

**A COLLECTION OF
LITTLE STORIES
ABOUT
FOREIGN SERVICE LIVING**

VOLUME III

BY

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YEAR 5

209. MAKING THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME

In 1975, I had only been with the Department about two months when my name came up on the Duty Officer's roster. As many of you will remember, those duties consisted of closing up the SY/T Office and laboratory area. During this process, you walked all through the offices and lab areas, assuring that the desks were clear of classified material and that all the safe file containers were securely locked. To aid you in this process, you usually carried a document in a plastic protector with all the office areas and safes identified on it, including their combinations. As you passed a safe, you checked to be sure it was secure, initialed a form on the top of the safe and went on to the next container.

As you might expect in a Technical Security Office, there were a lot of safes and doors and desks to check. There were two pages of safe combinations on the form we used. Most of the containers in our office area seemed to be on the first of those pages.

Many of the safes in our office area were over-filled. To close the safe drawers, you had to put the combination list down and rearrange paper, manuals and files inside the drawers. There were also bar-lock cabinets in the office area. For those, you put down the list, inserted the bar, locked it and spun off the combination on the lock.

On my second day as Duty Officer, I left the combination sheet on top of a bar lock cabinet. The following morning, I found the sheet where I had left it. Seeing the end of my new career very clearly, I turned myself in to John Perdew, our Operations Officer.

John said: "George, that's terrible. I'm sure no one else here has ever, ever left that list out. Sadly, since you put me on the spot, there's only one thing I can do about it." John paused for effect; I saw my new job headed right down the toilet. John said: "You have to change *every one* of the combinations on those safes, locks and doors. Start now and drop everything else you are doing until you get that job done."

Greatly relieved, I started to change combinations. I had not yet attended lock school, and I had a lot to learn. I opened the first safe control drawer, emptied it, and discovered that I needed some tools. I looked at the instructions posted inside the control drawer and learned that there were *several types* of change keys that I was going to need. I went back to John Perdew to ask about keys and tools: he sent me to the Lock Shop in the basement.

When I got there, Franchot White ("Whitey", to all of you) was waiting for me at the Lock Shop door. He was laughing. Whitey gave me a beat-up Phillips screwdriver, an equally worn flat blade screwdriver, several change keys and a dinky flashlight. He offered no instructions or help at all, shutting the door quietly as I began to ask for assistance.

I went back upstairs and got started. Over the next three days, I emptied control doors, accessed the locks, removed hard plate and learned how to change combinations. I discovered

that there were different kinds of containers from different manufacturers and that not all drawers opened smoothly. I discovered that you could sometimes find little aluminum spacers in the bottom of safes whose drawers did not move smoothly.

Gradually, I picked up speed, learning to compare the change key in my hand with the illustration inside the safe *before* I tried to change a combo. I learned to check each new combination several times before I re-secured the lock cover, and I discovered little levers that kept a person from opening a lock if the back fell off or was at all loose. Greatly concerned about leaving the list out a second time, I fastened it to a clipboard and carried that board around with me wherever I went.

There were twenty-eight safes and bar locks in the outer offices and the lab. Additionally, there were a number of combination locks with extensions on them securing our doors. There was a vault door leading into the lab, which I learned to open and service. I began to think I was done with the project. Even after changing all of those combinations, however, there was *another sheet* of containers and combinations to address. I did not know where those containers were located, and asked John Perdew about them.

He said: “Most of them are in the attic.” He asked John Bagnal to take me upstairs.

To be continued...

210. A WALK THROUGH THE ATTIC

(This continues an earlier story, “Making the Punishment Fit the Crime”)

John Bagnol and I took an elevator up to the Seventh Floor, with me holding the clipboard of combinations close to my chest and carrying a small bag of tools in the other hand. It was my first trip to the upper areas of the State Department. We walked into a completely different world. Harried Diplomats in expensive suits were walking rapidly from place to place, carrying papers, talking to each other about overseas issues and Congressional support. No one really looked at us: I was carrying *tools*, after all.

From the Seventh Floor, John took me up a fire stair to the attic on the Eighth Floor. There were strange crashing noises occurring all around us: these came from the pneumatic tube system used at that time to route classified telegrams through a series of switching centers throughout the huge State Department building. The tubes directed printed correspondence from regional desks to the communications center and brought incoming material back up to the senders. John explained that the two-foot-long leather-ended plastic containers often became brittle with age and use, and sometimes came apart inside the tubes, sending bits of shredded secrets all through the State Department.

Using a combination from the clipboard, John opened the first of three storerooms reserved for security in the attic. The room we entered was about as big as half of a basketball court. The storeroom contained dusty safes, and bar locks, and file cabinets: I felt like Howard Carter opening up King Tut’s tomb. All along the walls of this room were wooden shelves, and they were loaded with dusty meters and test instruments and antennas and lots and lots of old countermeasures equipment. John told me where the remaining two rooms were located and then left me alone.

It was dim in the storeroom, with only a single bulb for illumination. I began to explore the equipment before starting on the containers. Within a very short time, I was mesmerized: I was looking at the history of my new profession from an early time. As I walked along the shelves, I would open each of the small mahogany boxes that early search equipment seemed to require, discovering special microphones, meters, antenna systems, tuning assemblies and filters. There were radio receivers, tuners, amplifiers, grounding systems, cameras, tripods, lenses and more lenses. Many of the equipment items used vacuum tubes, which were still in use at that time. I recognized a gold-anodized vacuum tube HH Scott FM tuner, old enough that the second channel for stereo reproduction was labeled “FM Multiplex” and appeared as a jack on the top of the chassis rather than on the back. I found several leather briefcases with modular receivers tucked inside them. Many of the receivers I encountered were exotic; some, like the military R-390 receiver, I had seen before.

While wanting to explore everything, I had work to do. I started opening the containers and changing combinations, finding files of old security surveys, drawers of recovered microphones and stacks of black and white pictures with crumbling rubber bands around them. I discovered exotic test instrumentation like Bruel and Kjaer sound pressure-level meters in mint condition (mint color, too). The equipment in the containers was in better shape than the stuff on the shelves, but it still had to be removed to get at the locks in order for me to change the combos. Once I was done, and had tried out each lock with its new combination, I would replace the equipment I had removed and spin off the lock.

In the attic, I ran into my first hand-change lock. I did not know what it was or how to change it. I secured the container, picked up my clipboard, locked the room and went down to the lock shop to talk to Whitey. Laughing again, he had me change several Lock Shop safe combinations (also on the second sheet) before he would help me. Once I completed my chore, Whitey showed me how a hand change lock worked and how to change its combination. Then he explained a little of the history of combination locks to me.

I went back upstairs, changed the hand change combination and went into the second storeroom. This was much smaller, a space the size of two offices. The second room was filled with old and broken countermeasures equipment, old power tools and a mounted window that had been pulled from an Embassy somewhere. It was a barred window, but one of the bars had been altered so that it could be removed, and someone could get through that window from outside the building. There were piles of old microphones wrapped in cotton waste with long wooden tubes fastened to them. There were a variety of radio antennas, bow ties and dipoles and more exotic microwave antennas, including little log periodic offerings. There were also some major test equipment items: Tektronix 545 double-trace oscilloscopes, signal generators, RF power meters, Simpson multimeters and the like. I was especially interested in a black HRB Singer receiver that had a rotating tuning mechanism that looked like the cylinder on a revolver. The number of connectors on the back of this receiver was impressive: why were all those connections needed?

The third storeroom basically belonged to John Bagnal and contained newer equipment used to support the Secretary of State on travel. There were no safes in that room and I left it alone.

I took the clipboard back down to the second floor, reported to John Perdew and informed him of my success in changing all of the combinations. I promised him I would not leave the combination list out at night ever again. Then we started to talk about the equipment I had seen upstairs. This conversation took us into the lab on a Friday evening. Both Mac Musser and Don Fischer joined in the story-telling process as we sipped cheap Portuguese wine in the lab, explaining the sources, reasons and history of some of the items I had found.

211. LADY LIBERTY

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

In order that my readers may grasp the full Foreign Service experience by seeing it from a FS dependent's eyes as well as a colleague's eyes, I am going to throw in some of my earlier stories. I hope you will not be disappointed. Here begins a series of occasional stories from my childhood.

In my youth, Foreign Service personnel travelled primarily by ship. At the time, this was a notable benefit. From the time the employee left Washington until they reached their overseas destination, they were on Travel Time: they continued to draw a salary every day, because travel to their overseas assignments was a part of the job. The ship ticket was covered by the government; the price of shipboard meals was a part of the fare for both the employee and his or her family members. There were no other expenses save the Employee's bar bill, purchases from the ship's store and a tip for the cabin steward at the end of the trip. For days (and sometimes many days), the employee was able to spend time with his family in relative luxury, living in elegant staterooms, eating in dining rooms with white tablecloths and polished table ware, selecting from a group of well-crafted entrees at every meal from a menu printed aboard that ship each morning.

Families engaged in activities like shuffleboard, ping pong, skeet shooting off the fan tail, movies and (on some ships) sunbathing by the pool. There was High Tea on the Promenade Deck, sitting on deck chairs. There was evening entertainment: movies, bingo, lavish dinners and dances to celebrate holidays or special occasions, and horse races. These were run in the ship's lounge on an oval track made of canvas on which six lanes were marked out, divided into even segments. There were six small plywood horses about a foot high set on wooden bases that fit into these segments. Each horse was painted with a jockey in different-colored livery and a number: there was a cage with six dice, colored to match the horses. Passengers bought tickets to bet on the horses to win, place or show and there was a Trifecta. A steward rolled the dice, one of the ship's officers called the race, another steward moved the horses along the track and the cash prizes (compiled from the purchase of those tickets) were well received.

My parents wanted their children to see what the ocean was like and brought us to the upper decks to watch the ship leave port, meet the pilot boat and unload the pilot. Depending on the voyage, we could watch that process in reverse as we entered other ports. We took tours of the ship with our fellow passengers, visiting the bridge and the engine room. We watched flying fish sail towards the ship and sometimes land on the deck; we looked over the bow to watch porpoises riding in the bow wave. We could watch the ship's cargo being unloaded: many people traveled with their furniture and household effects stored in "lift vans", essentially big plywood shipping containers raised and lowered into the holds by cranes. At night, my parents

pulled me and my brother out of bed to see passing liners, the occasional warship and the stars, which appeared in great profusion above the darkness of the ocean.

I was nine when we went to Warsaw in 1954. We went over on the SS United States, a large passenger ship which had been launched in 1952, and we disembarked in Le Havre, France. My father's cousin was the Agricultural Attache at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, and we had been invited to spend a few days with them in their large flat in Montmartre. We visited Napoleon's Tomb, the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, the Arch of Triumph, two cathedrals, the Champs Elysée and Versailles. Then we went on to Warsaw by aircraft, flying on a DC-3.

In 1956, we left Warsaw in a hurry just before the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution. We went to Bremerhaven and caught the SS America, a sister ship to the United States. Our return voyage stopped in Le Havre and Southampton, and we were on our way home.

On the fifth day after leaving Southampton, we came into New York harbor early in the morning in time to see the sun come up behind the ship and illuminate the Statue of Liberty. We paused outside New York harbor to wait for the pilot, then sailed slowly past the Statue on our way to a berth in Brooklyn. The sight of such a famous landmark seen from so close a distance made a lasting impression on our whole family, and we took a ferry over to Liberty Island to see the Statue of Liberty up close before we set out for Washington by train.

212. THE GOLF BUDDY

When we arrived in Abidjan in 1978, we were housed in a villa in an old part of the city. The Embassy had leased our house and the property behind us. My neighbor was a junior Economic Officer on his second overseas tour.

This gentleman, with whom I car-pooled when I was in town, was pleasant, well-organized and spoke excellent French. He liked to play golf and joined a golf club associated with a new hotel just outside the city. He began to play other golfers in the club and moved up gradually in club rankings until he was at or near the top of the list. His skill brought him to the attention of Ivory Coast President Houphouet-Boigny, who also liked to play golf at that club.

Within a short time, my neighbor found himself invited to join the host country President in foursomes. A serious player who was able to laugh at himself, my neighbor became a regular in foursomes which occasionally included the President, but which more frequently included Cabinet members, senior military officers of the Ivorian Government and important business executives who also played with the President from time to time.

These contacts were a gold mine for my neighbor, who learned a great deal about the economic and political status of the host country while he was playing golf. His sources raised the level of reporting from the Embassy and brought him serious accolades from his supervisor, the DCM and the Ambassador. All of these officers encouraged my neighbor to “keep his game up” and stay in the top rankings of the club.

Doing so, of course, required lots of practice. With the full support of the Embassy, my neighbor was encouraged to go play golf any time he wanted to. The result? Frequent weekday golf, with pay.

213. STROMBOLI

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

During WWII, my father served as a Naval Officer, drawing assignments in Glencoe, Georgia (Blimps), in Jacksonville, Florida (B-124's) and in the Philippines (B-124's). He greatly enjoyed sea voyages and tried to move his family from post to post by ship whenever possible.

In 1956, we received orders for Bombay, India. I was 11 at the time and was more aware of the world around me than I had been on previous cruises. The late 1950's was an exciting time to travel: the world was not yet into travel by jet aircraft, and it was still possible to travel most or all of the way to your overseas destination by ship. For our trip out to India, we traveled on the SS Excalibur from New York to Alexandria, then took a flight to Bombay from Cairo on a Lockheed Constellation aircraft owned by TWA. As I remember, the flight stopped in Karachi on the way to Bombay.

The SS Excalibur was one of the "Four Aces", four matching passenger/freighters that ran regular routes from the United States to overseas ports. Two of the ships worked the Atlantic to Mediterranean route and the other two eventually cruised through the Pacific. My father liked the Excalibur because there was only one class aboard the ship, the number of passengers was small compared to larger ocean liners and the ship was relatively slow, giving the family more time to enjoy the trip. It also made a lot of port calls, letting us see many foreign cities.

My brother and I spent many hours on deck with our father, learning to recognize different types of passing ships, identifying land features along the shore and exploring port cities when the ship docked. We passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and made stops in Barcelona, Marseille, and Naples. In each port, we had a day or two to see the city while cargoes were being unloaded and loaded in the holds and as new passengers came aboard.

Leaving Naples, we went through the Strait of Messina at night on the way to Athens. The Stromboli volcano was active at that time on an island at the tip of Sicily: the mountain was very dramatic at night, like a firework display all in red. We could see the volcano spitting hot bombs of lava into the air like tracer bullets (which I did not know about at that time). We sailed slowly through the Strait, which Homer tells us Ulysses passed through twice. Our father told us stories of those trips as we transited the narrow passageway: Scylla and Charybdis waiting on either side of the channel.

A day or two later, we docked at Piraeus, visiting the Parthenon in Athens and then returning to the ship. In Beirut, we went ashore to visit the American University of Beirut and see its museum, which featured an enormous stuffed Sunfish. Then we were off to Alexandria. I can still remember looking over the side of the ship and seeing blankets laid out on the dock filled with items that passengers might buy: red Fez hats, Arab daggers, cheap pearl necklaces,

small camels cast in brass and carved stone blocks shaped like the pyramids. It was probably my first tourist trap.

We took a car to Cairo and went to see the Egyptian museum, which featured antiquities from Tut's tomb as well as other mummy cases and early Egyptian artifacts. Leaving Cairo, we took a plane to Karachi and then on to Bombay, completing our trip. It took us about three weeks to get to India from the United States; the voyage improved our understanding of the world around us.

214. CANADIAN CAMERAS IN CAMEROON

Today's outdoor CCTV cameras are about the size of a big grapefruit, including the pan, tilt and zoom functions. They produce high quality color video and are usually digital instruments. They are light and can easily be lifted with one hand.

It wasn't always like that.

Toward the end of my tour in Abidjan, SY/T abandoned its CCTV contract with Concord and began to acquire RCA cameras from a factory in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Where the Concord cameras were typically housed in a hinged aluminum box with a sun shade on its roof, the new cameras were housed in a heavy tube of aluminum, with a high quality glass-covered viewing window on one end and a removable aluminum plate on the other end, with a pressure fitting that looked like the one on a bicycle tire. The end plate was sealed with an O-ring.

The camera and lens were assembled, placed on a rail within the housing and the rear end was then slid into place and secured. The housing was then pressurized with dry nitrogen. There was a thermostatically controlled fan inside the housing to circulate the gas and a heater near the lens to prevent the glass surface from icing up. The new camera and housing assembly was secured onto an aluminum mounting base by a couple of stainless steel straps. That mounting base fit on our existing pan and tilt units. A sun shade running the length of the tube completed the installation.

While this was a sizeable assembly (the resulting cylinder was about nine inches in diameter and almost three feet in length) it was a much, much better instrument than the system it replaced. When provided with regulated AC power, the new cameras would often last for a year or two, while the Concord cameras (at least in Africa) had a working life of about three months.

Our new RCA camera assemblies were shipped overseas in thick cardboard boxes provided by the manufacturer, with the aluminum tubes supported very well in molded blocks of Styrofoam. Rather than buying shipping cases for the cameras, we simply used and re-used those heavy cardboard boxes, which we equipped with small handles.

I became the SY/T Operations Officer after my tour in Abidjan and was responsible for problems surrounding our logistics system among other tasks. After a couple of months on the job, we started to receive complaints from our overseas posts. A frequent problem seemed to be that cameras which New Delhi had ordered, for instance, had turned up in Mexico. It was confusing. Sometimes the cameras went where they were intended to go, and sometimes they went to bizarre locations on other continents. We started to look into the problem.

At that time, all of our overseas equipment shipments went out through the Department's unclassified pouch room. An order of cameras for Nairobi would be assembled at State

Annex-7, packed in the manufacturer's cartons with a store-bought aluminum handle fastened to the end flap of each box on a little strip of plywood, and addressed with routing labels. The boxes were then transported to the Department for onward shipment. We verified that the outgoing cameras were properly addressed and labelled; we modified our inventory to reflect the camera's expected destination.

In the pouch room, there were large bins for outgoing shipment. Each bin was four feet high and three feet across, labelled at the top with the post name. Each bin represented an overseas post, and the bins were arranged in alphabetical order. Into those bins went our stuff, as well as shipments from the Office of Communications, equipment orders from overseas posts sent to the Department for onward shipment, unclassified mail and odd-sized packages from all over the Department and the United States.

When a bin filled up, the mail room sometimes stacked any additional packages in front of the bin on the floor, but this was hazardous for mail room employees. More often, if the bin for CONAKRY was next to the bin for COLOMBO, one might be relatively active and the other would largely sit idle. Those empty bins often caught the excess boxes. Our camera boxes barely fit into *any* of the mail room bins, and sometimes wound up in the wrong hopper. Often, the shipping error was alphabetically very small (Monrovia to Mongolia, let's say) but the geographic error was immense.

The mail room tried posting notices on the bins, tried taping sticky notes to the camera boxes and otherwise attempted to keep the flow of cameras moving to the intended destinations, but it took months to correct this particular shipping problem.

