clock at night he felt he hadn't put in a full day. And he liked people around writing reports, and recommendations, and analyses. He was very demanding on himself and his staff and, at times, he was a difficult man to work for. He probably didn't think so.

Yet, I can remember one time later I was being inspected. And the inspector was a very senior inspector. I can't remember his name. He asked me, "Well, how was it working for Bill Leonhart? I've understood from several sources he's a very difficult guy to work for, very demanding." I said, "Well, after all, I only worked for him six months." Because I was declared persona non grata, I only had a six-months tour with him there. As I say, every time anybody would take anything to him he would have to completely rewrite it. I didn't mind that, that's the prerogative of the ambassador. But the fact that eight out of ten times he improved what I did, I didn't like that at all.

Q: What was the situation in Tanganyika at the time?

GORDON: As I say, in the spring of 1964 it had become Tanzania and had united with Zanzibar. And we had an office in Zanzibar comprised of two officers, Frank Carlucci, who has gone on to great fame since then. And the other one was a fellow by the name of Donald Peterson, who is the current ambassador to Dar es Salaam. That was a subordinate post since it was a consulate reporting through Dar es Salaam.

I arrived there in June and was out in January, and also out three weeks in the London Hospital for Tropical Diseases, so I didn't spend an awful lot of time there. I just barely got myself oriented where I started producing something when the ambassador was called in by the President who told him that Frank and I were declared persona non grata and we had 24 hours to get out of town. Never gave any reason or anything, which you don't have to do.

And one of my ambitions has always been to find out exactly what the reason was. We found out through a quirk that they had tapped the telephones and were listening to conversations I had with Carlucci. He would phone me or I would phone him back and forth just keeping in touch on things. And we had a long discussion a couple days before we were declared PNG. He had called me and said the Independence Day Anniversary of Zanzibar was coming up. I said yes. He said, "I'd like to do something. Some message of some kind."

I said, "Don't forget it's now Tanzania. It's no longer Tanganyika and Zanzibar. It's Tanzania." I said, "I want to move fairly slowly on this." I said, "Let's wait and see what Nigeria, Ghana, Great Britain, Members of the Commonwealth, let's see what the members of the Commonwealth countries do about this type of thing, whether they are going to send a message or not. And if they do, then that will give us the ammunition we need to go back to Washington and maybe get a message out of Soapy Williams or somebody." Now at that time we weren't aware that our lines were being tapped. Now, a few days later we were declared PNG and no reason given.

Many theories of why. One was the fact that I had used the word ammunition with Frank and, theoretically, it was interpreted that Frank and I had plotted against the Government of Zanzibar behind the ambassador's back through direct contacts with CIA. Joe Palmer at that time was Director General and he sent a big rocket around to every post in the

Foreign Service saying to be very, very careful when using slang. This and that could be misinterpreted and so forth. Giving credence to the fact that that was the real reason.

Well, baloney. I never had believed that. I still don't know. I can remember when I was going out as ambassador to Mauritius. I went over to CIA for the usual briefings. Frank Carlucci, at that time, was Deputy Director of CIA. I went up and had a cup of coffee with him. I said, "Frank, now that you've got this job, find out what the hell was the reason." He said, "I've never been completely satisfied, either. And I can tell you there's not much here because one of the first curiosity files I poked into was that one."

About two years ago, three years ago, I got a letter from Frank telling me that he had met a very high Soviet official at a reception. And this Soviet official told him that they had set us up on this and that they had fiddled with the tape of what we said and didn't say. I remember Nyerere, the President of Tanzania, said to our ambassador, "Well, they used a word which I think is a very insulting word and they think I wouldn't know that word." And the word was -- whatever the word was. I couldn't repeat the word now and it had no meaning to us. So that made me feel that those guys had been fiddling with the tape, too. Anyway, this may be the answer, that the Russians set us up.

Q: A disinformation campaign.

GORDON: Yes. The early days of it.

Q: What was your impression of President Nyerere?

GORDON: Of course, when we were there he was the great intellect in both the African independence movement and the movement of "we will correct all of our ills with a well-organized socialist directed society." And, of course, we see that that brought him to no good. It helped ruin what agricultural base they had in the first place. I didn't have too much of an impression except I knew he was very highly thought of.

He was a great pain in the neck already to the United States. But he was somebody we had to work with and he could be very helpful because he had an enormous amount of influence with other black African leaders. He was so revered as the great father and so on, and so forth. And I understand that he at one time was trying to be very helpful as one of the front line states in the Namibia-Angola-South African negotiations that have just come to fruition in the last months or so.