215. SNUFF BOTTLES

On my first trip into China, while visiting one of the stores set aside for tourists, I encountered a strange little bottle painted with a scene centered on a kitten. I picked up the vessel (which was about the size of a pack of cigarettes) and discovered that it was made of hollowed-out rock crystal that had been painted on the inside through the hole in the top with a tiny brush. There was a contrasting top of nephrite jade on top of the bottle that had been fitted with a little spoon.

When the European powers opened trade with China in the 1800's, they brought tobacco with them in the form of snuff. The use of snuff rapidly became a status symbol among those Chinese who could afford it, and Chinese began to carry the powder as well. Where the Europeans carried their snuff in hinged boxes and administered the tobacco as a pinch, the Chinese preferred to carry their snuff in little bottles, and to use a small spoon to bring the powder to their noses. In a short time, materials native to China were artistically formed into snuff bottles.

Many snuff bottles from that era are available today, and I saw some almost everywhere I went in China. After seeing a wide variety of these bottles on my first trip, I began to look for some to buy on later visits. Some of these bottles came from government stores, some were from open markets, and others were found in the gift shops of hotels. The variety was extensive, and I gradually began to recognize bottles of quality when I encountered them.

In Beijing, I found a lumpy little blue bottle made of turquoise. Turquoise can be botryoidal (formed as group of small globes) and the artist who made this bottle sanded a lumpy chunk of this stone to emphasize its natural shape and then hollowed it out. The bottle had a red carnelian agate top and a spoon.

In Shenyang, I bought a rounded crystal bottle with a mounted Chinese warrior painted on its interior, backed by a landscape painted behind the rider. The top and the spoon were missing from this bottle, which is sometimes the case. The level of detail on the painting is impressive, suggesting that it was painted with a brush made of only one or two bristles.

While in Guangzhou (where I saw many other snuff bottles) I acquired a flat-sided crystal bottle with paintings of a swan (side A) and a peacock (side B). It was fitted with a green jade top. I saw a lot of snuff bottles with this shape, which were probably more comfortable to carry than rounded vessels.

In Shanghai, on a trip with Field Cooper, I found a carved red coral bottle, fitted with a matching coral top and a spoon. In appearance, it looks like a flattened oval. The reddish-orange coral has yellow streaks and natural imperfections from the coral on its surface, and it holds a high level of polish.

In Chengdu, as previously related (story number 180) I bought a diagonally-carved amber bottle with an amber top and an internal spoon.

In the words of Marie Kondo, the Japanese expert on ridding your house of unneeded material, these little bottles still “spark joy” when I look at them. I am going to hold on to our snuff bottle collection for a while. Everything seems to move in cycles: maybe snuff will return someday.



Snuff bottles in the author's collection.

216. SUGAR FROSTED FLAKES

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

In 1957, we lived in Bombay, India. India at that time was a riot of color, sounds, smells and strange sights, from the colored powder people threw at each other during religious holidays to the overwhelming odors of an Indian fruit market, with mangoes and guavas and coconut halves and pineapples all merged into a banquet of smells. I remember India vividly, but while we were there as kids, we were homesick for what we thought were better things.

Americans overseas, (especially kids) long for the comforts of home. While we were overseas, everything was perceived of as *better* in the U.S.: Fresh milk, peanut butter, Wonder Bread, baseball cards along with your chewing gum, etc. All of the things that we used to enjoy at home that were somehow missing where we were.

Overseas stores in India were very different from Western stores. As an example, consider Chimalker's "Gents and Ladies Hairdresser" in Bombay. This emporium was an Indian department store in a single long building like a row house. There was an incredible variety of products for sale, all displayed on a single floor.

On entering the store, you were greeted with the exotic smell typical of Indian stores all over the world. Chimalker's sold prepared food, Indian spices, rice, candy, tobacco and carved wooden trinkets in teak from all over India. It was not just a food store: there were several barbers' chairs available for "Gents and Ladies". It was also a source for school supplies, notebooks, pens and ink. It was not just a barber shop: there was cloth available and a tailor in the store to custom make lined swim suits for the swimming club across the road. Draperies could also be ordered there.

It was not just a tailor shop. There were tennis rackets, carom boards, cricket bats, soccer balls, table tennis nets and paddles all piled on the shelves behind the counters. There were paper kites and colored rolls of *manja* (kite string covered in fine glass particles, for kite fighting.) Nor was it simply a sporting goods store. There were canned and bottled foodstuffs from all over the world. Indian products, British products (lots of them, often, with "By Appointment to Her Majesty the Queen" printed on their labels). There were European products, appliances, electrical cords and light bulbs next to the spices, shirts and sandals.

Once in a while, however, an American product showed up in Chimalker's. After about six months in Bombay, I spotted a box of Kellogg's Sugar Frosted Flakes on the shelf in the store. I had seen them advertised on TV in the States before we left, but had never tasted the cereal. I prevailed on my mother to buy us a box.

The next morning, my brother, my two oldest sisters and I each got a bowl of the new cereal for breakfast. My mother poured out the flakes into bowls, set a bowl before each of us and poured milk (we used water buffalo milk, which we pasteurized ourselves) over the flakes.

What we did not know was that, in transit and while on display in the store, the box of cereal had become Chock Full of Weevils.

Each bowl came alive with swimming insects, each about an eighth of an inch in length. The weevils were light brown, about the width of pencil leads. The bugs swam desperately for the edges of the bowls, but most did not make it.

We pitched the cereal and reflected again on how great things were back home.

218. FADING MEMORIES

In 1986, there was an OIC/ESC conference in Washington. We were expanding quite a bit at that time, and outside inventory experts had been brought in under contract to help us get organized and keep track of all the new equipment that had been installed around the world by the Security Enhancement Program.

We met in a conference room at the DS Training Center for a briefing on the new inventory system and how it was to be regulated. There was a little resentment in the air: we had been keeping track of our own inventory, however badly, for about ten years. Although all of us realized that there was a better way to order, stock and account for things, it seemed wrong to have someone from outside our outfit show up and tell us what to do. Our briefers were two women who had been studying our inventory process but who had no overseas experience in our organization. They wanted our advice and suggestions for improving the new system.

Where we had previously used permanent, glued-on metal tags with equipment serial numbers to identify all of our equipment, the new system would rely on adhesive bar code stickers. These stickers were easier to apply, would absorb our current means of identifying material and would eventually replace it, and could be read electronically, saving time and effort. All of these points seemed very reasonable, if you conceded that initially installing the new stickers represented a lot of work.

The ladies put a picture of a bar code scanner up on the screen. This was a small, hand-held reader not unlike the ones you see at grocery store checkout counters. They explained that the reader could be oriented toward the sticker in any direction and would still acquire the assigned code. For shelved equipment, taking inventory would be a lot faster and more accurate, and if the bar code was placed on the front face of the equipment we would no longer have to lift up a radio receiver, turn it around, try to read the glued-on metal sticker in poor light and record our findings on a paper form with a pen. All of this sounded pretty good.

At some of our posts, however, equipment that would need to be inventoried was already installed. Some of it, like CCTV cameras and alarm heads, was located out of reach on outdoor poles or on the sides of Embassies. Even in our storage areas, there was equipment that was deeply recessed on shelving that would be a nuisance to reach with the little hand scanner on the screen. We asked about this problem.

One of the ladies brought up a new slide. This was a second scanner that we were about to receive. It was shaped like an angular handgun with a long, slender barrel and a bar code sensor at its tip. The instrument was shown in profile and was very dark and ominous in

appearance. It looked remarkably like a probe that might be used on human abductees aboard an alien spaceship. This slide stayed up on the screen as the ladies continued to talk.

One noted problem, we were informed, was that the bar code stickers tended to fade in direct sunlight. For most of the equipment installed indoors, this was not a problem, but where outdoor alarm systems and cameras were concerned, ultraviolet light could actually bleach the stickers to a point where the readers could not recover the needed information. Placement of the bar code stickers, we were told, was important. Obviously, we needed to.....

With the long probe still up on the screen, a low Southern voice from the back of the room stated clearly: "Put it where the sun don't shine!"

The polite and interested audience gave out a huge roar. Our "trainers" shared in the fun. This bit of wit broke the ice where opposition to the new system was concerned and got the bar code program off to a good start.

219. GROUND HOG DAY

There is a limbo-like quality to sitting at home during a pandemic (and I'm not talking about dancing, at my age). Most of the activities we normally participate in (dinners out, meetings with friends, even dental appointments) are either postponed or cancelled outright. Our planned trip to Canada went South. Our scheduled travel to Scotland, England and France was pushed over to 2021. As we dutifully stayed in to avoid the virus, time seemed to gradually speed up week by week, but there was also a sense of treading water, of time frozen, of not *doing* anything. Limbo.

We mitigated this a bit. There used to be a train line between the Sussex County seat (Georgetown) and the town of Lewes. This line ran near our house, and when we first arrived it was still active, supporting a weekly train delivery on Thursdays that brought materials to a pharmaceutical factory near the ocean. We could actually see the train go by from our front porch before they built the other homes.

Time went by, and the need for the rail line went with it. The County reclaimed the little spur and decided to convert its entire length to a bicycle and walking path. As with other government work, even local government work, this took a while: days of stacked railroad steel at the edge of our community, followed by other days of stacked railroad ties. After this, there were long delays while road crews cleared the trees to either side of the former rail line, re-leveled the track bed and paved it. Finally, split-rail fencing was installed along the trail where the ground sloped steeply to streams and where summer trailer housing in the woods approached the new walkway.

Wearing masks, we ventured out on this trail to get some exercise, encountering other masked and unmasked figures walking by, jogging or pedaling. Social distancing required faceless passers-by to move to the edges of the walkway as they approached each other. The trail was refreshing, giving us vistas of estate-level housing and Delaware farms at first, but even this outlet became stale as we repeated hikes through the same territory.

In our home, each day seemed much like the next. I do a crossword puzzle and read the newspaper each morning: it was there for me at the same time every day. Staying home, we tended to eat the same things for breakfasts and lunches. After dinner, we either read or watched movies, often seen-before DVDs from our little library downstairs. Sometimes it rained, sometimes it was cloudy, sometimes there was a little sunshine. Overall, one day was very much like another, and this situation continues.

There is one exception to the monotony. For excitement, Gail and I change the sheets on our beds each Friday. We wash the sheets together, dry each set separately and then reinstall them on the aired-out beds. The day marks the end of a week of quarantine and starts the next week off at almost exactly the same time. As we continue to live cautiously, Friday is our line

on the wall for another week gone by in our cell, another notch in our stay-at-home belt. Gail has been calling it Ground Hog Day.

220. LEARNING TO SAIL

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

We lived in Bombay, India from 1956 to 1959. At the time, my father was an Economic Officer at the US Consulate in the city, which was the center of commerce in Western India. Several club memberships around town were maintained for officers in the Consulate by our government, as places to meet and entertain local government officials, captains of industry and other diplomats. One of these memberships was to a club based at the Gateway of India Hotel, which had a number of bars and meeting rooms (and which was attacked by terrorists not so long ago.)

Outside the hotel, which was situated on the edge of a harbor leading to the Indian Ocean, was a commemorative stone gateway erected to honor a visit to India by King George V. There was a set of stone steps leading down to the water, and a little marina just below the hotel. The marina contained a very few private sailboats and thirteen wooden dinghy-sized sailboats which belonged to the hotel's Bombay Sailing Club. If you were a club member, the cost of sailing lessons was very reasonable, and our parents decided that my brother and I should learn to sail.

Every other Wednesday afternoon after school throughout most of the above three years, we went down to the marina for lessons. Sailing was not undertaken during the Indian monsoon season, when the winds and rain were dangerous.

We began with learning boat terminology, then learned to raise and lower first the centerboard, then the mainsail. We progressed to running up a jib and running out a spinnaker. When we could move about the boat smoothly and operate the sails and the tiller, we were ready to go out onto the water. The normal course we followed left the dock below the hotel and took us out to the edge of the harbor, circling some six buoys placed as a course for club races. There was an anchored platform in the middle of these buoys that was used as a judging station during those events. We learned to sail with the wind, to tack against the wind, and went through drills like raising and lowering the sails away from the shelter of the dock. We got a little wet some days; we discovered that some of the club boats were faster than others. It was both fun and instructional.

Bombay harbor was very busy in the late 1950's. The port was visited by passenger liners, freighters, ships carrying coal, oilers, warships from several countries and bulk carriers loaded with ores like galena, sphalerite and cinnabar. We also encountered ships with raw materials like sulfur. (We had a board game at home called "International Trade" that was a little like Monopoly, except that you bought and sold goods as you moved around the world. We tossed out the commodity pieces that came with the game and replaced them with little pieces of actual cargoes, which we picked up on the Bombay docks.)

On those occasions when we sailed away from the buoys and towards the harbor, we were careful to skirt all of those motorized vessels. The wake of even a small freighter would toss us around easily, and our instructor kept us far away from the metal-hulled ships.

There was another class of ship plying Bombay harbor, however, that had been sailing that route for centuries. These were wooden-hulled dhows propelled by lateen sails. Most of them carried traditional cargoes that were not profitable for the motorized vessels, and not a few of these cargoes came from the Spice Islands near Indonesia. Many of the dhows were based in the Persian Gulf and carried their goods past Bombay to Bahrain, to Aqaba or to Basra. These ships were small and very slow: they were especially interesting because you could smell them as they came toward you, laden with pepper or nutmeg or cinnamon. These were the cargoes that Columbus was looking for when he headed West from Spain.

As the dhows passed by us (or as we passed by the slower dhows) we could generally see a man in pajama-like Arab clothing, usually wearing some headdress like a turban or a skullcap, sitting by the tiller at the back of the ship. Often, he was steering the dhow with his foot, or appeared to be asleep. The sails were of a burlap-like canvas, usually covered with patches, and the hulls had been exposed to the sun for many years and were bleached almost white. We would inhale the cinnamon odor, wave at the helmsman, adjust our sails and return to the marina.

221. THE WELL

On a trip to El Salvador in 1986, we were working at the USAID compound. The facility was getting ready for a Security Enhancement Package. However, there was a deep well in the basement of the main USAID building that was losing its lining and which threatened to undermine the building's foundation. A local laborer had been engaged to reline the bottom of the well with country rock and mortar, above and below the region in the well where the water table moved up and down. The USAID GSO, an American, was supervising the repairs.

I went down to the basement to look at the well. There were no safety rails in evidence, and I walked over to the edge of the well cautiously. Looking in, I couldn't see the bottom.

Over the small well hole, which was about four feet in diameter, there was a rickety wooden truss assembly forming a sort of tripod. The legs came together about six feet over the hole. Suspended from this tripod was an old pulley with wooden spokes through which was laced a long, well-worn rope. Hanging from the rope was a sturdy galvanized bucket that had also seen a lot of years.

While I was discussing the project with the GSO, three Salvadorian workers came into the dusty, dim-lit basement. There were two younger men and an older, rather emaciated man who carried mason's tools wrapped in an old cloth. There was a deep pan on the floor in which the younger two men began to mix mortar.

When they had a batch of mortar prepared, the older man took a large handkerchief out of his pocket and tied it over the top of his head like a bandana. He put the tools he had been carrying into the bucket. Then he looked around sadly, as if it would be the last time he ever saw the surface, looked up, and crossed himself.

The mason stepped into the bucket and grabbed the rope with both hands. The other two men untied the rope from a cleat on the wall and gently lowered him deeply into the well. I would estimate that he went down about twenty-five feet in the bucket, judging by the length of the rope.

Once he was down (I was told he was standing on a wooden platform), the younger men began to lower batches of mortar down into the well using the same rope and bucket. I was informed that the old man used a lantern to see what he was doing and spent about three hours at a time in the well before coming up for some relief, some water and a little food.

The USAID basement repairs were completed on time.

222. SHIPBOARD ROMANCES

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

On leaving our assignment to India in 1959, my father again booked us on passenger ships for our return to the United States. Travel by air was becoming cheaper for the government, and the required use of aircraft for Permanent Change of Stations was right around the corner, but it was not yet the Jet Age, and we were allowed to go by sea. Checking with the Consulate's Travel Section, we found that no American Flag Carriers serviced Bombay: we would have to travel by a foreign ship until we reached a point where we could transfer to an American vessel. That port turned out to be Naples, Italy. Since we were headed for Italy, we chose the SS Asia, an Italian luxury liner, as our ship for the first leg of this journey. I was 14 at the time.

I had told my friends that the SS Asia was due to depart at noon. A girl I liked and her parents planned to come and see us off, but they were delayed in traffic. At about ten minutes before noon, we were lined up on the Promenade Deck to wave goodbye to our friends, and the ship's stewards passed out rolls and rolls of colored paper streamers long enough to reach all the way to the quay. At noon, big hawsers tying the ship to the pier were taken in, a tugboat arrived to tow us out into the harbor and I spotted my girlfriend and her parents running to try and get abreast of the ship. I tossed several streamers to her, which she was able to catch, but the relentless movement of the ship tore the streamers apart: very symbolic. In a short time, we were out in the harbor, our well-wishers were out of sight and the ship's engines started up.

The Asia docked in Karachi, Pakistani the next evening. On the following day, another American family came aboard: let's call them the Crosbys. They had several children, including a young man who was eighteen and a pretty daughter who was a year younger than I was: let's call her Connie. We found ourselves engaged in a lot of activities with the Crosbys almost immediately, exploring the ship, going on guided tours, playing deck games and enjoying the pool. Connie and I paired off rather quickly. There were several movies to watch in the ship's theater each day, and we gradually spent a lot of time romancing in the darkened movie theater. When we were not watching movies, we were busy with shuffleboard and ping pong.

The ship made stops in Aden, Suez, Port Said, Beirut and Athens before heading to Italy. At each of these ports of call we went ashore, did some shopping or sight-seeing or both, and went back aboard. From Suez, we took camels to go and see the pyramids, then took a car to Cairo to see the British Museum and picked up the Asia again at Suez before it transited the Suez Canal. In Athens, we made another visit to the Parthenon, where polished marble steps seem to get smoother and easier to slip on every time I have toured the place. Finally, we pulled into Naples, where we had to wait six days until our ongoing vessel arrived.

On the first of these six days, we went to Pompeii to look at the ruins and the museum, containing fabulous plaster casts of cavities in the volcanic ash made by residents of Pompeii and their pets who were caught in the AD 79 eruption of Vesuvius. These casts can be viewed on the Internet, and are amazing in their detail, showing mothers holding children to try and protect them, men in terror and dogs frozen in positions of agony. On the next day, we visited Vesuvius and were actually able to walk down into the cone of the volcano, which still had traces of hot magma near the surface. Our Italian guide had a walking stick with him, and would occasionally poke it into the loose, granular rock here and there to release a burst of steam. I remember thinking that the inside of the cone looked like someone had poured box after box of multi-colored Kellogg's Kix into it: most of the coloring was yellow, brown and red.

On the third day, our family took the opportunity to visit Rome. We engaged a large car (there were seven of us) and a driver who spoke English, and we drove up the coast to the Italian capital. We stopped at an Italian restaurant for lunch, then spent the first afternoon exploring the catacombs beneath the city. On the fourth day, we visited the Vatican. My mother was wearing a dress with short sleeves that day, and the Swiss Guards would not let her enter St. Peter's Cathedral. We saw the Sistine Chapel, the Pieta and other works by Michelangelo. We visited the Coliseum on our final free day, and then headed back to Naples.

We repacked our suitcases and headed for our second ship, the SS Constitution. This was a large American luxury liner, with three classes of travelers aboard. We were traveling First Class, and to my surprise the Crosbys were also booked on the second ship all the way back to New York. Connie and I resumed our relationship and discovered that we could watch movies in both the first class and the second-class theaters. By this time, our parents had started to keep an eye on us, and sometimes sent my brother or her brother to find us and ask us to come up for air, or at least for a meal. This last directive was actually important on both ships, as we were required to dress for dinner.

The Constitution stopped in Genoa, Marseille and Barcelona on our way home. I remember that we visited a fortress in Marseille and an interesting Old City in Barcelona where Spanish crafts were reconstructed and where I saw glass-blowing for the first time. After that, it was back to the ship, and back to the theaters, all the way to New York.

After our return, I went to two years of high school in Bethesda, Maryland. After this interval, we were reassigned to the American Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, where my father was to complete the FSI Arabic Language course. I was enrolled in the American Community School in Beirut and made a lot of friends at my small new school.

On the first day of my Senior year, I went into the ACS student lounge. A beautiful girl new to the boarding department walked up to me and introduced herself: Connie Crosby! Both of us dated other people that year, but we found it to be a remarkably small world.

223. BIG JOHN

In 1983, I was in Lima, Peru for my first major Security Enhancement equipment installation. As a part of this project, we were working with a contractor from the United States to install an FEBR ballistic wall all the way across the Embassy lobby at the front of the building.

The wall was needed. At that time in history, the Shining Path guerilla organization had been targeting the Embassy. Their favorite tactic was to use a fishing mortar set up in a nearby park. This was an instrument used to pitch large nets into the ocean around a fishing boat. The guerillas used the mortar to launch sticks of dynamite at the Embassy. Nothing had yet been destroyed by this tactic, but it certainly got the Embassy's attention.

To install the wall, the floor had to be absolutely level. The installation firm (Norshield) brought in a surveyor's transit for the occasion. Using an abrasive saw, they first cut two long parallel grooves in the floor where the wall was to be installed. They then used a chipping hammer to remove about an inch of concrete from the floor slab. Into this groove they put a line of bolt anchors, fitting them with bolts. The transit was then used to bring each of the bolt heads up to the same height. When this had been accomplished, the groove was filled with new concrete to the exact height of the bolt heads, creating a level base for the wall about thirty feet long. Into this level groove went a steel-framed ballistic wall, which supported a control door near the Marine Booth.

The doctored wall base was allowed to harden for a couple of days while we worked on the installation of the security equipment for the Marine Booth and set up the equipment and internal wiring in the SIC room. Then the time came to install the wall. The steel frames went in first.

Norshield had sent the steel parts to post boxed in wooden crates. We had to push the cartons up an inclined wooden ramp to reach the lobby area, after which they were opened. The cartons, as you might imagine, were mighty heavy. Two of us struggled to push the first carton up the ramp, without success.

Norshield's factory representative on the site was a huge man who quickly became known as "Big John". John was easily big enough to be an NFL lineman, and was a Good Ole Southern Boy, with forearms larger than my thighs. John saw the two of us groaning as we tried to move the first crate and came over to help. Placing his right hand on the crate, John pushed it up the ramp by himself, using one hand.

When the steel framing for the wall was in place, it was time for the glazing. The ballistic windows arrived in smaller crates that were actually heavier than the ones that held the steel. John again came to our rescue, but accepted our help in moving the glass up the ramp.

John said that he would make real glaziers out of us. He installed the Neoprene gasketing around a ballistic pane, cutting the corners slightly with a utility knife to lock the gasket in place. He taped the two ends of the gasket together, then sprayed the entire gasket with silicone as a lubricant. Finally, he lifted the pane into place with a massive double suction cup handle. Having been shown the process, we began to install the gaskets, and took turns under John's supervision to seat each new pane in its frame. When one row of panes was in, we installed additional framing steel to hold the windows in place. As I remember, there were four rows of ballistic window panes between the floor and the upstairs slab, stretching thirty feet across the lobby.

A day or two after the wall was in place, we completed our wiring, checked out the circuitry and turned the new security system over to the Post.

Two months later, the guerillas drove by the Embassy in a truck and shot up the whole front face of the building with AK-47s. Not a single bullet penetrated the wall, but many of the ballistic panes were damaged and had to be replaced.

224. BIG RED

The first passive infra-red detectors shipped to the field in 1978. Where previously we had relied on ultrasonic alarm systems inside of embassies, the new equipment was quite different. These were “Big Red” detectors, looking something like a light grey beer can mounted on a swivel fitting above a dark grey pedestal that was intended for wall mounting. The “cans” featured a red cellophane film across the business end of the detector, from which the marketing name was derived. The technology was simple. The IR sensor was in the focal point of a parabolic mirror. The mirror had been broken into several pieces and glued back together. A circuit through the sensor was locked in a quiescent state, and the mirror looked out into the room for the movement of a warm body. As detected heat moved from one segment of the broken mirror to another section, a change in perceived energy was processed by the sensor as an alarm condition.

SEO Glen Habenicht unpacked the first Big Red to reach Abidjan and played around with it. Glen was a good engineer who came to SY after helping to develop avionics for the F4 Phantom program at McConnell Douglas during the war in Vietnam. He was a peaceful soul who did not like high pressure environments, but he was a pilot who really lived and breathed airplanes. Glen liked the passive IR unit a lot: it needed a moving, warm body to set it off and seemed to be immune to false alarms from flying cockroaches or captive birds or air conditioning gusts that made draperies flap.

Glen also enjoyed a little humor. On the Friday afternoon after he had tested the Big Red unit, he decided to have some fun with it. We had a small cassette recorder in the office that could be induced to play a recorded message by a contact closure. Glen said: “What’s the use of being an engineer if you can’t have some fun?” I put a recording together while Glen hung the PIR on the wall in our inner office, provided it with power and coupled it to the cassette recorder.

The PIR unit was angled so as to detect an “intruder” after they walked deeply into our office, and the cassette player was placed next to the door with its volume at a normal speaking level. After the rest of the office left for the day, we set up the alarm system and left the Embassy.

That evening, a young Marine Security Guard looking for violations entered our inner office in the dark about 9:00 at night. After about four steps into the office, he heard an unexpected voice behind him.

“Hold it right there, Marine!”

“Don’t make any sudden movements”

“Keep your hands where I can see them”

“Now, put your hands slowly above your head, and turn around”

When he got off duty, the Marine came over to the Marine House looking for us with fire in his eyes. He said that he nearly had a heart attack when the unexpected voice came out of the darkness behind him, and that he was expecting to be shot when he turned around. He kept his hands in the air for another minute, long enough for him to realize that he was being threatened by a cassette recorder.

Glen left SY after his first overseas tour. He went back into avionics with US Air, then jumped ship for Federal Express, where he was the Chief Engineer for Avionics when I last heard from him. His after-SY jobs allowed him to evaluate new avionics equipment for jet aircraft, to fly as a distinguished crew member while testing those systems in flight, and to spend more time with his family than he managed to do in Abidjan.

225. YELLOW FEVER

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

Growing up in the Foreign Service, we needed a lot more shots than we seem to require today. There were typhoid shots, cholera shots, plague shots, tetanus shots, gamma globulin shots and yellow fever shots. When you got sick, there were penicillin shots for pneumonia. Most of these shots began with an initial injection that was good for a specified period of time, after which you went in for “booster” shots. Some of these were very mild; others, like typhoid and tetanus vaccines, were debilitating for a day or two. The yellow fever shot stung sharply when it was administered, but was forgettable even an hour later. The typical interval between booster shots was six months, and your international shot record, a folding yellow card usually carried inside your passport, was an essential travel document you never wanted to lose.

In the early years, before Main State was built, the State Department’s medical section was housed in a temporary building built during the Second World War on the National Mall. It was located about where the Vietnam War Memorial now sits. Our family regularly drove down to this building, parked on the Mall, and went in for our shots at least once every six months. Later, when Main State was in place, we went into the Department for our medical work.

Both my brother and I had low blood sugar levels growing up. When we returned from our tour in Bombay, we went into the Department for our post-deployment physicals and (just incidentally) for some booster shots. After the shots, we headed down to the (then new) cafeteria for lunch. My 11-year-old brother went through the cafeteria line with a tray in hand supporting some food on china plates; he fainted as he left the cash register. This resulted in a loud clatter, broken dishes and a lot of concern from diplomats who were chowing down. “Did he have a heart attack?” was heard from several tables. After Bill regained consciousness, he picked up his tray and plates, took them to the drop off point and went back to get another lunch.

Similarly, when we were in Beirut, we went to a local clinic for our shots. There were seven of us in our family at this time and shot-taking had become a major production. On one summer day, it was determined that my yellow fever shot was about to expire. I received the shot with its strong stinging sensation, walked out onto the clinic veranda and fainted dead away. I was carried back into the clinic, revived, and was fine that afternoon.

When I went to my Army induction physical, I was the first soldier in line among a group of about thirty-five recruits. We were all sitting on plastic chairs in a hallway in our underwear. The first station was one where blood was taken. I went in, presented my arm, had three syringes of blood withdrawn and fainted in the collection chair. My limp body was carried across the hallway to a recovery area in full view of the other thirty-four men who were about to enter that same collection room. (You can probably see a pattern here.)

In 1975, my wife and I went into the Department for our initial medical examinations. We were seated in the waiting room, where my wife was the first to be called. She breezed through each step of her physical: giving blood, stress tests, Doctor's exams, etcetera, but she did not see me as she wound back and forth among the tiny offices and cubicles that formed the Medical Section.

I, of course, went in to give blood and passed out on the collection couch. Not a good start to my new career. I did fine with the rest of the physical, but had to return for a glucose tolerance test, which I somehow passed. Where I was concerned, getting into the Foreign Service was a bit dicey.

226. THE DREAM

My father died in 1994. At the time, I was in Suva, Fiji, assisting Mark Steakley and a Seabee Senior Chief with a Selectone installation at the Embassy. My mother called me the day before he passed away, suggesting that I return to Washington immediately, but there were no direct flights to the States from Fiji, the airport was on the other side of the island and it looked as if it might take me three or four days to return. I reluctantly decided to continue with the installation, but I felt guilty about not making it home in time for years after that.

The other night I was sleeping in my bed in Delaware and I had an interesting, full-color dream. In the dream, I was back in Bethesda at my parents' house. I was replacing an outdoor light fixture on the wall above the back door, which was about twelve feet off the ground. To reach the fixture, I climbed a short extension ladder, which I leaned against the brick building. My father was standing at the bottom of the ladder, holding it for me so that the base wouldn't slip.

I climbed the ladder with a new LED outdoor fixture and some tools. I set those on a tray near the top of the ladder. Then I removed the old, rusted fixture and placed it over a lower ladder rung. I installed the new fixture. Then I picked up the old light and climbed down the ladder.

I stood next to my father and showed him the old fixture, which was beginning to come apart. He nodded, smiled, and put his arm around my back to give me a hug on my left shoulder. He said: "Good job." I felt an intense feeling of accomplishment, pride and love from that little hug. I felt redeemed and wanted that moment to last forever.

Then I woke up. But I could still feel my father's arm around me.

During the night, the top sheet on my bed had come loose and was wrapped around me tightly, squeezing my left shoulder. Although I realized what had happened, I did not want to remove the sheet: I wanted to stay in the dream. It was very vivid and realistic: I was *there*.

I wonder how well the new light works...

227. WRITING A TOUR GUIDE FOR ATHENS

In the late Spring of 2002 Steve Klein, the OIC of the ESC in Athens, was due to take Home Leave. John Holland was looking for a six-week replacement for Steve, and asked if I was interested in the assignment. I was teaching high school then, and the timing was perfect: I could head to Greece shortly after school was out, and the earnings at my WAE rate would far outstrip Montgomery County summer school pay. I accepted the job immediately.

On my arrival in Athens, I was taken to the Alexandros, a small hotel near the Embassy. Because of its proximity to the Embassy (half a block) many TDY personnel were housed there.

At lunch on my first day of work, I stopped by the Community Liaison Office to ask if they had a guide to the city and a list of good places to eat. (Many Embassies do.) Surprisingly, Athens did not. Athens is such a mecca for travelers that there are many pocket guides available in book stores to get you around the city. No one had apparently taken the time to poll Embassy personnel for a list of their favorite restaurants. I am not a food critic, but I like to eat. I thought I might write an Embassy-oriented Tour Guide for the CLO during my TDY.

I was in a Fraternity in college, and I learned the Greek alphabet as a pledge. I have to add that I only learned the *upper case* Greek Alphabet. I did learn it well, however (all pledges do) and I was surprised to find that I could read and pronounce most of the street signs made with capital letters. Almost immediately, I started to learn the lower-case Greek script.

On my first evening, I started with bus routes from the hotel into other parts of the city. Buses are an inexpensive way to see a city as its residents see it, and you can almost always get back to where you started by taking another bus with the same number when you get to the end of the line. I took a couple of bus trips, recording my progress, and I wrote down what I had for dinner and where I ate. I also recorded the buses and subways I used to get places, beginning to write a guide on how to use a Greek bus and how to obtain subway tickets, always leaving from the Alexandros Hotel and returning there.

It turned out that I could catch a bus immediately outside the hotel, ride it for two stops and then get into the excellent and rather new subway system serving the City of Athens. After commuting to work by subway in the Washington area, I found the Athens subway to be easy and (since the Athens Olympic Games were only a year away) subway stops were shown in several languages. As with the streets, where Greek was used, most of the destination lettering was in upper case Greek!

Each day at work, I would ask around for restaurant recommendations. I would try some of the suggested eateries, and more often explore restaurants that looked interesting. I could usually find a Greek-speaking secretary in the Embassy to call and make reservations for me at the more expensive restaurants. This was important because restaurants in Athens would like you to arrive as a party and spend a lot of money on your dinner: single guests sitting at a table

for four were not especially popular. Single guests from the American Embassy, however, were usually welcome at each restaurant I visited.

I found some wonderful places to eat. One rooftop restaurant was in the Makrigianni area of town with a super view of the Acropolis. Almost all of the clientele appeared to be Greek, but they had an English language menu. This particular restaurant specialized in roast lamb; many of their wines were from Macedonia. I liked the wine list in most of the restaurants I frequented: half bottles are sold in many Greek restaurants, enough for perhaps three glasses and just right for a single person's dinner. I wrote up each of the restaurants I patronized, discussing the menu and what I ate.

One evening, just for fun, I ate at a McDonalds in Athens. The menu was largely the same, with the addition of a couple of varieties of Gyro. I did notice that in Athens, you could get a Heineken beer on draft at McDonalds.

I could go on here for quite a while, but I'm not going to belabor my readers with a repeat of the whole Tour Guide. For those of you who have read *Charlotte's Web*, however, think of Templeton the Rat at the State Fair and you will have a good approximation of my dining pattern in the Greek Capital.

I *will* relate that my favorite restaurant was Daphne's, an old eatery with a lot of history. Daphne's was just off to the side of an ancient fountain; it was perched just below the Acropolis and just above the Plaka area. Daphne's had classic Greek statuary; it displayed a Corinthian capital set on the floor to hold a plant. The restaurant featured a tent-like outdoor dining room, excellent service and a menu to return and investigate further. I was served Greek broad beans as an appetizer, and just about reordered them as an entrée. I ordered *Demestica* wine from Patras, had lamb with spanakopita (Greek spinach pie) and ordered ice cream for dessert.

Towards the end of my TDY, I edited my guide, gave it to the ESC Secretary and walked it down to the CLO on a CD, so that the Office could easily add to it.

228. THE VALUE OF LITTLE CONTRACTS

Prior to 1985, most ESC and ESO locations overseas survived with a labor force of SEOs, Seabees and (usually just ESCs) secretaries. Some progress was made beginning in 1981 or 1982 with outside support contracts, principally with Dynalectron, to hire technicians who could travel out of Washington to help the field, but that support was relatively rare and the crews that came out initially required a lot of spoon-feeding.

Early in 1985, Don Hoover was working as the Operations Branch Chief in SY/T, and he managed to obtain some funding for local support contracts. Each ESC was told they could hire two or three local people, and we were asked to write up job descriptions for the type of personnel we hoped to hire. The prospect of local labor involved some wrinkles: security clearance problems, FICA and other pay considerations, how that labor might best be used, etc.

I decided to ask for three positions. We had a large warehouse in Panama out by the Miraflores locks of the Panama Canal, in which we primarily armored cars. A lot of our large power tools were stored out there, and (to be honest) the place was a mess. I thought that a "Warehouse Supervisor" might be a useful addition to our staff, and that individual would not need a security clearance.

Our little lab area was packed with work benches, metal shelves with of all sorts of electronic equipment, key cutters, shipping cases, power tools, refrigerators, batteries, locks, CCTV cameras, alarm systems and the occasional spool of wire. It was in fairly good shape, but it could have been in better order. I thought that a "Laboratory Assistant" would be useful, but I wrestled with the security clearance issue due to some of our equipment. I decided to ask for American Citizenship on the job announcements and tack on the requirement that applicants needed to qualify for a Secret Clearance.

Finally, we needed secretarial help to address travel vouchers. We submitted a lot of them, and our personnel needed those vouchers funded in order to replenish their checking accounts, which were initially filled with blanket travel advances. I decided to ask for a "Secretarial Assistant". I sat down at my Wang and typed up job descriptions for each position, which I sent to the Department. Two weeks later, funding arrived for all three positions.

With the assistance of the Embassy Personnel Section, I advertised these empty positions within the Embassy, within the U.S. military organizations in Panama City and the nearby bases, and at the offices of the former Panama Canal Commission. It was like fishing: you baited a hook, threw it in the water and waited.

The first applicant was a young man with a USAF background. He was married to an Army Captain who worked in Intelligence for the U.S. Southern Command. He had been an enlisted C-130 aircraft mechanic before leaving the Service. In interviewing him, I determined that he knew a lot about tools, perhaps more than we did. He was almost desperate for work as a

military dependent: he *wanted* to work, but there weren't that many jobs around that he qualified for. I thought he would be a good fit for the Warehouse Manager and hired him. I also thought I would request a clearance for him.

Our second applicant was an Embassy dependent. Barry Copenhaver was the spouse of a secretary in the Economic Office. Barry had been a physical education teacher and a soccer coach in Mexico several years before and was interested in joining the State Department and becoming a Tandem Couple with his spouse. Barry was easy-going, likeable and spoke Spanish like a Mexican soccer player. He was the best of two candidates to compete for the "Lab Assistant" position.

Finally, a young woman from the Panama Canal Commission office showed up to ask about the secretarial assistant job. She was pleasant, a good typist, had a little college to offer and was eager to try her hand at travel vouchers. I decided to hire her as well.