Q: Moving on, you went to Rome as a political military officer. What was your principal work there?

GORDON: Well, as the ambassador and the DCM said, it was the best job in the embassy. And I had some good assistants there. My first assistant, who broke me in, was a fellow by the name of Allen Holmes, who later was Assistant Secretary for Political Military Affairs and was the Senior Deputy in the European Affairs before that.

Q: And Ambassador to Portugal.

GORDON: Italy was a member of NATO so one of my main jobs was to supplement or work with the embassy in, first, Paris, and then Brussels on Italian attitudes in cooperation with NATO. It was sort of my job working the Italian Foreign Office end for them and then they worked up there. So any of the complicated things in NATO--level of forces, disposition of forces, trying to have common equipment, and so forth--that was one aspect. We kept very busy just reporting on NATO affairs and the Italian attitude on the thousands of things that popped up in the whole NATO spectrum.

The other, which was the most fun, was the liaison between the diplomatic and the military world regarding our many facilities in Italy. And I worked directly with the Chief of Cabinet to the Minister of Defense on this. The Director of NATO Affairs in the Italian Foreign Office said, "Always keep me informed. Bring the papers to me but then go ahead and work with the Ministry of Defense if that's what you think is necessary." And so I worked a lot with the Ministry of Defense on any problems regarding strikes, pay and other matters regarding Italians working on our bases.

Q: As we both know, having both served as consul generals in Italy later on, strikes and pay remain a constant theme in American-Italian relations on the bases.

GORDON: Oh, yes. Of course, the communists represented over 35 percent of the vote in Italy while I was there. They were very powerful. But every time they would try to do something about getting rid of our bases, the Italians working at these bases would demonstrate to keep them and thus keep their jobs. (In other words, when it came down to the crux, their good-paying jobs on all these bases were far more important than ideology). We had big air bases in the North. At Livorno we had a big logistics base. Down in Sicily we had naval bases. We had naval bases at Naples and the Sixth Fleet moved its headquarters to Gaeta, just north of Naples. We had them all over the place.

Q: I know, even in my experience with the communist mayor of Naples, his main theme was can you bring more of the Sixth Fleet in for repairs?

GORDON: Exactly.

Q: Because of jobs.

GORDON: Sure.

Q: We'll be coming back to Italy, but to move on, maybe we can cover at this point two terms that you served with the State Department dealing basically with grievances and other matters. I wonder if you could talk about that. You left Rome in 1970. And you were in the State Department from 1970 to 1972.

GORDON: Yes. Almost two years to the day.

Q: And then you came back to the States in 1978 and 1980 working in sort of the personnel field. And I wonder if we could sort of combine those two together. What were you doing?

GORDON: Well, 1970 to 1972 was the first significant stirrings of pressure from the American Foreign Service Association that there were inequities all around the place, individual inequities and inequities regarding arbitrary handling of rules and regulations regarding pay allowances, promotions, all that. So they decided to appoint an ombudsman.

They should have always used that word but there was a congressman that objected to it and so the Department kowtowed and never used the word. So I had the title of Special Assistant for Welfare and Grievances and I was right in the immediate office of William Macomber, who was the Under Secretary for Management at the time. So anybody who had any gripes, they brought them to me and I tried to see what I could do about them.

I had some success. There were a variety of problems such as contested promotions or lack of promotions; contested assignments; contested travel vouchers; people who got in trouble with security on whatever matter, even alleged homosexual activity; and people with debts. On the civil service side there were people caught in dead-end jobs who I helped get them transferred to other places.

Another important matter concerned locally-hired American secretaries whose husbands, were in communications. We loved to have those couples in Africa and in the Middle East where you had this combination and only had to provide one house. But then what would happen, when the husband was transferred to the next post, the dependent spouse would be terminated and have to start all over again. They had no career of their own and no building up towards any type of seniority or pension. I got that changed.

Q: One person with all the complaints of a 25,000 person Department? I mean, how did you operate?

GORDON: It was by persuasion and, fortunately, I had the backing of the Director General of the Foreign Service and Macomber. And the answer to your question is that it became too heavy. And, first of all, the last I knew, we had an office of three or four people in the Department, which was the grievance staff on the Department side, and then an independent grievance board of, I guess, a dozen people or so listening to grievances and passing out judgments. So I was replaced by a very structured, comprehensive organization, which is the grievance system of the Department now. And when I came back the next time there was a lot of agitation on --
[Brief interruption by wife.]

Q: On this personnel, and we're really talking about two eras, but were you the first ombudsman?