A security clearance for the Warehouse man came in almost immediately, considering his wife's occupation. He went out to the warehouse, looked around, came back and asked for permission to create a restricted area in the warehouse, close it off with a chain link fence, and move all of the high value warehouse tools except the ones needed for car armoring inside that enclosure. This was very unpopular with the Seabees (he was locking up "their" tools). After hearing his arguments, I authorized the fence.

This young man went through every tool kit we had, checked out the tools and ordered fresh battery packs. The tools were cleaned, the cases were repacked and junk was turned over to property disposal. He ordered new tools that he knew the Seabees could use. When Seabees scheduled a trip, he would send their tools to post by unclassified pouch, saving us money, and verify that they had been received before the Seabees left. Finally, when the tool area was clean enough to eat dinner there, he turned his attention to the rest of the Warehouse and did the same sort of comprehensive cleanup. Then, bored with so little to do, he started helping the Seabees armor cars. He got very good at armoring; I obtained an Official Passport for him and he occasionally traveled with the Seabees to repair lightly-armored cars and vans all over Central and South America.

Barry Copenhaver's clearance also went through quickly. I walked him through the Laboratory shelves to explain what various cases were for, and he began a cleanup similar to the one taking place at the warehouse. Barry's Spanish was extremely helpful: he escorted our chars carefully, keeping them laughing and on the job and encouraging them to do the work they were capable of doing. Our floors shined, our workbenches were clean and orderly, light bulbs were replaced and doorknobs glistened. The Seabees could bring Barry a pile of the armoring clips they used on cars and Barry would zip over to a machine shop, order a hundred of each type of clip and negotiate a good price for the parts in Spanish. Barry became our wire shipper for installation projects, working with Bob Frahm to identify the types and quantity of wiring

needed and pouching it to posts from our downstairs wire vault. (Barry eventually became an Administrative Officer for the State Department.)

The young secretarial assistant's Secret clearance had not come in by the time I left Panama, but she was efficient at producing accurate and timely travel vouchers, and was stern about getting the receipts needed to allow the vouchers to go through quickly.

Morale in the ESC was excellent once those positions were filled. Our personnel arrived at constituent posts knowing that the equipment, wire, parts and tools they would need for the job were already there. They left and returned to a clean, bright and well-equipped office and lab area, filed their vouchers and turned in their passports for new visas. The chemistry between ESC Panama office members in late 1985 and 1986 was the best of any office I managed in the Department.

229. A GUEST OF ROYAL THAI AIRLINES

On my arrival in Abidjan, I learned to travel on two Diplomatic Passports. One would go in for a visa while you were traveling on the other document. Our secretary, Gilder Washington, kept a close eye on our multiple-entry visas, sending our passports out to renew those visas as they approached the end of their validity dates. This practice continued when I went to Panama. Our secretary there, Shirley Corn, also did an excellent job of updating our visas ahead of trips. Once in a while, we would notice that a visa was about to run out, but our secretaries were usually far ahead of us.

When I reached Seoul, I was by myself and was without secretarial support. The RSO (Mel Harrison) offered to have his secretary assist me with visas, but I was usually able to obtain the forms I needed from the Consular Section and completing the visa applications was easy. I would fill out the form, draft a cover letter and walk it down to the Consulate: They would send someone over to the appropriate Embassy for a visa and I would have my passport back in a day or two.

On a trip to Bangkok in 1992, I was headed to Thailand to visit Tim Daly in order to generate a Work Requirements Statement, check out the ESO and conduct a constituent post visit. I flew in to Bangkok from Seoul on Royal Thai Airlines, a very pleasant flight, and landed without incident. I deplaned, entered the terminal and scooted over towards the entry line for flight crews and Diplomats. There was a young Thai Immigration Officer at the desk, neatly uniformed and friendly. He looked at my landing card, checked the Visa (which I had previously checked), nodded and turned to the front of my passport to compare my face with the picture in my passport.

He smiled, raised his visa validation stamp and started to grant me entry to Thailand. Then his hand stopped in mid-air. He frowned, looked at me, looked back at my passport and said: "Please wait here." Then he left me standing at the booth and walked back into the airport.

In a minute or two he returned with a uniformed Thai woman behind him. She looked at my passport, then looked at me and asked me to accompany her to her office. Concerned, I walked along behind her. We entered a small, neatly-furnished office with a desk and a chair for visitors in front. The Major indicated that I should sit down, then took her own chair behind the desk. Then she said: "Mr. Herrmann, your passport has expired."

After thirty-three years of Foreign Service dependent, military and State Department travel, this was the first time this particular experience had ever happened to me. I was not sure of my status. Would I be allowed to enter Thailand, or would I have to return to Seoul? Would I be allowed to travel, at all, on an expired passport? Could I even get back into Korea once I arrived in Seoul? Would I have to go into some sort of holding cell at the Bangkok airport until a

Consular Officer was sent to rescue me? I was almost in shock. I asked the Major what I could do to set things right.

She made a call, smiled and said: “Mr. Herrmann, you will be admitted to Thailand as a guest of Royal Thai Airlines. This is a limited admission: you cannot leave the City of Bangkok. You must show the form that I will give you to your hotel and you must check in at your hotel desk each morning until you get a new passport. I regret that this is necessary, but I want to welcome you to our country.” Greatly relieved, I thanked her.

With my Royal Thai Airlines certificate firmly in hand, I walked through Immigration processing to meet Tim Daly in the baggage area. I explained my problem to him. We went by the Imperial Hotel to register, dropped off my suitcase and headed for the Embassy. On our arrival, I went straight to the American Services section of the Consular Section.

The Consulate was not pleased with my diplomatic *faut pas*, and said so. I was informed that Bangkok could not (or would not) issue me a new diplomatic passport because my records indicated that I already had *two* such passports, which the Department frowned upon. I would have to wait until I returned to Seoul to substantiate my need for a new second Diplomatic Passport. In the meantime, I would be issued a Tourist Passport, but I would have to complete an application form and provide the Consular Section with two properly-sized passport pictures.

I asked Tim where I might obtain passport photos. He made a couple of calls and identified a photography shop in Bangkok that took and developed passport pictures, close enough that we could walk to it. I have forgotten which street the shop was on, but we walked down Wireless Road away from Suknumvit and into a maze of little back streets. The photographer’s shop was very modest, slightly more than a hole in the wall.

We entered the store, explained my need for pictures, and asked the proprietor how soon he could have them ready for me. He indicated that he could produce the pictures by the afternoon on the following day. I went over to a stool at the side of the shop, and the photographer stepped behind a big view camera on a tripod and inserted a sheet of film into the camera. He asked if I was ready.

(I was.) He stepped up to the camera and pulled a black hood over his head. He reached around the hood, took off the lens cover and cocked the iris mechanism with his finger. Giving me a second to compose myself, he then squeezed a rubber bulb on a rubber tube, setting off a flashbulb in a silver umbrella. He did this twice, then emerged from the hood and asked me to return the following afternoon.

Tim and I went back to the Embassy to start on the work I had planned to do. With valid visas, but an expired passport, our constituent post trip had to be scuttled, but we completed the remaining work. On the following afternoon, I went by the photographer’s studio, picked up two black-and-white photos and took them back to the Consular Section with my application for a

tourist passport. This was ready on the following day. I checked out of my hotel, headed for the airport and limped back into Seoul, entering through the line for tourists.

230. THE NUMBER ONE SHIRT SHOP

An early highlight of our tour in Seoul was the proximity of the Itaewon shopping district to the Yongsan military base where our housing was located. The Embassy compound was just inside the base, separated into two sections by the main entry road through the gate on the Southeast side of Yongsan. (These two housing areas were called “North Korea” and “South Korea” by their Embassy residents.) From where we lived, it was a short walk to the gate, where you turned up a hill and crossed a single road to enter Itaewon.

Like many sections of Seoul, Itaewon was both a sales district and a manufacturing zone. Leather jackets, for example, hung on racks in store after store. New jackets were being sewn together noisily at the back of the shop. There was something for everyone: fringed western jackets, suede jackets, long leather coats with Chinese collars and motorcycle jackets, all in a store the size of someone’s living room. Next to that store might be a vendor of women’s underwear, and down the hall might be a store selling Columbia winter outerwear, often factory seconds at very low prices.

Itaewon was built on the side of a hill that sloped down from the principal road, which wound through about a mile of the shopping district. As you looked Northeast, the shops on the left side of the road climbed up hill, while those on the right side of the road dipped down the slope. There were often three levels of stores on the downhill side of Itaewon, and they were intertwined like a Skinner Box for lab mice. The floors were connected by stairways, ramps, winding metal stairs wide enough for a single person, and outside roads that dipped down the hill to allow small trucks into the area with new stock. Electricity was a problem: a ceiling light fixture might be the only source of power for three little shops, which were connected to that fixture by the type of electrical cord used to power plug-in steam irons. There was seldom any consistency between what was sold in neighboring stores within a single building, and you couldn’t really tell a visitor how to get to a specific store inside one of these tangled emporiums: you had to take them there.

Like Bangkok and Hong Kong, Itaewon was a mecca for hand-made custom clothing: men’s suits, for example. The wool for suits was made in Korea: it was beautifully woven, of high quality and was inexpensive in the country that made it. Tailor shops with English/Oriental sounding titles (“Smitty Lee’s”, let’s say) had bolt after bolt of suit fabrics on shelves as you walked in, along with catalogs of different types of suits and coats. You were measured, you selected your fabric, you picked out the type of suit you wanted and were given a price. Within a week, you stopped by for a fitting and any adjustments needed. Two days later, your custom suit was ready. Prices varied with the fabric, but a tailored suit made of a really select wool blend might cost \$130, especially if you were a repeat customer.

There were thousands of American military personnel stationed in and around Seoul, and Itaewon was filled with some of those personnel and their dependents every day of the week.

There were also foreign troops in Seoul, part of the continuing UN presence: they also shopped. And there were large numbers of Koreans: shop owners, sales personnel and garment workers, along with caterers bringing in food and fuel and raw materials for the Korean workers. Think of a big shopping mall in the States two days before Christmas, with half the space of the mall, dim lighting and low ceilings. The stores you walked through were filled with clothing piled on racks and benches and on the floor and in cardboard boxes. Picture people openly trying on clothing all over the store, with local people pushing past you carrying pelts for jackets or kerosene for heaters and others seated on stools eating pickled cabbage stuffed with garlic cloves, and you're getting close.

Even with the above melee in progress, there were little vignettes of color in Itaewon. I once watched two Delta flight attendants in uniform walk into the shopping area, buy large wheeled suitcases and then stroll down the sidewalk, visiting store after store in the shopping arcades, filling the luggage with items they could sell or gift to others back home. At that time women's baseball jackets made of Hermes scarves were very popular. The Koreans could imitate the Hermes scarves, and a scarf jacket cost about \$20: each stewardess bought several, with the suitcases serving as shopping bags.

Oriental customs and courtesies mixed with customers' good will on the shop floors. Learning English, a shopkeeper might say; "You my first customer today. I give you discount" and a lady from Kansas (learning the Korean culture) might say "Park Kook Hee, you promise me that every time I come in here and I never see that discount. I'm your best customer. You owe me!" Customers who purchased items in quantity could negotiate better deals; returning customers who brought guests with them were especially welcome, in a practice probably dating back to medieval markets.

Copyright violations of internationally-protected products were *rampant*. Leather shops purveying purses to ladies might have a low plywood panel in the back of the store hidden by two racks of leather coats. If a customer expressed interest in a Coach handbag, the store owner would look around, evaluate the customer carefully, guide the buyer to the panel and lift it up so that the customer could crawl beneath it. The visitor would find themselves in a well-lit, tiny cubbyhole stocked with faithful reproductions of famous-maker purses. There were Louis Vuitton bags, Coach Bags, Hermes and Gucci purses. You could spot Chanel copies and Burberry purses, some going into those stewardess' suitcases. Since Customs personnel were looking for illegal copies, there were *ruses*. My favorite was an authentic-looking line of expensive Dooney and Bourke purses with the signature duck head backed by Velcro so that the buyer could swap that identifying patch with an alternate logo to slide through Customs, after which the duck head could be easily reapplied.

About a block into Itaewon on the right side of the road, visitors could enter a glass door, turn left, enter another glass door and find themselves in the Number One Shirt Shop. Like Smitty Lee's, this was the front door to a factory, but shirt fabrics were on sale instead of bolts of wool. I like oxford cloth shirts, and my right arm is about a quarter inch longer than my left arm.

I could bring in a shirt of a style I liked, or select a shirt from a catalog, choose a collar style if I wanted something different, then look at a dozen suitable fabrics in a variety of colors and pick what I would like. For about \$15 each, the vendor would measure my neck, girth and arm lengths and give me a pickup date, usually about a week down the road. The shirts were of excellent quality.

About halfway through my tour, I had some new shirts made. I don't usually go in for monograms, but I had a Korean name from the language class at FSI. I had my Korean name embroidered on the breast pockets of each shirt in classic Chinese characters in a contrasting color. There was no charge for the monogramming. This turned out to be very popular in the Embassy: FSNs would notice the shirt, read it and learn my Korean name. Since the same formal characters are used in Korea, China and Japan, the monogramming was an occasional icebreaker in all three countries. The surname given me at FSI ("Han") is widespread in both Korea and China and is easy for Japanese to read as well. ("Han" is kind of like "Smith": a hard-working, regular guy.)

231. CHICKEN DOG

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

My family moved from a Washington assignment to the American Embassy in Amman, Jordan in 1969. On their arrival, they were housed in a leased residence on Jebel Amman, not far from the Intercontinental Hotel. The house had several bedrooms, a fenced garden and a large open rooftop with a high wall around it which was useful for drying clothes and for sunbathing.

Shortly after their arrival, my parents acquired a black and white mongrel Springer Spaniel; they named the dog Lucky. Lucky largely behaved himself around the house, but on occasion would leap over the garden fence and rampage through a Sheikh's chicken coop next door, usually killing a chicken or two. The shape of the dog's lower jaw made Lucky seem to smile when his face relaxed: this was especially noticeable after a successful chicken hunt. My father would always compensate the Sheikh generously for the loss of each dead chicken.

Jordan was unstable in 1970. Many Palestinians had been displaced to Jordan from the West Bank of the Jordan River after the Six-day War with Israel in 1967. A number of these refugees formed militant groups, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. As these groups amassed followers, there were several attempts on the life of King Hussein of Jordan. Neighboring countries like Syria that were sympathetic to the Palestinian cause supported these militant groups with weapons; Syria actually invaded Jordan with tanks at one point, but was repulsed. Dependents at the American Embassy (including my mother and three sisters) were evacuated to Athens in the late summer of 1970 as the militant groups began to place large numbers of troops around Amman and other Jordanian cities in an effort to unseat the Government of Jordan and replace it with a Palestinian government.

In what the press has termed "Black September", an actual civil war broke out in Jordan between the Husseini Government and the Palestinian Militias. My father put out some food for Lucky and several buckets of water, locking him in the garden; he then moved into the relative safety of the American Embassy. There were ten days of intense house-to-house fighting in Amman, involving tanks, aircraft and a lot of infantry movement. The limestone curbs of streets were crushed by the treads of tanks, stone buildings were holed by white phosphorous tank rounds and by high explosive rounds. There were many casualties, with both dead and wounded often left lying on the sidewalks for a day or two until a lull in the fighting allowed casualties to be moved to safer locations.

During the intense fighting, my father was unable to return to our house to feed or water the dog, although he hoped that our pet would survive the conflict. On the eleventh day of the fighting, with the PLO and PFLP pushed out of the capital, he drove over to our house to check

on Lucky. He entered the house through the front door and walked through the house to the garden.

The garden area of the house was literally covered with bloody bandages. In hunger, Lucky had slipped his collar and jumped the fence. He then went foraging along the city streets, smelling blood and then ripping the field dressings off dead and wounded soldiers. He took these bandages back to our house and chewed on them until they were tasteless, then went back for more. One can only imagine how a wounded soldier on the street would have felt on seeing a big dog come out of nowhere and begin ripping the bandages off wounded men around him.

Lucky had lost some weight and was thirsty but was otherwise in good health. He was smiling. My father fed the dog, moved him inside, and quietly bagged all the bandages for disposal in a dumpster down the street.

232. SYMBIOSIS

On our first tour, in Abidjan, we acquired a sloping yard and garden with our Embassy-provided lodgings. On the property were two large avocado trees and two mango trees, all fruit-bearing, and several other plants that I could not identify. We purchased a number of shrubs and flowering bushes (especially crotons) to line our driveway and to make the house look brighter, and we enjoyed the avocados when they were in season.

About eight feet off our front veranda, there was a strange tree in the yard. It looked like a giant dowel with bumps on the trunk; it was about twelve feet high. Its trunk was cylindrical, about 18 inches in diameter at the base and it was normally bare of foliage, like a dead tree. After the rainy season, however, the top of the tree sprouted foliage with large blue-green leaves almost overnight. The tree looked good for about two weeks. I have been trying to find it on the Web for this story: the closest look-alike plant I can find is *Cussonia Paniculata*, the “Mountain Cabbage Tree”.

Two weeks after the leaves emerged, out of nowhere, dozens of very large and menacing caterpillars showed up at the base of the tree and started climbing its trunk. I have been trying to find the caterpillars on the Internet as well. They seem to have been *Bunaea Alcinoe* caterpillars for the Cabbage Tree Emperor Moth. These caterpillars were black with red spots and white spikes, were each about four inches long and were covered with menacing spikes. They looked pretty formidable, and we tried to keep our children away from them.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=cabbage+tree+emperor+moth+caterpillars&docid=608037807218950994&mid=317122BE99A840663830317122BE99A840663830&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Once the caterpillars reached the leaves, they started to eat. After the first day, the tree looked like someone with a hole punch had started perforating every single leaf. Over a week's time, the caterpillars ate every shred of leaves on the tree. I should add that the caterpillars ate nothing else in the yard, nor did we see any of them at any other time of the year. The tree looked like an umbrella with its fabric stripped off: in time, each of the new limbs supporting leaves fell off the top of the tree, creating more bumps on the trunk.

After the leaves were gone, the caterpillars climbed down and disappeared. This event was repeated each year for the three years of our tour.

233. A COMPELLING QUESTION

My mother-in-law loved Early American furnishings, and she enjoyed visiting antiques malls where all of the debris from America's past was on display. Old chest-type Coca-Cola coolers with bottle openers on the side, bits of farm equipment and shooting irons, American flags with 48 stars, old records and especially items of china filled these stores. Between overseas tours for the State Department, knowing that her mother enjoyed the trips, my wife would often suggest outings to such stores, taking Mimi along as our guest. There were a number of these shops in Kensington, Maryland, but the store my mother-in-law enjoyed the most was a large antiques mall in Fredrick, Maryland named "Old Glory".

After several years of these visits, Mimi started to collect "Depression Glass". During the Depression, the price of crystal for dining room tables was more than most families wanted to spend. Some glass companies began to produce less expensive pressed glass table settings that *looked* like cut crystal, with elaborate patterns which were named and which sometimes came in a variety of colors. The pattern that Mimi liked was named "Moon and Stars" and it featured heavy goblets and an assortment of plates. On each of our visits to Old Glory and other stores, she might find a plate or a bowl or a teacup in the pattern she was collecting. She bought those items if they were in good shape.

Mostly to keep her company, my wife started to amass her own collection of Depression Glass, settling on a different but elegant pattern named "Miss America". Like Mimi, Gail bought one or two items at a time, but over a period of about fifteen years she was able to assemble a complete setting for eight: several sizes of plates, many serving dishes, a tea set with sugar and cream holders and so forth.

We seldom used the dishes, because they were not designed for the heat of a dishwasher and each plate, bowl or cup had many impressed figures in the glass that made a chore of washing the plates by hand. When they were used on a table, however, they were lovely to look at. All of the dishes were carefully packed in heavy cardboard boxes with the pattern printed on the side to keep the dishes together.

When our beautiful daughter married, Gail gave her the entire set of dishes as a wedding present. Initially, Jeana lived in a small house in Michigan that was low on storage space. Later, however, she moved to a much larger house with a big kitchen and lots of glass-fronted cabinet space. She decided to clear the glassware out of her basement, unbox it and put it on display facing the dining room. As she unpacked, she put the cardboard boxes out by the curb for a refuse pickup the following day.

A woman and her young daughter happened by the house and saw the empty boxes. This lady had material of her own to pitch and wanted the cartons. She knocked on Jeana's door to ask if she might have them, and my daughter said she could have all the boxes she wanted. The

woman and her daughter loaded up their car and somehow got all of the boxes into the trunk and back seat.

They came up to the door to say thank you. As they did so, the little girl looked shyly at her mother. The lady said: “Go ahead, honey. Ask her.”

Under her breath but starry-eyed, the little girl quietly asked:

“Are you Miss America?”

234. THE COMMUTE

Jules began his story-telling with a description of the time he spent on an ammunition ship headed to Vietnam. Others have expressed interest in learning about what list members did before their time at State. Here's a pre-DS story:

Just before joining the State Department, I was working for Vitro Laboratories in Montgomery County, Maryland. Vitro was a large US Navy contractor involved in design guidance: they worked with Naval Sea Systems Command and the Applied Physics Laboratory at Johns Hopkins University to develop and integrate improved sensors and weapons systems into existing warships. Vitro had the Polaris and Poseidon programs; my group worked with large surface missile ships which were then called Guided Missile Frigates. I worked in the integration of all the sensors and weapons aboard those ships with the shipboard computers.

I lived in Gaithersburg, Maryland at the time, and I had a small Volkswagen Karman Ghia. I used to take back roads from Gaithersburg to the Aspen Hill area where Vitro was located: it was only a 14-mile commute in each direction. Muncaster Mill road, my main route at that time, was two lanes wide and wound sharply through farmland, deep woods and many little hills. There were blind corners, deer to worry about during the fall, areas that flooded from time to time and the occasional piece of farm machinery or construction equipment along the route, but it was fun. After work, I could usually be home in twenty minutes.

My wife was working in Crystal City, Virginia at that time, all the way out by National Airport. Her commute was about 29 miles and she had to cross the Potomac in each direction to get to work and back. Her commute time (in a '73 Camaro) varied with traffic (which was a lot better in 1974) but averaged about an hour in each direction.

Our missile frigates were armed with Terrier surface-to-air missiles. Each major weapons system or sensor system used on those ships had a support section at Vitro, and the Terrier section was right next to us. Over time, through interaction with members of that section, I came to know some of those systems engineers. One afternoon, I was talking to one of them and I mentioned the length of Gail's commute. He listened to me, smiled, and said:

“I live in Gettysburg.”

At that time, the cost of housing in Southern Pennsylvania was about one-third of the cost of living in the Washington Area. The engineer I was speaking to and five of his colleagues all lived in or just outside of Gettysburg, and had large, elegant homes. Their families were comfortable in Pennsylvania, the schools were good, public universities were good and affordable: life was simpler there. It was a hike to get to work, however: 70 miles in each direction.

These six gentlemen van-pooled to work every day in a windowed Ford Econoline van. One of the men was an accountant, who kept tabs on the costs of running the van and divided those costs evenly among the riders. The van owner drove in each direction. A route almost like one for a school bus was worked out: the driver would leave his home and pick up the other riders one by one as he left Pennsylvania, dropping them off on the trip back in reverse order. The van pool, all friends, talked to each other during the ride or read books.

At that time, all over the Washington Area, the Federal Government was trying hard to encourage commuters to form car pools. Government contractors were encouraged to follow suit. As inducements to van pooling, groups that had formed pools were given priority indoor parking spaces at Vitro and a bit of slack on arrival and departure punctuality. HOV lanes had not yet been invented (at least along their route) but the Gettysburg van was driving against the major flow of traffic in each direction, and they got an early start every work day. In my experience, the Terrier commuters were always on time and somehow in a good mood when they started work. Their commute was usually about an hour and twenty minutes in each direction.

On Friday afternoons, there was a cooler in the back of the van. The driver would slip over to a liquor store in Aspen Hill and fill the cooler with beer and ice. The group, excepting the driver, would party on the way back to Pennsylvania. At Christmas time, they added carols to their commute, and arrived home in the same pleasant frame of mind that I observed at the laboratory.

235. TDY IN CONAKRY

I'm not sure I can completely capture the experience of servicing our Embassy in Conakry, Guinea in the 1970's. Each trip there was a unique event: I have previously written about the Playboy Club, and my visit to the Embassy with an architect. I have also described the experience of leaving the city through the airport as the country's President was coming in. There was one trip to Conakry, however, that sticks in my mind, on which several experiences happened sequentially. In this story, I would share that trip with you.

Several of the African capitals we supported from Abidjan had been planted with shady lines of trees along the major roads of the city. To keep new drivers from running into these trees in the dark, the trunks of the ones in Conakry had been whitewashed. At some point in time before my arrival, some of the trees had died and others were filled with small yellowish-brown bats. The bats (Abidjan had them, too) filled the trees by the thousands and went hunting for insects by night. During the day, they hung around in the trees and defecated on the cars and sidewalks and people below the canopy. The bats were difficult to oust from these perches, so bat-infested cities took the easy way out: they cut down the trees. Accordingly, on driving into Conakry from the airport, you encountered street after street of whitewashed tree trunks that ended about twelve feet above the ground. There was no shade at all.

Hotel accommodations in Conakry were hard to obtain. To encourage regional support, our Embassy there acquired a TDY apartment in a three-storey building near the Chancery. On this particular trip, I was traveling with Stu Keen and a Seabee electrician named Pete. As I remember, we came in on a Friday, spent a weekend there and part of the following week on an installation. There wasn't much to eat in Conakry, and we were going to be in town for a while, so we bought food at the Embassy commissary and agreed to take turns cooking.

Our Embassy had a sensitive conference room on the second floor that had been installed by Casper Pelczynski during his tour in Abidjan. There was a plywood wall erected by Seabees surrounding the conference area, and the room was air-conditioned. Unfortunately, when the A/C was installed no attention was given to the condensate drain. Instead of an actual drain, the condensate hose was routed to a galvanized bucket on the floor. After each conference, Foreign Service Officers were supposed to empty the bucket. None of our illustrious colleagues considered it their job to handle this chore, so the bucket just filled up and overflowed, causing the plywood panels surrounding the conference area to rot. Almost as fast, termites began to eat the rotten plywood, and a hole was gradually opening near the bottom of the wall through which local employees could easily look.

The TDY apartment was on the second floor of the three-storey building, and there was a Guinean family above us. On Sunday morning, I was reading a book in the living room when I heard a clicking sound above me. The floor slabs of the building were really thin, perhaps three inches in thickness, and it did not take long to realize that what I was listening to was a large

marble bouncing on the floor. Someone (probably a child) was holding the marble above the floor, letting it drop and watching it bounce until it stopped. Then they repeated the process. There wasn't much to do in Conakry: the marble-bouncing went on without interruption for almost two hours. You could hear the marble clearly all through our TDY apartment.

On Tuesday, it was my turn to cook. In the Embassy Commissary, I had purchased the ingredients for a meat loaf which I had planned to bake in the apartment's oven. I had looked up a recipe for the dish that told me to preheat the oven to 350 degrees, and I was planning to prepare (canned) green beans and (instant) mashed potatoes with the meatloaf. I turned the oven on and began preparing the sides while waiting for the oven to heat up. With two pots on top of the stove ready to go, I touched the front of the oven (no electronic controls here) and found it cold. I thought that the pilot light might have gone out. To check (nearly qualifying myself for a Darwin Award) I turned on one of the burners on top of the stove.

This stove/oven combo had *two* pilot lights. The one at the top was lit, and the one in the oven was not. As soon as the burner caught, I saw a four-inch wide tongue of blue flame spill from the edge of the burner down the front of the stove to the oven door. There was a bright flash and a loud explosion, and the oven door was blown open with the edge of the door scraping the skin off my shins on both legs. My eyebrows disappeared, as did about a half-inch of my hair, which was already getting thin. At the time, I did not understand what had happened, and I stood there in shock looking down at my scraped shins and the open oven door. Pete and Stu ran into the kitchen shouting questions at me, and I could not hear them. After a couple of minutes my hearing began to return and I tried to light the oven's pilot with a match. It worked; I made dinner. It was good, with something of a smoky taste. After eating, I carefully and completely turned off the oven and its gas supply.

Early on the morning we left, Pete came into the living room to share an experience with us. He had borrowed a glass tumbler from the kitchen when we first arrived in order to rinse out his mouth after brushing his teeth with bottled water. To allow his toothbrush to dry, he would put it handle-down in the tumbler when he was through with it and he put the glass on a shelf near the sink. On this morning, while it was still dark outside, he entered the bathroom and turned on the light, to find a three-inch African cockroach perched on his toothbrush, nibbling on the food particles among the bristles. Pete decided to throw that brush away, and I went looking for a two-piece plastic toothbrush holder when I got back to Abidjan.

Similar experiences accompanied us on many of our other African trips.

236. ARTURO

I replaced Don Hoover in Panama in 1983. We moved into the same apartment he vacated, located in a 10-storey building that stood next to the Embassy. We were on the 10th floor, and the two most enjoyable aspects of the penthouse apartment were its balcony (overlooking a Marina and the entrance to the Panama Canal) and the use of the roof above us, one-half of which was part of our apartment. This rooftop was equipped with a wet bar and formed an excellent place for our young children to play on roller skates. To keep them away from the rather low metal grilles around the roof's parapet, we bought some large terra-cotta pots and planted palms in them, then placed these plants in front of the grilles.

After about a year at Post, we wanted to use our roof with its wet bar to entertain some friends and colleagues. It seemed impractical for Gail to cook a dinner for some forty guests, so we started to look into restaurants that catered to moderate gatherings. Then Gail heard about an "excellent" cook who would come to our house and cook for a large group: this was Arturo, a noted local Chef. After talking to a couple of other families who had used his services, we engaged Arturo: costly, but reportedly worth it.

After discussion on what he might prepare, Arturo gave us the menu he would like to cook. Meats, veggies, wines, breads and starches were all covered, with the quantities of each that he would need for fifty guests.

We sent out invitations and began to plan the dinner. Gail bought all of the needed ingredients at the commissary; we decided to do cocktails on the roof, bring up appetizers, then set up a buffet of the dishes Arturo prepared and have people eat on the rooftop. I set up a music system on the roof and (as my Panamanian neighbors were wont to do) cranked it up a bit. We put up some party lights to make the rooftop more festive.

On the day of the party, I set up the bar upstairs and bought ice. Arturo arrived a little late and got started on the hors d'oeuvres. Interested in his process, and wanting to help, Gail and several friends helped Arturo get set up in our kitchen. He was adamant about not needing help, however, preferring to work by himself.

For a professional Chef, Arturo was pretty messy. He tended to drop bits of the food he was not going to use directly on the floor, expecting others to pick it up. He wasn't shy about walking all over these vegetable clippings and bits of fat, turning our pristine kitchen into a sty.

Our guests arrived. We had drinks, bar food and music for them. We all waited for the hot hors d'oeuvres to arrive, but this process took a good half an hour to happen. When they did arrive, they were good. Our guests were getting hungry and the hot snacks disappeared almost immediately. It was time for dinner to arrive, and we waited to be called to eat.

We waited for well over an hour.

Gradually, the food began to arrive. I went downstairs to find the kitchen a battle zone, with cucumber skins, potato peels, avocado skins and other food debris largely thrown on the floor. Not all of the dishes were coming out at the same time. Some were underdone, while others were overcooked. Significantly, *all* of the cooking wine we had purchased for the dinner was gone. Arturo was an alcoholic; he was drinking the cooking wine by the tumbler. Our Chef walked around the kitchen inebriated, but still refused help and insisted that he could complete the dinner. We were angry but went back upstairs to wait.

Dinner finally emerged from the floor below. The guests were provided with napkins and utensils, were wined and dined, and dessert was brought up and presented. The guests left happy, if a little concerned about the delay between courses.

After the dinner, we went down to clean up. Every pan that we owned was out, sitting on the kitchen table or the stove or in the flooded sink. These areas were loaded with dirty dishes as well, some of which were just set on the kitchen floor. Utensils were everywhere, and the second sink was filled with cooking spoons and spatulas. Gail followed a trail of dishes to our laundry room, where she discovered that our *washing machine* was full of dirty dishes! Fortunately, our chef had not turned on the appliance.

Arturo was not hired again, at least by us.

237. THE LOCK-IN

In 1981, I was back from Africa in SY/T Operations. At that time, we were still in our original offices on the second floor of Main State in the North-West corner of the building.

I was about to go home one evening when a telephone in our outer office rang. I picked up the phone and was connected to an elderly lady.

I said: "Security. May I help you?"

She said: "Is this the security office?" I said that it was.

She asked: "Can you fix locks?" I said that we sometimes could.

She said: "Can you come get me out?"

I asked what the problem might be, and she explained that she had been working in an office in the State Department and closed the door to reduce the noise from some construction work nearby. When she tried to leave to go home, she found that the lock on the door was broken and she could not get out. She had called repeatedly for help, even shouting, but no one came.

The *tone* of the voice I was listening to was compelling. This was a polite, elderly lady who did not want to bother anyone, but she was *frightened*.

I introduced myself and asked for her name. I do not remember it now: let's call her "Agatha".

I said: "Where are you right now?"

She said: "I don't know!"

I asked where in the State Department she was employed.

And she said: "I don't work here. I'm a volunteer".

This started an interesting round of "twenty questions." Main State is an immense building, fully one city block in length and almost half a block in width, with seven floors and a basement. There are two sections to the building, Old State and New State, which were grafted together to form the present building. In trying to narrow down where this lady was located, I first tried to identify the floor she was on. I asked if she could look out the window and tell me what she saw.

She said: "This office doesn't have any windows."

That told me, at least, that she was in an interior office. There were a *lot* of them in Main State. I asked if she could tell me which floor she was on. She did not know.

I asked which entrance to the building she used to reach her office. This confused her. So I asked: "Were there a lot of flags at the entrance, and a big airy lobby with lots of black marble?" She said no.

I asked her how she had reached the building: she said that she had stepped off a bus by the World Health Organization and walked down to the building. That would have taken her to the Employee's Entrance on the North side of the building.

So I asked: "Did someone meet you there and escort you in?" She said yes, she had come in with a group of volunteers and they had been escorted to the area where she was working. I asked if she had taken an elevator or stairs to reach her office. She said no. That put her on the First Floor.

I asked what she was doing in her volunteer job. She said that she was working with the book sale.

Every year, at least back in the 1980's, the Foreign Service Wives' Association held a book sale in the Department's West Lobby. This lobby was usually closed except for the book sale and special events. When you entered the West Lobby, if you turned left, you ran into the West Auditorium which we sometimes used for security briefings for the Marines and for the Junior Foreign Service Officers. You could enter the Auditorium directly from the lobby. Because this auditorium was sometimes used for briefings and seminars involving invited foreigners, there was a ring of translator booths in a horseshoe pattern above the seating area of the auditorium. Beyond this, to the North, was a small staging area that was used for preparing handouts for such presentations. At Book Sale time, that area was filled with donated books that were sorted and then arranged in the lobby for sale. I thought I knew where Agatha might be.

I grabbed a small bag of tools we kept in the office and stepped out into the hallway. I took a set of stairs down one floor and walked towards the North-West corner of the building, opening outer doors to suites of offices. It was after five, and most of the areas I entered were empty of employees. I started calling Agatha's name: no response. I went through several outer offices without finding her, then went a little further South towards the auditorium.

I spotted a GSA paint cart parked in the hallway next to a set of double doors. I went in to an office area smelling strongly of fresh paint.

The interior area of this space was a work room with cubicles (in a building that did not care much for cubicles.) There was a short line of windowed offices to the West, but the rest of the area was a rabbit warren of little worktables, moveable screens, filing cabinets, bulletin boards and chairs. The area was *loaded* with old books. I noticed that the locks on some of the doors had been removed during painting and were sitting on the desk in a cubicle.

Looking around, I spotted an interior "office" made of plywood, recessed in the back corner of this otherwise open space. I called out "Agatha?" and heard a little voice from the cubicle: "Yes! Here! Here!"

There was a hollow core plywood door on the cubicle which was missing its lock. The bolt from the lock, however, had been left in place. It looked like the knobs on either side of the

door had been removed for painting, and that the latch had closed when Agatha shut the door. It was easy to insert a screwdriver into a hole in the latch and open the door.

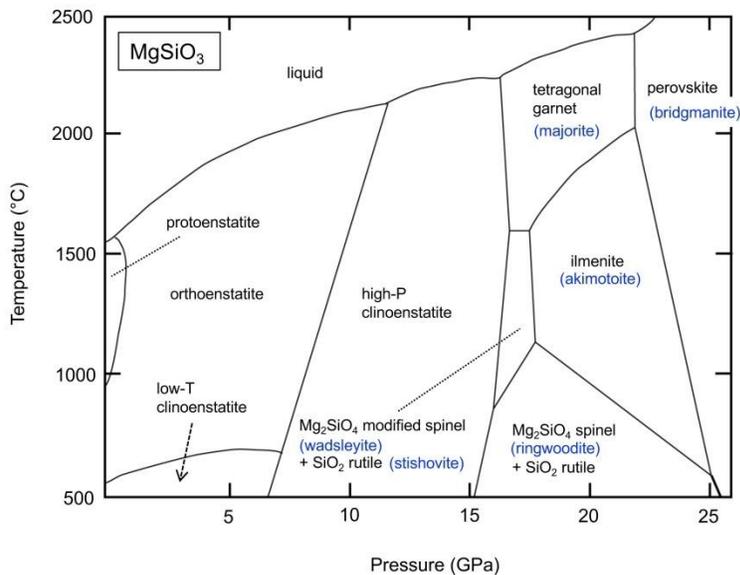
Inside the office was a neatly dressed elderly lady. She looked very glad to see me and was anxious to get out of her little office and go home. I escorted Agatha down to the Employee's entrance, returned the tools to our office and headed for home.

At that point in my career, I had addressed many lock-outs, but this was the first *lock-in* I had ever worked on.