GORDON: And the only one, yes.

Q: I remember the period because the State Department in its personnel policies was a little bit slow, but it was part of, you might say, the revolt of the '60's.

GORDON: Right.

Q: There used to be an organization called JEFSOC, which was the junior officer, which actually carried some weight. I was in Vietnam and we felt the same sort of social stirrings that were felt elsewhere.

GORDON: Remember, also, at this time there was the consular officers had an organization of their own.

Q: Oh, yes. I was very much involved in that.

GORDON: And then there was the, I think they called it the September 15th Group, or 17th of something, which was the secretaries' organization. Right in the middle of my tenure as ombudsman we had Thomas, who committed suicide.

Q: John Thomas.

GORDON: Not John.

Q: I'm not sure if it was John Thomas.

GORDON: Charles.

Q: Yes. I might, for the record, say that Charles Thomas had been selected out, I believe. And about a year afterwards committed suicide and it was claimed, particularly by his wife, that it was because his file had been mixed up or it had been unfair. I can't remember the exact details of that.

GORDON: At least one thing came out of that because I remember when I had been in Personnel before one of the most bitter things I ever had to do was to talk to officers who had been selected out at class four or below because in those days, before 1972, if you were a class four officer and you got one year's pay and that was it. You had to be class three before you were eligible for a pension. And this incident, at least, sparked what evolved into the new time in class of roughly 20 to 22 years between tenure and being selected out, even if you never got up to the senior Foreign Service. But you name it, somebody had some kind of a complaint.

Q: For somebody who is interested in the Foreign Service reacting, particularly in the early years, did you find that the organization was responsive or it never thought about it? Because there was the impression that this was an organization that was essentially run by men who often had their own money, who had been political officers and very successful people who really didn't understand the problems that were faced by those who were more modest in their achievements and also in their income and all that. Did you find this a responsive body?

GORDON: Yes. What you seem to be describing to me is something long before the '70's; I mean, when you associate money and position in the Department.

Q: Well, let's not say money, but let's say real achievers; I mean, very hard working, very successful officers who moved up in the political part.

GORDON: Most of the achievers in the Department were people who, it seemed to me, at least in my experience, the guys that really got to the top were people who really didn't mind being there until 7 o'clock at night, coming in Saturday and this and that. The long hours and hard work were one of the hallmarks of the achiever. Whether or not it should be necessary is another long, philosophical problem that I don't know the answer to. There was the so-called establishment in the Foreign Service. I've heard that since I came in, that he belongs to the establishment and he doesn't, and so on and so forth.

It was also, as you point out, the first serious stirrings of the women's movement. The Oakley's were a good example of this. It was during that period we reversed the policy where if the wife and the husband were both FSO's and they got married, then she had to resign. And now we have the tandem system so you don't have to resign. It's not simple to operate, but that was another outcome of that same period. Things have developed over the years with pressures from various and sundry elements. And then this last tour the Department was much criticized throughout Washington for having no program for the handicapped--"the Department was run by elitists who had the physique of astronauts, et cetera." So I was brought back to try to do something about this.

Q: How responsive did you find, say, William Macomber? Was he your immediate boss?

GORDON: Yes. There was nobody between us. That's one reason it worked.

Q: How responsive was he?

GORDON: He was very responsive. The point of it is, if I needed his ear, if I wanted a committee of three FSO CM's or I wanted advice from some people to go look into the details of this or that and give a recommendation, he would always sign the letters appointing those people to do this. I mean, he was very cooperative. Basically, 90 percent of my dealings were with the administrative area of the Department and personnel. That's where people's problems are.

Then, when I came back to be Coordinator for the Handicapped in 1978, I was not reporting directly then to the Under Secretary of Management. I wasn't even reporting directly to the Director General, but to his deputy. And the idea of making room for the handicapped, it was a hard, hard thing. You had the junior officers against it. They just thought it was unnecessary and it was going to weaken the service. Well, there was resistance everywhere.

And the reason that I finally got a program through, which was setting up a committee that was empowered to override the medical division recommendations of whether somebody should be cleared to enter the Foreign Service or not, was that I got the support of David Newsom, who is an old friend of mine and at that time was Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and George Vest, who was a War College classmate and at that time was Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. They were both members of the Board of the Foreign Service and they helped push this program through. Most importantly, Under Secretary for Management, Ben ReAd supported the proposed handicapped program and without him it would never have been accepted. In general, hardly anybody in the Department really wanted a program for the handicapped. They hoped that, by appointing someone to look into this matter, they could all go back and never hear about it again, but they weren't able to do it.