238. BALTIC RAIN

When I was in college, I took a fascinating course in Mineralogy from a professor named Jacob Friedman. I remember one class in which the professor (who was getting on in years) reflected out loud as to the type of stone he would select for his personal grave marker. He wanted something that would hold up to the ages: he told us that he would prefer a fine-grained granite schist. I could see the importance of this decision: several of my distant family members in Indiana were buried with limestone grave markers that acid rain has today largely dissolved.

The study of metamorphic rocks turning into swirling minerals was an exciting course for me. There was a lot of chemistry involved in this program, however, and remembering geologic phase diagrams was challenging at times:



On one of our several field trips, I was impressed by an exposed outcropping of garnet schist that Prof. Friedman showed us in a cow pasture on a Pennsylvania mountainside. Golf ball-sized chunks of garnet popped out of a swirling bed of muscovite, hornblende and quartz. You could easily imagine emeralds or tourmalines or rubies being created in similar beds of rock.

Time passed. When we arranged to buy our current house in Delaware, it was not yet built. Once we purchased a lot, we were able to choose among several styles of homes which could be built for us. We could also pick out details of interior finishing that we wanted. One of those options was the type of granite that we would like for the counters in our kitchen area.

Gail graciously allowed me to pick out the granite.

When molten rock cools quickly, as with lava, the crystalline grains within the rock are tiny. Intrusive rock (the Palisades Sill, for example) stays hot for a lot longer period of time,

allowing larger crystals to form. Metamorphic rock that has sat deep in the earth's crust for millions of years and has been exposed to both hot and cold conditions over that time interval tends to develop very interesting crystalline structures, making for beautiful counter tops.

I found a commercial sample that I liked, titled "Baltic Rain" on the sample's legend. It was essentially a spattering of large sienna-brown feldspar crystals inside of other greenish crystals with a black matrix of hornblende and black mica. In Geology, those nested crystals are called "phenocrysts" and one way in which they occur (as in geodes) is when streams of hot liquid chemicals are able to percolate slowly through other rock with "vesicles" or cavities inside it. Our polished counter tops looked as if quarter-sized drops of falling rain had created brown and orange spots across a black surface.

Here and there on the counter tops, there are fine seams of salmon-colored feldspar that flow through the darker matrix like little Milky Ways. It may be that no one but me likes those seams (or notices them) but I remember those phase diagrams and can recognize orthoclase when I see it.

Several years after we set up housekeeping in Delaware, I became interested in the *origin* of the rock used to make our counter tops. It turns out that the stone is quarried from a "pluton" located North of Helsinki in Finland. A pluton is an old, old type of rock that predates even Cambrian stone, and might be a part of the crust of the world that was formed before anything lived here.

Reading a scholarly study about this interesting rock, I discovered that it is called "Rapakivi" granite in Finland.

"Rapakivi" apparently means "crumbly rock" in Finnish. If they were unsealed, and left exposed to the elements, our granite counters would weather quickly and fall apart.

Professor Friedman would have chosen something different.

239. THE WEAPONS EXPERT

On my first tour in SY/T, there were lots of new people coming in. As I was going to be in Washington for a while, I became familiar with the Department and enjoyed showing it to new arrivals, part of the Army process of making new people feel welcome. I tried to take each new arrival on a quick tour of the Department; I endeavored to get them oriented to the colored wall strip system that helped with navigation. I showed new personnel the several entrances to the building and took them to locations where our facilities were located. I especially liked taking newcomers down the wide corridors of New State into the AID section of Old State, where underfunded offices with too many people had poached office space from the hallways, necking down a corridor that might have once accommodated twelve people abreast to just four.

SY/T was, at that time, purchasing firearms for the Special Agent and RSO factions of SY, and we were getting into unfamiliar territory with weapons vendors, the need to arrange time at firing ranges and with the selection of weapons and holsters and ammunition. We needed a weapons expert, and advertised for one. After a number of interviews, SY/T hired an individual named Jus David Meyers in 1978. He was due to report in on a Tuesday, and I offered to take him around the Department as I did with some of you.

I had met some weapons experts in my Navy Contractor job prior to SY/T, but they worked with guided missiles, anti-submarine rockets and Phalanx anti-missile defenses. I wondered, while waiting for our new hire, what he would look like and what sort of person he might be. As I pondered, into the office walked an ordinary man about my height, perhaps a little heavier-set than I was. He introduced himself as Jus David and I realized that he seemed a lot like the rest of us.

We set out on the Department tour, going up to the Seventh Floor and working down by the stairs. I showed him where the regional bureau offices were located and a few offices like Legal that he might need to work with. We went to the cafeteria for coffee, to the Credit Union and some of the exhibit areas, which were not well developed in those days. Finally, I took our new hire down to the Lock Shop in the Department's basement.

Both Russ Waller and Whitey were in the Lock Shop when we came in, and I introduced Mr. Meyers as our new weapons expert. There was a touch of disbelief evident when this new skill was announced and, as with all new hires, a feeling-out process began, with Russ and Whitey asking about the new man's background. They wanted to know where he had worked before, what types of weapons he was familiar with and what made him an expert. Jus David said that he was primarily familiar with firearms, specifically Police and Military weapons.

On the wall in the Lock Shop, Russ Waller had hung an old Japanese Sword on the wall. It was dusty, had two brass rings along its scabbard and was basically brown with a handle that

appeared to be woven threads over a pebbled material. Jus David asked if he could take a peek at it, and Russ handed it to him.

Our new hire hefted the sword, pulled it a little way out of its of its case and said “This is a *shin-gunto* Japanese Officer’s Sword, possibly a Type 94, made between 1935 and perhaps 1942. I could probably say more about it, but I would need to disassemble the sword. Would you mind?” Russ said it was okay.

Jus slipped the sword out of its scabbard, revealing a blade of apparently folded steel with a wave-like edge that had a nickel-sized notch in it, as if it had been hit by a bullet. He took a dime out of his pocket and removed a small threaded pin from the hilt of the sword. The hilt slipped off the blade, followed by several pieces of steel and brass making up the guard. This exposed the tang of the blade, which was incised by a string of Japanese Kanji characters. This entire process took less than a minute. He laid all of these parts out in a line and looked at them.

Then he said: “This is an old blade in a relatively new sword. It was probably made at the naval arsenal near Nagoya. At that time in history, the Government of Japan wanted its Officers to be issued swords, but they needed a lot of them and began the process of mass-producing what had always been hand-crafted weapons. At first, as with this sword, old blades from craftsmen were used. Each sword was fitted with a brass guard piece featuring cherry blossoms, as was the pommel at the end of the hilt. The pommel was fitted with a hole at the rear of the grip through which tassels were pulled. The tassels were of different colors, each indicating a specific rank. Blades like this one, signed by the sword maker, were used before the war or in its first year or so. After that, stainless steel machined blades were used, stamped with Arabic numerals. I can’t read Kanji, but the marks here represent the maker’s name and may offer a name for the sword.”

All of us took a closer look at the Japanese characters, the cherry blossoms, the handle of ray skin wrapped in silk and the metal scabbard with its lining of wood. After a moment or two, Jus put the sword back together again in about a minute and hung it back on the wall. Then we said goodbye and went back upstairs.

I’m not sure about Russ and Whitey, but our new man seemed like an expert to me.

240. CLOISONNE

Having completed the East Asian Area Studies course at FSI, I felt well-prepared for our tour in Seoul. I was particularly interested in the culture of China, and I was looking forward to traveling to Beijing to see the Forbidden City.

On my first trip in Beijing, in 1990, there were a number of stores selling examples of traditional Chinese art. These were new rather than antique pieces, but the craftsmanship was excellent and there was a lot to see. In fact, because I saw so much on that first trip that I liked, it was hard to choose what to acquire. At a government-run gift shop in the China World hotel complex, however, I encountered Cloisonné.

Cloisonné is a decorative process involving tiny beads of colored glass (enamel) contained within fine curtains of precious wire that are fused to a metal substrate, like a brass vase. The little compartments formed by the wire are filled with different colors of glass dust and the piece being decorated is fired repeatedly to melt the enamel, to enhance its color and to create details like the colored centers of flowers within white petals. When the firings are complete, the work of art is finely ground to bring the wire flush with the enamel, is burnished and is polished to a high sheen. The resulting object is beautiful and may last for many years: some of the earliest Chinese cloisonné dates back to the Yuan Dynasty (127-1368 AD).

On my first trip, I purchased a set of mirror-image black ginger jars decorated with lavender and white peonies. On one jar, the large peony is in the center with the smaller white peony on the left. On the other jar, the lavender peony is in the same position, but the white peony is on the right. Otherwise, the scenes on the two vases are identical. While the cloisonné jars were exquisite, the wooden bases they stood on were cheaply carved out of pine and then painted black.

On another trip, I bought similar ginger jars in a bright blue (I like ginger jars). I then sent some cylindrical cloisonné vases back to my brother, who also enjoys Oriental artwork.

On my final trip to Beijing in 1995, I found a cloisonné bowl in a government store that I like very much. It is a squat covered bowl about eight inches in diameter, and it has a light yellow field with scenes of flowering wild plum branches and butterflies running around the sides and more elaborately expressed on a tree on the lid of the pot. The yellow field is filled with tiny silver wires in a Chinese pattern representing clouds. Because it sometimes blooms during the winter under adverse conditions, in China the wild plum is considered a symbol of things with resilience that choose their own way. I was again disappointed with the base.

As I was leaving the airport in Beijing on my last trip, there was a Chinese art shop in the airport. I wandered into it and found a whole stack of beautifully-carved rosewood bases for ginger jars! Not being certain as to the diameters of the bases I needed, I purchased the whole

pile. One of these was an exact fit for the plum branch pot, and all the other cloisonné pieces that I purchased now sit on elegant bases.

241. A VISIT TO SPEIGHT'S

New Zealand has become famous for wines, especially white Sauvignon Blanc wines from the Marlborough region at the Northern tip of South Island. Less well known, but equally enjoyable are the many beers consumed on the country's two principal islands. I engaged in a scholarly study of these beverages while we were in New Zealand, sampling both draft and bottled beers and ales. About a year into this study, I became a devotee of Speight's.

Speight's beverages come from a brewery in Dunedin, a major college town on the East Coast of South Island. The brewery has cleverly marketed its beers and ales through a string of franchised Speight's Ale Houses dotted in principal cities on both islands, in which you can enjoy a well prepared New Zealand meal such as roast shank of lamb along with the beverage of your choice. To help you in making such a choice, the Ale Houses feature "flights" of the many beers and ales produced by Speight's. Among these, my favorite was Speight's Distinction, a marvelous reddish amber ale.

In our second year in New Zealand, Gail and I took a tour of the South Island by train and bus, visiting Marlborough, Christchurch, the fjords at the Southern tip of South Island, the gold fields outside of Dunedin and Dunedin itself. While in town, we elected to visit an old Cadbury's chocolate factory and Speight's brewery.

Most of Speight's beers and ales are brewed in huge vats made of Kauri wood, native trees which were slightly smaller than redwoods when the British settlers arrived. (Most of these trees have since been cut down.) Like many other breweries, Speight's is full of pipes and valves which channel water to the vats and beer and ales out of the vats to designated bottling or keg-filling locations. On the upper floor we encountered a computerized mixing tool which made the process of adding hops and grains to designated beverages more precise.

Near this modern gizmo were two slight smaller vats of copper. Those were used to make Speight's Distinction Ale.

After our tour of the brewery, we were escorted to a tasting room which, magically, turned out to be a little Speight's Ale House. We had an excellent lunch on the premises and started back toward the train station.

On the street just outside the brewery, we observed a small Speight's tank truck connected to an open hose on the ground. The tank truck was being flushed out by spring water. New Zealanders drink so much beer that some pubs and restaurants bring it in by the tank truck rather than in kegs. It seemed a waste to just flush so much good ale out into the street scuppers, but we knew there was more where that ale originated.



The author, with a glass of Speight's "Distinction"

Photo taken by my wife at a Speight's Ale House in Dunedin, 2004

242. THE TELEPHONE

I lived in the Washington area at the time I started working for SY/T. Under hiring conditions prevalent at the time, this meant that I had to wait for training and an overseas assignment while colleagues who hired in from say, Seattle were immediately put into training and slotted for overseas posts. While I was in R&D, we were a small outfit at that time and I enjoyed visiting the Lock Shop in the Department's basement. The two Lock Shop personnel that I interacted with most frequently were Russ Waller and Franchot White, a former Seabee who served as the principal instructor for our Lock School.

Whitey was a big man, with massive arms and a lot of patience. He was an excellent instructor who had a highly developed sense of humor, and he especially liked to let his students learn from their own mistakes. There was a lot of opportunity for this in Lock School. When I was finally sent there for training, my first mistake occurred in sliding the bolt out of a Simplex pushbutton lock. This released a tiny ball bearing sitting on a spring underneath the bolt, sending the bearing (smaller than a BB) bouncing across the terrazzo floor. To see the bearing, which Whitey insisted I find, I had to put my cheek on the Lock Shop floor and crawl around under the student desks to retrieve it. This generated a lot of amusement from the class as well as some pithy comments from Whitey.

We covered key locks, combination locks, bar lock cabinets, money safes, classified file containers, fireproof file containers, vault doors, electric strikes, electric deadbolts and little adventures like rebuilding safe drawer slides. We did many things incorrectly, and Whitey was always right at hand with a comment whenever one of us made a mistake. Lock school lasted three weeks then, and I found it to be a very active course in which I learned a lot.

The Lock Shop not only taught lockwork to SEOs, Marines, RSOs and Seabees, they serviced lock problems throughout the Department. Towards the end of the course, students were sent up to address lockouts in various parts of the building, with varying degrees of success. One day, the Lock Shop was asked to install an electric cypher lock on the door to SY's new Command Center, which was then on the second floor of Main State.

Whitey saw this as a training opportunity. He assembled an extension cord, a battery-backed cypher lock with a key pad, a Brute lock, a drill and a drill index with several long bits. He grabbed a tool box, a roll of masking tape and a large sheet of brown paper off a roll in the back of the Lock Shop. He gave each student in our class something to carry (I had the Cypher Lock) and we marched in line from the Lock Shop up to the back door of the Command Center. We looked like native porters on an African safari, each of us with a small burden, following our leader.

Whitey showed us the inside of the front door we were going to protect, where the lock was to be installed. To prevent the passage of people *through* the door while we were working

on it, he placed a rubber door stop under its edge. The Command Center had arranged for a power outlet to be installed for the lock up near the suspended ceiling. Whitey began by finding an empty trash can, which he placed on the floor under the area where he planned to install the cypher lock power supply and the activating key pad. He took the piece of brown paper and used the masking tape to fasten the upper edge of the paper sheet to the wall above the trash can. Then he curled the paper so as to form a chute that would catch all of the debris from the drill and route it directly to the waste container. Whitey spoke about the need to plan installations carefully in your head before you started work. We were impressed at his foresight and understood the need for the door stop.

Whitey then installed the cypher lock power supply and its battery up near the ceiling, making sure he had lots of room to open the door to the power supply. He used drywall anchors to secure the screws. Whitey looked over the numbered wires from the key pad, selecting a four-digit combination, and wrote it down. He put the key pad aside for the moment. He then ran the lock activation cord straight down from the power supply, formed a 90-degree angle and took the wiring across the door to where the lock would go. He made some light pencil marks across the top of a level placed against the door as he did this, then drew a line to lightly indicate where the wire would go. He sunk a couple of anchors into the wall at regular intervals and continued the same interval across the inner face of the door, extending the line to mark the jamb. This provided a string of evenly-spaced mounting points for small plastic wire retention hoops that came with the lock.

Whitey told us that he normally mounted the strike on the door jamb first, then mounted the lock, and finally aligned and connected everything. He said that it was helpful, however, to have a working lock while you were making adjustments, and that the key pad installation was an important part of this. He measured to find an appropriate point for the key pad, which was to be installed on the outside of the wall he was working on. He then planned another wire run to neatly bring the lock activation wire cable from the key pad up to the cypher lock.

Finally, Whitey took out the key pad, which came with two long threaded rods, acorn nuts for the inside of the rods and a spacer bar to help protect the wall. He screwed the two threaded rods into the back of the key pad. Then he found the center of the wall space to the side of the door, brought the key pad up to the height of his belt, and put his level against the wall to set the edge of the key pad parallel to the floor. When the pad (which was going to go on the other side of the wall) was correctly aligned, Whitey marked where the rods touched the wall. He made two small marks around the rods. Then he took a magnetic drywall nail finder out of his tool kit and checked to be sure that there were no wooden studs inside the wall where he planned to drill.

Whitey installed a long, skinny bit in the drill we had brought along. Taking great care to keep the drill level, he gently drilled two holes through the wall. All of the debris was neatly captured by the paper funnel he had created.

Whitey emptied the trash can and gave it back to the Command Center. He rolled up the brown paper and drywall dust and had us put it in the trash. Whitey then removed the door stop and opened the door to the Command Center to see how the two drill holes had emerged on the other side. We found that the two holes *exactly straddled* a wall-mounted telephone that was used to request access to the Command Center. It was obvious to all of us that the keypad would need to go somewhere *else*, and that Whitey had not *considered* that there might be something on the other side of the wall. Nothing was spoken, but the class was nearly in tears.

Whitey was furious with himself. Now working on the corridor side of the wall, he slammed two new drill holes for the key pad to the right of the phone. No waste can or paper or level was used this time. He punched a larger hole in the wall for the activation cord, and angrily fished the wiring through the wall. He asked us to firm up the wiring and clip it to the wall while he installed the strike and the Brute. Then, once the lock was working properly, he marched all of us (in total silence, but with a lot of student-to-student eye contact and smiles) back to the Lock Shop.

As it was, encountering the unexpected phone was probably the best lesson of the week for all of us. To a person, we resolved to always check the *outside* surface of walls before drilling whenever we installed a similar lock.

243. BUSH BABIES

When we arrived in Abidjan in 1978, we learned that we were to be housed in a relatively new villa on an old road in Cocody. We had a neighbor immediately behind us who worked in the Economic Section, and a French expat neighbor next door. All around us, however, were undeveloped lots that were still overgrown with jungle. We saw some unusual birds and heard some unusual noises at night, but had no serious problems with the jungle areas except for the occasional snake slithering through our yard. (See “The Duty Snake”, Story Number47.)

In 1981, someone purchased the lot next to our Embassy neighbor, razed the trees on the property, cleared out the brush and began to dig a foundation. These efforts displaced a surprising amount of wild life. The birds in the razed area simply flew to new jungle areas near us, but larger species had nowhere to go and needed to improvise.

Among these denizens was a family of bush rats. These animals were about the size of my forearm, not including their tails. There was a large tree at the edge of the cleared property with a limb that stretched over near our villa, and the bush rats were able to climb the tree, jump from the limb to the top of our roof, and slip into our attic through the corrugated iron swiggles of our roofing material where they touched the eaves of the house.

About the size and weight of large cats, these animals were sometimes called “Bush Babies” in West Africa and were a source of food for local people. Our Bush Babies made themselves at home in the attic and would chase each other around on the attic side of the plywood surface that served at the ceiling of our home. We could hear the rats rolling around like otters at one corner of the house. We then heard bounding leaps as they ran to the opposite corner, complete with squeaks of enjoyment.