Q: What were the issues?

GORDON: The issue was can somebody who has a physical handicap, be it sight, hearing, needing a wheelchair, whether that person could function effectively in the Foreign Service. And there were people who said they couldn't. They weren't really interested in talking about it. But Secretary Vance then got involved and he supported the program. I would go to meetings that he had on EEOC and so forth, and I always had my time of day with him on that about once every six months. He really believed that we ought to find means of accommodating the handicapped as a general, philosophical matter.

The special bathrooms, the curb cuts all around the Department, those are things that I got done through GSA, and the city which were little, piddling things. Lots of people were turned down for the Foreign Service because they were overweight. And there were people who thought that was perfectly right. There was a certain amount of tolerance and if they were over that weight, they couldn't be employed.

And worst of all, the part of the Department I never got any cooperation out of on that whole thing was the Office of Communications. The communicators lead a very difficult life. They're always on call, the telegrams come and they have to go at hours which are terribly inconvenient. In addition they have pouches to worry about. And they have over the years, or at least when Stuart Branch was the head, developed their own little empire.

Q: Well, they are also mostly from the military.

GORDON: A lot of them are ex-military. Though a lot of our women weren't. See, we have a lot of women communicators.

Q: That's right.

GORDON: They fought and fought that no woman was going to be allowed in the courier service for a long time because they said they couldn't carry the heavy bags, and couldn't clear this and that, and so on and so forth. But they did. And there are marines around to help them to get to and from an airport with a big bag. But whatever it was, they were absolutely neanderthal in their attitude toward it. I don't know whether they ever changed or not. But we did have a committee that had the power to override rejections on physical grounds and this was a big step forward. I must say, the Medical Division was very cooperative.

Q: The argument is, and all of us have heard it, and I was wondering how you approached this--the argument is you are taking somebody to be a reporter, and you put him or her into a country and they are supposed to report on what's happening there. And if they don't have all their faculties, how do they operate? How did you answer that? I mean, I'm trying to put you back at the time.

GORDON: Sure. I tried to answer that and I said, "I don't know. You've never given them a chance. Let's see. You've got to have people who are willing to try." I got one guy who was an examination FSO, passed the writtens, passed the orals. Just before coming in he was in a ski accident that paralyzed him from the waist down. He came into the Department as a civil servant and worked in the E area, he was an economic type. I finally got him accepted as an FSO. I don't know whether they did it as a token, I don't think so. Since I've been back I haven't been able to find out exactly where he is and how he is doing.

Further to your question, there are jobs in the foreign service which handicap people probably can handle. There are cones. And two cones where it might be easier to adapt--let's take the wheelchair first--would be the consular cone where, except for the need, perhaps, for prison visits, certain emergencies like a plane crash or something, this person could carry on pretty well sitting in his wheelchair stamping visas or signing passports. And you know better than I, but I think there is some validity to that. And the same thing is true is certain parts of, say, budget and fiscal, and certain other parts of the administrative area where mobility is not as vital as it is in, let's say, economic or political officers.

Q: So it's looking around to find places, rather than just in general say, well, we'll do this and we make it work. You try to find the niches and crannies within the system.

GORDON: That's right. All that I was mainly asking for was an open mind. Let's try and see what happens. And I just don't know. They're undergoing a big survey now on what to do about this, so I don't know. It's just a never-ending thing where you've got people,

basically, resistant to the whole idea. Fortunately, there were three people who helped push this whole thing through. One was Ben Read, who was Under Secretary for Management, and then David Newsom, who was Chairman of the Board of the Foreign Service, and Secretary Vance, himself.

Q: This is Tape II, side one of an interview with Robert Gordon on January 25, 1989. You went to Florence as Consul General. How did this assignment come about?

GORDON: It came about like a lot of assignments to Italy. When they are looking for new officers at the senior grade they often look to find people who speak Italian, and that usually is somebody who has been in Italy before. Graham Martin was ambassador in Rome at the time. He was in Washington and we were talking about when my job as Ombudsman would finish up because we knew that when the new grievance system was in, then there would be no place for me. The idea had been that I would only spend two years, anyway. And so I talked to him about the possibility of going to Florence, which had always sort of appealed to me. At that time my eyes were giving me an awful lot of trouble.

So, anyway, to make a long story short, he thought it was a great idea and it was arranged that I go to Florence. The man then in Florence went down to Rome to become political Counselor. And so that's how that came about and I stayed there from February of 1972 until September of 1978.

Q: What were our major interests in Florence. I mean, looking at it as if I were a complete outsider, I would say that Florence has some nice art galleries, but why have a consulate in Florence?