We called GSO to report the home invasion and were informed that someone would be out soon to deal with the problem. There was no access point from our living area into the attic, and we had no rats in the house, so we were not overly concerned, but with small children in the house we did want the attic cleared out.

One night, while waiting for the exterminator, we were going out and we engaged the teenaged daughter of another Embassy employee as a babysitter. As we were explaining where we would be and how to contact us, two of the bush rats started an attic romp. The night was quiet and the effect of the playful rats on the plywood panels was something like a pair of animals bouncing on the head of a kettle drum. The rats clomped diagonally across the attic floor, rolled up at the far corner of the roof, then ran around the edges of the house.

Our babysitter looked up at the attic with misgivings, then looked at us for an explanation. I told her that we thought there were mice in the attic and had asked the Embassy to send over an exterminator.

She looked at us and said: “*MICE??* You’re kidding! Those things are *HUGE!*”

We prevailed on her to accept her babysitting job anyway, promising to make it worth her trouble. (We did.)

The exterminator arrived a couple of days later and slipped poison baits into the attic. The running of the rats gradually ceased and the ceiling became quiet. We did hear *movement* in the attic, however. Then one afternoon a poisoned Bush Baby crawled out of the ceiling and fell headfirst into the fan shaft shroud in our kitchen. The cup-shaped shroud (centered over the table where we prepared food) slipped down a little and the tail of the rat hung over the outside of the cup. We kept our kids away from the dying rat and called GSO to request a follow-up Bush Rat retrieval visit from the exterminator.

244. DINING IN HONG KONG

I have enjoyed nearly every place that I have traveled to, over the years. That said, I have a special affinity for Hong Kong. I first went there as a soldier on R&R during my first tour in Vietnam, and made a lot of memories bar-hopping with a friend from my company and with a group of Australian Special Air Service soldiers that we met at Tan Son Nhut AFB in Saigon. Hong Kong was a British Crown Colony all through the times that I spent there, both during my period of military service and later during my years with the Department of State.

Memories? Hong Kong is a jewel of a city, consisting of a massive island set in the middle of a huge, deep harbor capable of anchoring many deep draft ships at the same time. Land is valuable there, and builders erect tall buildings with lots of floors, each trying for elegance in design, views of the harbor and proximity to important traffic arteries. Traditionally, naval ships arriving to visit the harbor outline parts of their hulls and superstructure with white lights, which becomes very dramatic at night when you look down on the harbor from the top of the mountain on Hong Kong Island. In addition to the military ships, the harbor is filled with tankers, freighters, passenger ships, pleasure craft and ferries going between the mainland and the island and out to other islands. During the day, you can even see Chinese junks in the harbor, some of which have been rebuilt and fitted out with modern motors and navigation equipment as executives' toys. The night skyline of Hong Kong is dazzling.

During the Vietnam war, the U.S. Navy maintained an emporium for servicemen in Hong Kong named the "China Fleet Club". It was exotic, especially for those of us coming out of primitive war zone living conditions. There were stereo rooms in which the latest and best stereo equipment on the market was on display and could be listened to and fiddled with to your heart's content. I had been Best Man at a friend of mine's wedding in Philadelphia just after I joined the Army: I encountered that friend and his wife in an elevator in the China Fleet Club. There were a great variety of shops selling Mikimoto pearls, Chinese carpets, made-to-order suits that you could be measured for on Saturday and pick up finished on Sunday, restaurants and camera shops and high-end watch shops, all selling treasures at PX prices. Returning to the elevator bank on my first day there, I literally ran right into Bob Hope, nearly knocking him over as he stepped out of an elevator. My friend from Vietnam and I ate dinner on a floating restaurant, visited another restaurant complex in the "new territories", ferried back and forth between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong Island, took the tram up to Victoria Peak and had cocktails in our new suits at the penthouse bar in the Mandarin Hotel before returning to the war.

As Asia's Regional Security Engineering Manager for DS, I was able to revisit Hong Kong several times enroute to other posts. Our Consulate General was located on Victoria Island and was unique in my experience where the Wang System wiring was concerned. There were no vertical chases for IT wiring in the old building, so huge bundles of twin-coax Wang wiring (some over a foot in diameter) were simply run through the air conditioning ducts of the

building. Our office had an equipment storage and shipping facility in Hong Kong that sent material into our five posts in China, and I would encounter the technician assigned there in the Middle Kingdom from time to time.

On one of my visits to Hong Kong, the Admin secretary recommended a restaurant to me that was located on Hong Kong Island in the Wan Chai district. At one time Wan Chai was famous in the U.S. Navy for its red light district, but by 1970 the area had become wealthy, diversified and very upscale. At the time I went there, in 1994, there were a number of small, twisting streets off of the main roads through Wan Chai, and I had been directed to a restaurant patronized mostly by Chinese that featured sizzling dishes.

After passing the restaurant I wanted two times, I finally located it and asked for a table. The restaurant was clean and was beautifully decorated with paintings showing Chinese landscapes as well as little wall niches containing elegant Chinese stone carvings. All of the tables were covered with white tablecloths, and each diner was given a huge white napkin.

I was seated, ordered a Tsing Tao Chinese beer and looked through the menu. As I considered my choices, I saw the order for another table arrive; the table seated two Chinese couples. The kitchen doors opened and two waiters emerged with large platters emitting white smoke and spitting oil into the air. Each of the diners unfolded their napkins and used them in unison to form a cloth wall between themselves and their table. The waiters reached between two diners at either end, placed the dishes on the table and withdrew quickly. The white tent went back into service with the dishes audibly popping and spitting for a minute or two. Then the napkins went down, the chopsticks came out and dinner commenced.

Intrigued, I ordered a spicy shrimp dish that was served in the same fashion. I was alone at my table and could not form a wall around the food, but I did my best to protect myself when my dinner order arrived. The restaurant's twenty-some tables were sporadically emptied and refilled throughout the dinner hour, with each table erecting a wall of napkins when their orders arrived. Most patrons laughed in delight as the food was served, with older customers coaching first time arrivals on what to do. I nibbled my way through a great dinner and a memorable dining experience, then returned to my hotel.

245. A STUDY IN JADE

The word “jade” has always conjured up the Orient to me. My first Christmas present to my wife was a jade and pearl necklace; my first bit of jewelry from travel for her was a jade ring set in gold that I bought on a trip to San Diego. When I bought those items, I had no inkling as to the many types of jade in the world, or of the importance of jade to China.

Broadly speaking, there are two forms of jade: “precious” jade and nephrite. “Precious” is relative here: the most-prized jade in China for centuries was actually a white form of nephrite with a greasy luster and little traces of green and lavender, which they called “mutton-fat” jade.

Precious jade, or jadeite, is a dense, hard, granular microcrystalline silicate with Sodium and Aluminum combining chemically with Silicon and Oxygen. It is usually bright green. In the Orient, its principal source was Northern Burma or Myanmar: it has a Mohs hardness of 7. Nephrite jade has a hardness of 6. For centuries, these two stones were harder than the available metals in the Orient, and they were abraded rather than carved.

A hardened, pointed stick was dipped in finely-ground corundite, the same stone found on emery fingernail files, and was rotated with a short bow and string, with the blunt end of the stick held in a small wooden block. Corundum has a hardness of 9, and it was able to wear down the jade if handled properly. Early jade pieces were often round disks with holes in the center: why? With no tools to cut the stone, a small piece of jade could be more easily abraded if rotated around a center shaft. The designs on early pieces of jade are often little cloud-shaped patterns looking like two commas on their side running together. This figure was relatively easy to create on a hard surface with the above stick and bow.

The Chinese associated jade with heaven and believed that carrying a piece of the stone would both protect you and give you greater endurance. Many Chinese carried small pieces on their person; all of such pieces I have found have rounded edges, probably for comfort.

Over time, the basic cloud pattern gave way to animation. I have a small jade that initially looks like a disk with a hole in it, but on closer examination the swirls are only half-formed so as to become the scales on the back of a dragon. The center hole is still there, but it is not round and the outer rim has been worked so as to form the head of a dragon which touches its tail to complete the circle. The object I have is worn smooth by many years of travel in people’s pockets.

Because of its hardness, jade was used for tools and weapons as well as protective talismans. I found a piece of mutton-fat jade that at one time served as a button or clamp tying together little slits in two pieces of leather, perhaps an adjustable strap. The piece is small, curved almost like a safety pin and surmounted with the head of a lion. The back of the piece has an extended and widened stud that was slipped through the two strips of leather, tying them together. The lion appears to be wearing Oriental armor: a front “bib” below the lion’s chin has

evenly-spaced circular whorls running to the end of the piece in a three-circle stack, reminiscent of the military tunics seen on the figures from the buried army in Xien.

The Chinese treasured carved stone for centuries and may have used jade implements to work softer stone. When metals hard enough to carve and work jade arrived in the Orient, carving jade became a little easier. I found a piece of what appears to be nephrite (it's often hard to tell the stones apart) shaped like a lioness that appears to be hunting a smaller animal at the other end of the stone. The body of the lioness is perched on an object that might be a tree, the bark of which is cross-hatched with fine lines that might have come from a sharp and harder tool such as a gouge of tool steel.

When we reached New Zealand, we encountered an entire culture that relied on nephrite jade for both tools and decorations. With no metal on the two islands, the native Maori people mined jade on the South Island and turned it into edged, paddle-shaped clubs, farm tools like adzes, knives, fishing hooks, spear points and jewelry. Where Jadeite is granular, Nephrite is fibrous: both are very tough. Forming a *mere* (a Maori hand club) by abrasion took a great deal of work and a long time. These weapons became family heirlooms, and were passed from father to son as prized gifts.

The Maori identify some 18 different forms of Nephrite by name. There are also traditional patterns into which greenstone, or "*pounamu*" in the Maori language, is cut. Because of the great amount of labor involved to make things of nephrite, jewelry made from the stone was usually saved for special occasions.

On a trip up the North Island, I spotted a piece of *Inanga* pounamu in an arts store. This is a smoky grey-green form of nephrite that gets its Maori name from a little silvery fish. This piece has no inclusions and a translucent/opaque quality that lets some light through. It was carved in a *Koru*, a fern-like curl. Symbolizing new beginnings, it went into Gail's jewelry box.

Later, I found a four-inch disk that could easily pass for a Chinese jade, except that the surface of this stone looks like a Picture Jasper representation of the heavens. I have borrowed this item (made from what is called "Marsden Flower Jade") from my wife, and it sits on a little stand on my dresser.

246. OLD NEIGHBORS

This is another pre-DS story for Jules, with a genuine DS connection.

In the fall of 1967, with the war in Vietnam much in progress, I enlisted in the U.S. Army in hopes of getting language training. Instead, the Army decided to send me to a lengthy electronics course on repairing cryptographic equipment. At the end of this year-long program, my classmates began getting their assignments. Almost everyone in my class was sent to Vietnam or to Germany.

My assignment was to Asmara, Ethiopia (wherever that was), to an ASA Field Station, (whatever that was). I did not know we even *had* an Army presence in Ethiopia. I went to the Post Library and found an Area Handbook for Ethiopia, which I read. It was a great introduction to my first assignment, and I followed the practice of reading Area Handbooks before every one of my following assignments, both in the military and in the State Department. I remember that I had to get written permission from my CO to read the handbook at Fort Monmouth *and* I had to read it in the Library because it was classified FOUO.

When I reached Ethiopia, I found that there was already an experienced electronics technician at Post in the only slot supporting the five types of equipment I had learned to repair. Worse, this man (who became a good friend) had recently been promoted in that position, effectively preventing me from any chance of promotion until his enlistment was up. In the eyes of the ASA Field Station, I was “excess” and could be used for other jobs.

I quickly discovered that an enlisted man with a college degree drew interesting assignments. After about a year in the radio maintenance shop, I was assigned to support an Army Major in a two-man office. There was a lot of interesting reading material in this office: the Major traveled often, and I read all the material that came in from DIA.

In the office next to ours was a young 1st Lieutenant named Bob Jenkins. He was the Deputy Operations Officer for our huge facility, and was a bright, very pleasant Intelligence Officer. Bob was a consummate linguist, fluent in French and Arabic. He was absorbing Amharic and Tigrynian like a sponge. Bob was fascinated with the reading material in our office, and asked for permission from the Major to read whatever came in.

There was a thin plywood wall separating LT Jenkins’ office from mine. Several times each week, Bob would raise his voice in his office to ask me if we had anything new to read. When his schedule allowed, he would slip over and read the new material at the Major’s desk. We became friends.

After Asmara, I went off to serve two tours in Vietnam.

On my third assignment in the State Department, I was the Operations Branch Chief for SY/T. My office was on the second floor of Main State in the Northwest corner of the building.

There was a thin wall between my office and the area occupied by SY Foreign Operations, which supported overseas RSOs. Shortly after I started work, a new Desk Officer for African Affairs took the desk on the other side of the wall. His name? Special Agent Bob Jenkins. We renewed our friendship. We each had more material to read than we could handle, but we still yelled through the wall, sometimes in Tigrynian, sometimes in Arabic.

After that job, I was transferred to ESC Panama. In 1983, we were asked to support a Congressional Staff Delegation consisting of a Staffer from the House Armed Services Committee, the SY/FO Desk Officer for Latin America (Sy DeWitt) and the SY Congressional Affairs representative, Bob Jenkins. I asked RSS Ron Kelly if I could host the Delegation.

Just inside the entrance to our apartment in Panama was a short privacy wall that simply screened the interior of the apartment from the view of people at our door. I invited the Delegation to our house for dinner. When they arrived, I put Bob on a chair on one side of the privacy wall and I sat on a chair on the other side of the wall. Reflecting the improvements in communications that had occurred since our Army days, I had prepared two tin cans connected by a piece of string. I have a picture somewhere of Bob and I chatting through this optimized link.

247. CARVED RED LACQUER

Looking back on some of the stories I have posted here, this series could be called “Herrmann’s Primer on Shopping in China”. One might think that our trade deficit was caused by me. I saw many other things in China that I have not written about, such as the used furniture warehouse that Field and Jenny Cooper took me to see (basically an airline hangar full of very old Chinese furniture) but I have tried to stick to the essential arts. However, I have missed one: carved red lacquer.

Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), Chinese people and other Asians have tapped the sap of the lac tree for a gum that can be built up by layers and then carved. In China, the color of Fortune is red: for centuries, Chinese mixed Mercury Sulfide (a mineral named Cinnabar) with the above sap to produce a bright red paste that could be applied layer by layer to a base of wood or paper and then carved into elegant objects of art. Because Mercury Sulfide is toxic, this pigment has been replaced by a resin-based polymer, but the new boxes are equally as attractive as the original ones.

As with other artwork that I have already described, I first saw Cinnabar on my initial trip into Beijing, and I found that exquisite little lacquer boxes (which made great gifts) could be purchased inexpensively in China. The variety of shapes and sizes of carved lacquer boxes that I encountered was extensive. There were cylindrical shapes, rectangular shapes, round shapes and irregular shapes like hearts that usually came apart to form containers.

I have a little box shaped somewhat like the traditional Chinese “cloud” with a couple of roses on the top and the sides decorated with running patterns of roses and entwined vines. The carving is about an eighth of an inch in depth. The roses on the top sit above a background of tiny geometric nested squares that catch light as you turn the box, giving it a lot of depth. I have some smaller pieces shaped like hearts and round pill boxes. I have a box about four inches across that is shaped like a peach, one of the Chinese symbols for longevity.

Our best piece, however, is a cylindrical box that is about six inches in diameter and four inches high, beautifully incised on the lid with a landscape from the Guilin area with a river, boats, long needle pines, Chinese homes and craggy mountains in the distance. The sides have a running pattern of roses and winding vines. The detail is exquisite and it makes me think of China every time I see it.



One of the author's carved red lacquer boxes.

249. TAKE YOUR CHILD TO WORK DAY

I was in Seoul in 1994, deep in the Korean winter at the time of this story.

Because of travel, I often missed out on scheduled events for my children. I tried to be in town for birthdays and swim meets, but I usually missed school-scheduled activities. I especially regretted missing “Take Your Child to Work” day.

One Saturday in early February, the Marines called me to say that a camera covering the Embassy parking lot was out. I had a spare camera in storage and decided to go change it.

This was a sealed-tube RCA camera on a Pan and Tilt unit. The camera was mounted on the very top of a steel pole along with the CCTV receiver. Access to the camera was by a few steel rebar pegs welded to the side of the supporting pole. The Embassy did not have a tall ladder or scaffold available that might have made the swap easier.

The top of the pole was sealed with welded steel plate. There was another wider plate welded over that which was drilled to support the P&T unit. Power and signal wiring emerged from a hole in the side of the pole and went to the receiver, then on to the camera and P&T via a short harness. There was nothing to hang on to at the top of the pole, and I needed to use tools to release the camera. I also needed a way to lower the old camera to the ground and to raise the new camera into position, then hold it on top of the P&T while I secured it.

There was no help available at post for this activity on a Saturday. I decided to take my 15-year old son (Andy) to the Embassy to help me with the camera swap.

Seoul was dirty in the winters, and very cold. The camera we went in to replace should have been swapped by someone wearing a lineman’s safety strap for telephone poles, which would have freed both hands to disconnect and reconnect the equipment. I did not have such a safety belt. I did have a long length of half-inch nylon rope, which I intended to use in lowering the old camera and in listing the new one.

We went into the Embassy and picked up my tool box, the new camera and the rope. We went out to the parking lot to get started.

The steel pole was very cold in the February weather. I put on a tool belt, loaded it with tools and tied the rope to the hammer loop on the belt. Then I climbed the pole, which was covered with soot from auto exhausts and coal fireplaces.

I reached the top of the pole and found that the climbing rungs stopped below the CCTV receiver. Standing on one peg and hooking my other leg around the pole, I freed my hands for work. I then used a crescent wrench to loosen the four nuts securing the camera mounting bolts to the P&T unit. I put the tools back in my belt and tied the rope around the camera. I then wrapped the rope around my hand, lifted the camera off the top of the pole and gently lowered

the failed unit down to Andy. I climbed down the pole to untie the old camera and attach the new one to the rope.

I tied the end of the rope around the new camera tube, threaded through the camera mounting base to prevent slipping. I went back up the pole, with the other end of the rope again tied through the hammer loop on my belt. When I reached the top of the frozen pole and raised the camera, I found it difficult to untie the camera and align the mounting holes to insert the mounting bolts with nothing to hang on to. I asked Andy to climb up and help.

Andy climbed the pole carefully and ascended past me on the other side of the pole. He tested the integrity of the CCTV receiver box, found it to be strongly mounted, and gingerly used the top of that fiberglass box as a platform for one foot, looping his other leg around the pole above mine. He helped me balance the camera on top of the P&T, untie the rope and line up the mounting holes on the camera base with the ones on the R&T. We used a Philips screwdriver as a pin in this alignment process.