GORDON: That question is being asked all the time when they do these budget-cutting exercises. But, basically, there is a very large American community there. Over 30 American colleges and universities have programs in Florence. Therefore, there is what you might call the protection and welfare aspect of those American residents.

It is, of course, the center of the Red Belt of Communist influence so, therefore, the principal officer usually has a lot to do with mayors and others of the various cities, and presidents of the various provinces. Most of them are Communist or Socialists. You try to carry on some sort of dialogue with them to try to figure out what they are up to so that we can counter it, if we had to. So that was very interesting politically.

Another thing that was an aspect of that job, which was particularly interesting, was the consul general in Florence is accredited to the Republic of San Marino, which is a semi-autonomous city-state within Italy, sort of like Monte Carlo and Liechtenstein. San Marino is very, very active. They were one of the original members of the Helsinki meeting and accord. They had taken an active part in it. It was really a miniature embassy because you are always getting this, that, and the other thing from Washington concerning San Marino's attitude on various matters. And they wanted the views of San Marino

mainly because it was a member of the Helsinki Accord (CSCE). It was very much in our interest to be sure of the attitude of the government because they could just cause unnecessary pain if it was governed by the wrong people. And, fortunately, it worked out very well. They've been very helpful to us on things in the CSCE meetings.

Q: CSCE is?

GORDON: I'm just trying to think. It's the thing that grew out of the Helsinki Accords. Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I believe is what the acronym stands for. That added a lot of extra duties.

Q: What were your duties? I mean, did you go there?

GORDON: Oh, yes. I would go up there. They had a very interesting ceremony the first of April and the first of October to preserve their democracy. There are two men chosen for a six month period called Captains Regent and they are the executive of the country. But they change every six months and that's to prevent anybody getting too good a toehold on executive power. And so they always have a big celebration. Originally, everybody was in top hat and striped trousers, but that was done away with eventually when the Socialists took over.

Then, as I say, you'd get messages from Washington and you'd have to go up there and talk to them about this and that so you would get the answers back. And the embassy in Rome, if they would send something up there they could forget about it. They would send it back and say, "We deal only through the consul general in Florence."

Q: Let me ask you a question. For the record, I might add, that later I was consul general in Naples so we're sort of speaking on collegial terms here. How did you deal with the local governments which are run by communists? I mean, after all, we represent sort of the antithesis of the communist ideal and all, being the United States. How did you deal with these people?

GORDON: Even in the places like Siena and Prato which were really communist, the vast majority, I don't recall having any difficulty dealing with a mayor, or the president of a province, a member of the city council who were communists. They always were polite and listened to what I had to say, whether it was a problem of somebody in jail, or it might have been just general attitudes towards Americans, or just listening to our point of view on things. I always found them very polite and civilized and had no difficulty in carrying on any type of business.

One of the best examples, I remember talking to the Mayor of Bologna. Bologna is one of the reddest cities and has been communist since gosh knows when. It's the seat of one of the great universities in Italy. I remember the Mayor of Bologna was also a professor at the university. And I was talking to him one day saying we were having a United States Information Agency, USIA exhibit coming through showing some of the spinoffs from

our astronaut program. And he said, "Well, when is this going to be?" I told him the date and I said, "I hope you can come. I will let you know the details because I would love to have you there for the opening." He said, "Oh, I'll be there. Where's it going to be?" I said, "Well, we're trying to get this building, but there's some construction." He said, "I know that building and I don't think it's going to be finished in time. If you'd like to use the foyer of city hall, please do so." So that is an example of, I would say, sort of benign communism. At the same time, everybody knew we had different points of view when it came to security of Europe, and defense, and foreign affairs. But I think we all tried to get along. I can't remember anybody just turning me down flat because they were Communists.

Q: The Italians always struck me as being the most civilized people I ever had to deal with. I mean, they practically try to disassemble their government at times, but it seems to work.

GORDON: Was the mayor of Naples communist when you were there?

Q: Yes. Valenzi, I believe his name was.

GORDON: As part of my consular district, I had Livorno, which is a big US logistics military base. We had real problems over there. There were a lot of people who thought we were storing nuclear weapons there. I knew we weren't so we got the president of the province and the president of the region and we all made a tour all through the base there and their criticism died down. And they were willing to go take a look at it, which was the interesting thing.

Q: They had practical concerns rather than just using this as a means of causing trouble?

GORDON: Oh, yes. They had to be sure to accentuate the difference between the Communists and the Christian Democrats regarding the storage of nuclear weapons in Italy.

Q: Let me ask a question. You mentioned you were having trouble with your eyesight. I'd like to get this on the record. Tell me how you operated in this way and what was the problem?

GORDON: Well, the problem is a disease called retinitis pigmentosa. There is no known cure for it, no known preventative for it. The pigment seeps in through someplace in the eye and blocks the retina so that when the light hits it it doesn't record. And they say it's genetic, though they are not absolutely sure of it. Outfits in the United States and in Europe are pouring money into researching this. I first knew it when I was in Rome and I started having trouble reading. Usually, it hits somebody by the time they are teenagers.

I've been blessed in my jobs of having absolutely first class secretaries who read the necessary mail to me and requests or telegrams that come in. And I dictate the answers or get them to put it together. That was how I worked as Counselor in Rome, the Ombudsman, as the Handicapped Coordinator, and as Ambassador in Mauritius for three and a half years. All places being blessed with exceptionally able, devoted secretaries. That, in a nutshell, is the answer to the question.

And when I had to get around, get from point to point, it's amazing how quickly officials in Rome, in Florence, and in Mauritius were aware of this. My driver or, if I got a taxi, the taxi driver would park his taxi and see that I got to the right door in city hall or something like that. And then somebody would see me out. So I was lucky in the sense that both in Florence and in Mauritius I had a car and a driver so I got to where I wanted to go with very little or no difficulty.

Q: Most of your work was absorbing information and making analyses, and that.

GORDON: Sure. In the morning my wife would read me the Italian newspapers when we were in Florence and also in Mauritius, where all the newspapers and magazines are published in French. The other half of it was a great amount of help at receptions and other official functions from my wife, who was with me all the time. A bachelor would have a hell of a time with that, I guess. In addition, both in Florence and in Mauritius my wife had her own top secret clearance when it was necessary for us to work on classified matters.

Q: Just out of interest, do you see that you could, in dealing with the handicapped side, anyway, say, have the equivalent of a reader go along or?

GORDON: That's another possibility. For instance, some blind people in the Department had readers. I didn't depend entirely on my secretary. After all, in Florence she was also the teletype operator and the coder and decoder of telegrams. And lots of stuff would be sent by telegram, some economic analysis, or some particular political thing. Or even if I had good sight, I would sit down and talk to the other officers and say what do you think about this and what do we need to know that we don't know, and how are we going to get hold of what we need to know. Sometimes it would be a collegial answer and they would do the first draft. Sometimes I would do the first draft and have them work on it, depending on who we thought had more information.

Q: I'd like to move now to your last assignment, which was as ambassador to Mauritius. You went to Mauritius in 1980 and left in 1983. How did that assignment come about?

GORDON: Well, it's one of those things, how did anybody get to be an ambassador? It's a very arcane, esoteric subject. I think it came about like all other ambassadorships of career officers. People in the Department see someone they think might do a good job and they support the candidacy through the long, intricate passage of suggesting an idea to it being approved by the proper committee in the Department, check with the White House

to be sure it's going to be career, check back with the Secretary, be sure he approves. It goes back over again to the White House. The main hurdle is clearing the personnel committee which is usually headed by the Deputy Secretary and includes the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Under Secretary for Management, and some of the other Under Secretaries. Everybody usually has some particular person who helps move their candidacy along. Usually it's an Assistant Secretary moving somebody who has been one of his deputies or office directors, or a DCM in a post. Personnel, itself, makes a list all the time. I've been told the Senior Officers Branch is supposed to have a group of suggestions for all coming ambassadorships and they keep working on that, that's another source which is considered by the committee.

I would say my own candidacy, as I look back on it, I didn't know what was going on. All I know is I was asked if I was interested in an ambassadorship by Harry Barnes, who was Director General who told me that some people on the seventh floor were interested in my getting an ambassadorship. I said I certainly was. I guess the person who was most important concerning this was Ben Read, Under Secretary for Management.

Q: That's R-e-e-d?

GORDON: No, Read.

Q: Having been working on a history of the consular service I know that Mauritius is actually one of our oldest consulates, our post since 1794 or 1796.

GORDON: Except we had nobody there from 1911 to 1967 or 1968.

Q: It was very important, particularly for whalers and all that sort of thing. But, today, what is American interest in Mauritius, outside of it's just a country.

GORDON: Basically, the US Navy is nervous about security in the Southern Indian Ocean area. We have no bases there. We have, clear up on the equator, the use of the island of Diego Garcia which Mauritius is involved in, whether we like it or not, because Mauritius maintains Diego Garcia is rightfully theirs. We have a large military facility there. When there were anti-US demonstrations it was always about the United States using Diego Garcia without any payment to Mauritius, the rightful owner. And so one of the big problems was trying to keep that down to a low roar.

Delegations of Mauritians would come to visit me. I would say, "Don't come see me about Diego Garcia. Go to the British. We're only little renters. Go to the landlord." And they would kind of laugh and go. But, at the same time they wanted compensation and tried to get some money out of us. Also in Mauritius itself we have access to a port and a friendly area in the Indian Ocean.

Q: By the way, Mauritius falls, within the State Department's parlance, into which area?

GORDON: AF, bureaucratically it is in the Bureau of African Affairs.

Q: AF? Into the African area? Is this a good idea?

GORDON: Well, nobody knows. You can argue about it. The Mauritians sort of chided me about it. I said, "You want to put it in Southeast Asia?" I said, "If we do, since the majority of the population is of Indian origin then we would put you all with Ceylon and India." They would say, "Well, I don't know." I said, "Well, why don't we just leave it alone."

Geographically, it's Africa. From the standpoint of ethnicity, about 70 percent of the population came from what is today India. 52 percent of the population of Mauritius is Hindu and about 18 percent is Moslem. But they are Indian Subcontinent Moslems, not Arab Moslems. And about 25 percent are Creole. And about two percent of the population is white and three percent Chinese. So it's a real potpourri.

Just one more thing is that Mauritius has been a moderating influence, generally, in the Organization of African Unity, OAU. And you've got some very wild guys in that organization. And to be able to work with Mauritius both through the OAU and also at the United Nations on resolutions that are important to us, it's one more vote. In addition, they welcomed visits from the US Seventh Fleet. In fact, the admiral commanding the Seventh Fleet was the guest of honor at the Independence Day celebrations on at least two occasions while I was there. And you look at the map and you look over there at Madagascar and Seychelles, you're never sure about those guys because they've usually been governed by very left-leaning regimes. So Mauritius has been a spot of some tranquility and access.

Q: What was the government like when you were there?

GORDON: First of all, it would shame the United States as far as being a democracy is concerned. When I arrived there the Labor Government was headed by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the father of the country, who had been the Prime Minister since independence. Practically all of the members of Parliament were members of the Labor Party. They had an election, a hard fought election, in which we supported the government. When the election was over the Labor Party had lost every single seat. They didn't even win one out of 60 seats. A complete wipeout. What did they do? They swore in the new government and went about business.

Q: Why did they have such a wipeout?

GORDON: I think it was partly because it was "time for a change."

Q: I mean, there was no great issue or something like that?

GORDON: No. Oh, they were having more unemployment than had been usual. There were some hard times.

Q: But it was not a crisis time?

GORDON: No. It was just that it was "time for a change" and maybe the appeal of non-labor candidates who were more strident and much more nationalistic.

As an overlay to all of this, Mauritius is a product of French culture-with its impact on the Creole language and the publication of most magazines and newspapers still in French. I studied to be a college professor but never was one. But I've often thought when I was in Mauritius of friends of mine who were in graduate school with me and how they might view Mauritius as a political science case study with its mix of 52 percent Hindu, 18 percent Moslem, 25 percent Creole Christian, the Chinese Christians, the French and British Christians.

It's amazing the way they turnover a government. Fortunately, against a lot of Mauritian official opposition, I got a leader grant for a visit to the US by the then leader of the opposition. He is the prime minister today and has been for the last four or five years.

They've had a marvelous economic recovery there. I remember when I was there I had the "great, good fortune" of telling them that the US was very pleased about the manner in which the Labor Government had promoted free enterprise and a market economy. For example, the Mauritian Government had established export processing zones primarily for the manufacture of textiles for export. But they were so successful that I then had to tell them "you have been so efficient that we're going to have to impose quotas on sweater exports to the US" "What? You tell us this is free enterprise and now you put a quota on our sweaters. What is going on?" I said, "Well, thank God you're a democratic country and you can understand what power blocks in the US Senate can do."

But it really was a fascinating, fascinating place. There was just always something of interest going on. As I say, there have been two or three elections since I left. The Deputy Prime Minister prior to the elections of the fall of 1983, called me up and said, "I understand you're leaving." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, you can't leave. You're the only guy in town both parties trust." And they actually instructed their ambassador in Washington to request the State Department to have me stay at least until after the elections. Well, I stayed through the elections. This was a nice little compliment.

Q: Oh, it was a very nice compliment.

GORDON: A nice compliment that both sides would like for me to stay on because both sides knew me and trusted me.

Q: Well, what about fleet visits? Were these a problem or not?

GORDON: There was a short period following the 1982 elections after the new left-wing government came to power when fleet visits were not welcome. Otherwise, they were more than welcome and, as I said before, the Admiral commanding the Seventh Fleet was twice the guest of honor at Mauritian Independence Day celebrations. After a lot of hesitation on the part of the Mauritians it was agreed between Mauritians and the United States that Mauritian workers would be employed at the US Naval Facility on Diego Garcia.

Q: I was going to say, when you've had 5,000 young men who have been cruising around, particularly in that area where if they arrive there, they've been at sea a long time.

GORDON: That's right.

Q: How did they behave?

GORDON: Well, we had very little trouble. We had two cases of drunkenness. One of them resulted in someone going through a revolving door in the wrong direction. Somebody was going the other direction and they smashed up the door. Somebody else threw a bottle through a windshield. But no problem. They didn't want any problems and we didn't, either. And those are the only two that even came to my attention during several ship visits.

Q: I would imagine that a great deal of our interest, I'm speaking of the United States' interest, there would be in Mauritius, as you were mentioning, in the OAU and then other organizations there, you know, the United Nations vote, explaining what our interests were and all this.

GORDON: Sure. Oh, yes. For example, we initiated several AID and PL 480 programs and this helped to keep us quite busy.

Q: Were you getting, rather than blanket, sort of specific instructions or were things going well in Mauritius so that this was not raising much of a stir in Washington one way or another?

GORDON: Things were going well. And, in general, we at the Embassy received adequate attention and cooperation from Washington. The one commendation that I ever got from the Department was very much in actually turning the government around and getting them to say things and do things they wouldn't before. Once they got over the period of the first few months of being very nationalistic, left-wing OAU members and they found that wasn't getting them anywhere. It was much better to be cooperative. Then more aid came and more cooperation came on things they were interested in. And since they, basically, weren't Marxists and they weren't communists, either. In fact, while I was there, they had locked out the Libyans, just threw them out lock, stock, and barrel. They were messing around with the Moslems and the government didn't like that.

GORDON: So that, in a nutshell, is the Mauritian tour.

Q: Good. There are two questions that we try to ask. One, in looking over your career, what achievement gives you the most satisfaction?

GORDON: Well, I think, clearly, the slow but very successful turning around of the then radical and militant Mauritian government to seeing that, basically, their own selfish interests lay in cooperation with the West, rather than with the East. At that time there were people in Mauritius who sort of had a mindset against the United States that was difficult to get Mauritian officials to see things our way. But I think that's the one I feel this turn around was the most significant single thing that I had a major hand in accomplishing.

Q: And also, really looking back on the personnel side, helping to break the handicapped barrier.

GORDON: Yes. I would think the other thing I found most fulfilling was the Ombudsman job and the two years I was head of European Personnel. Personnel is organized differently now. It was organized entirely on a geographic basis with very little counseling. My office had about 2,000 people to worry about in Europe plus North Africa and the Caribbean which were bureaucratically a part of Europe. You had your secretaries, your code clerks, your officers and decisions you made affected their career as well as their life style, their problems of health and family responsibilities and so forth. This was before the days of ever thinking of trying to find a job for the spouse as a tandem assignment or anything like that. One of the things that I think about that period, some almost impossible personnel assignment things were finally worked out with patience and understanding and they turned out very well.

I can remember one occasion which sort of typifies the stress of that position at that time. My wife and I went to a party one night, one of the little in-house parties that the personnel assignment branch chiefs had from time to time (Europe, Latin America, Middle East, Far East, Africa and Washington assignments). The women got to talking and they said, "You know, we hate these parties because these guys get together and they go right back into panel and start assigning people." Also the women said that they noticed that their husbands did an awful lot of talking in their sleep; a measure of the intense pressure we were under. All of us had that same thing.

Q: One final thing. Looking at it today, how would you feel about recommending the Foreign Service as a career to a young person interested in perhaps coming into it?

GORDON: That's really a good question. One of my problems with that is there has been such a change in the Foreign Service since my day--I've been retired five years now--with the new tenuring system, with the new selection out system, time in class, and all the complexity of the 1980 law, and when you go for a window and all that. What are the chances of making a career of it? This is where I feel very inadequate to say, well, you

know the chances are so and so that you will make the senior Foreign Service. I just don't feel adequate to answer that question.

Q: I think that's probably a better answer than most people give. I want to thank you very much.

GORDON: It's been a pleasure.

Q: I've enjoyed this.

End of interview