This was an icy, windy day and we were both covered with soot as we wrestled with the mounting bolts. From the street, we probably looked like a pair of storks nesting on top of a very skinny chimney. When all four bolts were in place, I used the wrench to secure the camera, then reconnected the cables. Andy going first, we went back down the pole and into the Embassy to confirm the presence of good video. We took my tools and the old camera back inside the building, where we attempted to wash up. Our clothes were covered in grime, our hands took a long time to warm up, and we were hungry.

I figured that the CCTV swap counted as a "Take Your Child to Work" day.

250. THE MIDDLE MAN

One day, sitting at my desk in Seoul in 1992, I received an email from Brad Roher, who was then stationed in Frankfurt and from whom I had not heard a thing since the last OIC conference I had attended in Germany.

Brad was a hunter; he belonged to a German hunting club in Frankfurt. His club held an annual banquet at which commemorative medallions (think “large coins”) with animal heads struck on them were distributed to successful hunters. If you bagged a Chamois in a given year, you received a medallion commemorating your hunt at the banquet. The medallions came in small, hinged, velvet-lined boxes. There were three finishes for each animal: “gold”, “silver” and “bronze”. (You may recognize a pattern here.) The hunter bringing in the Stag with the biggest antlers received the gold medal, etc.

Brad said that the cost of manufacturing these coveted coins in Germany was getting more expensive every year. He asked if I would be willing to look into having similar coins made in Korea, which he understood was capable of fine workmanship at lower costs. He offered to send me a sample of each medallion through the APO system to show local manufacturers. If a suitable vendor could be found, the hunting club was prepared to order fifty copies of each type of coin in order to build up a small stock, after which there would be repeat orders several years apart. I told Brad to send me the medallions, and I would look into it.

After about a month, a box came in that contained several medallions. There were three of each kind, each with a different finish. Chamois, wild boar, Roe Buck and mountain sheep were represented. Each was embossed in fine detail by a specially-made die. That Saturday, I took the medallions to a large trophy shop in Itaewon. I took a neighbor who spoke Korean well along with me to help resolve any issues.

The first trophy shop examined the coins and indicated that they did not do that type of work. Their products were trophy cups and figurines. They sent me further down the street to another trophy shop. In the second establishment, the owner looked at the medallions and wanted to know how many we needed. My colleague explained the purpose of the coins, the numbers we needed and asked for a price estimate. The Korean asked to keep the coins for a week to show to his die maker, after which he could suggest prices and a delivery schedule. I asked for two weeks, since I had a trip planned.

When I returned from travel, I went over to the trophy shop. The Korean firm could make the coins for about a quarter of the price that the hunting club was paying in Germany. Leaving the coins with the trophy shop, I sent Brad an email later in the week from my office computer with the results of my study in Seoul.

Brad was also on travel, but he got back to me two weeks later. The hunting club was interested but wanted to see samples of what they were going to buy before committing themselves. I went over to the trophy shop the next weekend and delivered the Club's message.

The trophy shop owner explained that the major cost to him was the manufacture of the dies needed to produce the four animals on one side of the coins and the club seal on the obverse side. He wanted the club in Germany to commit to the purchase before he spent money having the dies made by a local craftsman. I again had travel planned, but I said I would get in touch with my contact in Germany and try to work something out. To be helpful, the Korean vendor broke his costs and pricing down for the distant customer. So much to create each die, after which the pricing would vary slightly with the volume of coins ordered. I sent this information back to Brad.

One month later, at a meeting of the hunt club, Brad worked out a compromise. The club in Germany would pay for the cost of creating a single die (the Chamois) and the Korean company would send them a sample in each color. If the workmanship was up to German standards, they would order the other medallions.

In passing this information to me, Brad added that he was about to leave Frankfurt, and asked if I could complete the deal working with a friend of his in Germany who was also a hunter. I agreed to keep at it.

The Korean accepted the arrangement. It took a couple of additional weeks for a method of payment (German bank to Korean bank) to be finalized and for money to be transferred. Then it took a month for the Chamois medallion's die to be manufactured and for coins of different colors to be struck. I picked up the coins, mailed them to Germany and went off on another trip, now working with Brad's friend.

Over the next three months, an order was placed for the other three dies and the requisite number of medallions in each color. DHL International shipping was to be used from this point forward, taking me out of the picture, improving the tracking of orders and avoiding any use of the APO system for commercial purposes. At the end of the transaction, Brad's friend indicated that the club members could not tell the difference between the Korean coins and the German ones they replaced. The Koreans should hold on to the dies: repeat orders were coming and other hunting clubs in different European countries might be interesting in acquiring medallions for Ibex, reindeer, moose and other animals hunted elsewhere in Europe.

With the orders finally placed, I was no longer the Middle Man. On occasion, however, I would pass by the trophy shop, and stop in to say hello to the owner. I was always received in a friendly manner: I was a Prize Customer, after all.

251. THE GREAT SEAL

On a trip to Santiago, Chile in 1985, I saw an interesting USMC plaque on the door of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant's office. It was a little more than a foot in diameter and was made of a sheet of copper with copper-enameling. Parts of the plaque were embossed, and the overall effect was interesting. I asked the Gunny where it came from.

Chile exports copper to the rest of the world, and there was a shop in Santiago near the Embassy that produced the plaques inexpensively. They apparently did not require a great deal of time to manufacture. I went over to the shop on a Saturday morning to look at their wares.

In the shop was a catalog of available designs, several inches thick. Most of the countries in South and Central America were represented, with military plaques forming the bulk of the catalog illustrations (mostly pictures of completed work). There were also plaques for commercial firms and government agencies thrown in. I also saw a lot of designs for American government Departments and Agencies: plaques for American ships, NOAA, the EPA, the CIA and NSA and many DOD outfits were also in the book. Completed plaques were wrapped in cellophane and placed on a shelf behind the counter for pickup. I found a Great Seal of the United States design and decided to order a plaque for the ESC in Panama. I had a return trip to Santiago scheduled two months later to work on the Consulate and thought I might pick up the plaque at that time if it was ready.

I ordered and prepaid a Great Seal that was about 24 inches in diameter for an asking price of \$50. I gave the shop an estimated return time for me and they were sure they would have it ready on my return trip.

Two months later, after visiting with the Consulate Architect (Story Number 30, The Nose of the Devil) I went over to the shop to pick up my plaque. When I entered the store, I saw the plaque on the shelf behind the counter, wrapped in cellophane. It exceeded my expectations for quality and color.

Next to it was a similar-sized KGB plaque, equally well made, but with a sword-and-shield design behind a red star with a hammer and sickle on it over a red banner. It featured grey, black and red enameling. That plaque was also wrapped in cellophane.

Looking carefully around the store, I asked the shop owner if that customer had arrived for his order. The owner just smiled and said he wasn't sure when that man might be in.

252. CHRISTMAS CAROLS ON MALABAR HILL

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

Throughout much of my time as a Foreign Service Dependent, I had a lot of British friends. This experience started in India, where the school and swimming pool I went to were supported by British subjects who had children my age. At the pool (Breach Candy: a large indoor and outdoor swimming complex with a huge outdoor pool shaped like the Indian subcontinent, which you can find on Google Maps) I was surrounded by young Brits as I aged from twelve to fourteen.

These friendships led to some interesting experiences. Crackers were expected for birthday parties, for example, the kind you pull apart at a table to create little explosions and produce party hats. Party games were also expected. Get-togethers at the houses of friends featured puzzles and board games. As Christmas approached the year that I turned thirteen, my British friends decided that they would go caroling, and invited me and my brother to come along.

As with most such outings, the organizers wanted everyone to sing carols the same way. To this end, they wrote out the lyrics of the songs we were to sing and reproduced the guide using carbon paper at some parent's office so that copies were available. Transportation arrangements were made with a parent who had access to a lorry and was willing to drive our crowd from place to place over a period of about two hours. Many of the high rise apartment buildings on Bombay's posh Malabar Hill were semi-circular in appearance; our game plan was to assemble in a park at the focal point of these parabolic structures and sing three carols at a particular building, then move over to another and sing, and then another.

When we reached our first caroling point, I was handed a copy of the carol sheet. *I did not know most of those carols nor the tunes they required.* As I remember, the (smudged) list looked something like this:

- Good King Wenceslas
- The Coventry Carol
- Silent Night
- Once in Royal David's City
- Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day
- The Sussex Carol
- Ding Dong Merrily on High
- We Wish You A Merry Christmas

We formed into a cluster of singers and the older children began to sing. I had honestly never heard "Good King Wenceslas" before: I had difficulty in understanding both its terms and

message. (Did *your* family celebrate the Feast of Stephen?) After the first chorus, however, I managed to limp along with the others. Lights began to appear on the balconies of the high rise as we sang, and balcony doors opened to allow listeners a better experience. We sang three songs and then walked over to the second building.

In the group were several older teen couples who slipped away from the other singers for some private time near a clump of trees in the park. Their absence was quickly missed as we sang for our second audience. The missing voices were stronger than those of the rest of us and absolutely more certain than my own. Our squeaky caroling brought these older teens back to us in few minutes, and the festivities continued.

Encouraged by the examples of the older teens, we younger singers began to eye possible partners. We were all a bit young to go courting, but the *idea* of courting was certainly instilled in me and several others.

After singing at the first two buildings, getting scattered applause from several balconies, we went back to the truck and were ferried to our second destination. The parent providing the ride had arranged for a little straw to be placed in the bed of the truck: as close to a Christmas Hayride as was possible in sub-tropical Bombay. We left the truck and stood between two massive apartment buildings to entertain their occupants. These buildings were somewhat disappointing: we sang, but no lights came on and no one came out to listen to us. After two carols, we called it a night and headed home.

253. A MAD MINUTE

Here's another pre-Department story for Jules. It's a little like his ammunition ship tale...

On my first tour in Vietnam, my company was attached to the First Cavalry Division out of Fort Hood, Texas. The 1st Cav was at that time deployed in a defoliated rubber plantation about halfway between Saigon and the Cambodian border. We covered territory that included farms, rice paddies, thick jungle and several mountains. Our mission was signal interception, and we had a small antenna farm to support that effort. We also had RDF equipment on helicopters to triangulate the origin of active signals. This program was productive, and to shorten the response time that would otherwise be needed, "our" helicopter went out with a light observation helicopter (a "Loach") and a Cobra attack helicopter. In military heraldry, intelligence is represented by the color white, and artillery is represented by the color red. As both our bird and the Loach were intelligence sources, and the Cobra definitely represented artillery, our combined outfit was called a "Pink Team".

There was another type of unit that we supported. We had several artillery firebases in our area that were perched on mountaintops above the Ho Chi Minh trail. NVA units moving down this trail were very quiet (often traveling on bicycles) but there was some coordination by low-level radio. We had several Low-Level Voice Intercept (LLVI) teams deployed at those fire bases, whose job it was to listen for such communications and record them. When they had monitored such traffic, (perhaps once a month) they sent word to our company that they had information for us to analyze. A pickup was then arranged.

This is where I came in. As a sergeant, I was tasked with collecting those tapes and with carrying new batteries and fresh tape for the team I was going to visit. I also brought out their mail, some canned goods like cocktail sausages that were popular but hard to find on Fire Bases, and sought-after items like fresh socks. I put these in a backpack, determined when a Huey or Chinook helicopter was going out to the Fire Base needing support, and scheduled myself as a passenger. I would fly out, make the exchange, bring back the recorded tapes and turn them into Production, usually on the same day.

On the day I am writing about, a call had come in from Fire Base Jupiter, which was out in the middle of the jungle on top of a mountain. My flight out was scheduled for 0700. Wearing a helmet and flack vest and carrying a rifle and ammunition along with my pack, I showed up at the helicopter pad a little early and was asked to wait in the aircraft. I was told that we might start a little late because we were waiting for donut dollys.

I sat in the helicopter for about ten minutes when a utility truck drove up. The driver of the truck reached over to the passenger seat and lifted up a fiberglass pallet loaded with boxes of donuts. He put this behind me in the helicopter. Then two young American women got out of the truck and walked over to the helicopter. They were both attractive, more so perhaps because

they were the first Caucasian girls I had seen in nearly a year. I was sitting in the middle of the aircraft, so they sat on either side of me.

I was astonished at the company in which I found myself. I asked the young ladies where they were coming from, and what they were doing in the middle of the war. They both worked for the USO at Division Headquarters and were essentially morale boosters. In addition to the donuts, they had a bag with a volleyball and a net, some writing implements and paper and envelopes. They would arrive at a Fire Base, distribute the donuts, get a volleyball game going, then help soldiers who needed assistance in composing letters to write their relatives back home. After several hours of this, they would hop back on the aircraft and return to Phuoc Vinh, where we were located.

Fire Base Jupiter had initially been created by an M-121 10,000 pound bomb, dropped on the mountain top from a C-130 cargo plane using a parachute to slow down the explosive. The bomb cleared a 100' circle at the top of the mountain. A couple of helicopters full of Rangers then came in to secure the perimeter, followed by some combat engineers with a small bulldozer. This machine was used to form command centers, office spaces, living quarters for some personnel and a clinic area, all underground and lined (somewhat) with logs. Larger, thicker logs from the former tree line were dragged over these areas and were covered with huge tarps. The tarps were piled high with soil to form a bunker; the soil was then covered with another tarp to keep the dirt in place, then covered with more soil to hide the bunker's location. Using the bulldozer, the perimeter was quickly expanded. Observation bunkers and machine gun emplacements were created around the perimeter of the Base, all fortified with sand bags. Firing areas for artillery pieces were subsequently established.

When the support facilities were operational, 105mm and 155mm howitzers were flown in by large helicopters, one at a time. These were set up in carefully-configured gun emplacements to completely cover the area on every side of the hill and to allow each cannon to cover other emplacements should they be overrun.

Pairs of men assigned to the fire base were each given three half-circles of corrugated galvanized steel culvert, a tarp, a couple of ponchos and a pile of sandbags. The tarp served as a floor; the steel arches were used to form a low frame for three layers of sand bags. One poncho was used to keep rain out of the head of the facility; the other served as a doorway. When completed, this was a two-man combat hooch: living quarters for a pair of soldiers. Each hooch intentionally pointed in a different direction so that no one could run down a line of the little enclosures and fire into them in succession.

We flew in toward FB Jupiter over deep jungle, looking down through several canopies in search of the ground. I saw a lot of thick bamboo as well as mahogany trees with fluted root systems. There was a lot of undergrowth. The helicopter frightened birds and they left the trees in droves as we approached, yawing unexpectedly from time to time as helicopters do.

There was a helicopter pad about halfway up the Fire Base, between the outer perimeter and what had been the top of the hill. We landed; a sergeant came out to help the USO workers and I wandered over to the Tactical Operations Center to ask about my LLVI team. At the time, their actual mission was not discussed and they were referred to as “communicators”.

My team was eager to show me around and introduce me; they did not often have visitors. In Vietnam, people who disliked authority were inclined to seek assignments where dress codes, rules and appearances were not considered important, and this certainly was true of our personnel at Jupiter. Both men were unshaven, disheveled and very relaxed. We traded tapes and batteries, I gave them their mail and went into their hooch (which was both home and office for these guys) to check the condition of their equipment in case it needed to be exchanged. Everything was in working order.

While we were talking and they were showing me the Fire Base, the helicopter I had arrived on took off with the two USO women. We went into the TOC to ask about it and were informed that the team had been recalled; I could get another ride back to base the following day. This was fine with me except for one consideration: I had nowhere to sleep. My team invited me to share their two-man hooch, one end of which was filled with equipment, with the two of them. “Equipment” included the above-mentioned radio equipment, all of the possessions of both men including all their clothing and flack vests and helmets and rifles and ammo, plus the stuff I came in with. We were crowded.

Dinner was military rations heated in a 50-gallon galvanized can: Beanie Weenies, as I remember. After dinner we sat on top of their hooch with a couple of beers and I listened to the men tell me about all the things that were not going well in their lives. Problems with girlfriends and family members at home, lack of promotion potential, concern that their mission was not valued back at the Company level (it really was) and other woes. I felt very much like a donut dolly.

We turned in about 2200, with me in the middle. The radio receiver was on and the men were taking shifts as listeners. I was scheduled to depart at 1000 the following morning, allowing me time for breakfast at FB Jupiter and lunch at Phuoc Vinh before I returned for my evening shift in the Communications Center. All of us wiggled around a bit to get comfortable, but two of us quickly fell asleep.

At about 0300 the next morning, every rifle and machine gun around the FB went off and continued to fire. Greatly alarmed and certain that we were under attack, I sat up quickly, really whacking my head on the galvanized steel culvert above me. I was groping for my helmet and rifle when one of the men said: “Don’t worry. It’s just a Mad Minute.”

At that point in the war, after many late-night attacks on remote facilities like our FB, established procedure called for a random, unheralded nightly firing of all small weapons at the facility towards the outer perimeter. This was directed by the Operations Officer. Any group sneaking up on the Fire Base would think they had been seen and would fire back. Should this

happen, more fire power would be directed toward the area that fired on us, and air support would be requested. I did not know this at the time; I think my team at Jupiter intentionally did not tell me that such an exercise was planned just to observe my reactions.

After my heart calmed down, I went back to sleep and woke up about 0700 to a fire mission by one of the artillery batteries. I ate breakfast, gathered my stuff, put the team's tapes and outgoing mail in my pack and headed down to the landing pad. The flight back was uneventful.

254. THE IMPERIAL HOTEL, BANGKOK

Frequent travelers are used to settling down briefly in a wide variety of accommodations, some of which are better than others. On repeat visits to the same city, if I stayed in a hotel that I liked on my first visit, I usually went back to that hotel on subsequent trips. I did this in Beijing, where I liked the Travelers Hotel, and I especially liked the Imperial Hotel in Bangkok. I stayed in this facility many times between 1982 and 1995. Its location was great: it was an easy walk down Wireless Road to our old Embassy, and an even easier walk to Sukhumvit, a major shopping area in Bangkok.

The property on which the hotel was situated and the hotel as well were donated to a girls' school in Bangkok by one of the Thai Princesses. After expenses, all of the hotel's profits went to the school. The hotel was always clean with its appliances in working order, and it had fairly extensive grounds for a property in downtown Bangkok. The landscaping was tasteful and well maintained.

At one time, the hotel sited four traditional Thai houseboats on the front lawn outside the principal entry to the facility. For a premium charge, clients of the hotel could stay in a houseboat instead of a hotel room, with room service coming out to the boat. Remaining within per diem, I did not stay in a houseboat, but I was tempted.

The Imperial Hotel featured many restaurants and stores on its ground floor. There was a Jim Thompson Thai silk store, with bolts of colorful raw silk and processed silk. There were jewelry stores, often exhibiting beautiful rubies brought in from the Mogok valley of Burma. There was a gym, a European restaurant, a Chinese Hot Pot restaurant, barber and beauty shops, a business center, a travel agency, an expensive Japanese Teppanyaki restaurant and, in the hotel gardens near a shallow pool with water lilies, a Thai restaurant in a small building resembling a Thai temple.

The housekeepers and janitorial staff at the Imperial exclusively used the back stairs and a service elevator to access the rooms. On several floors in the housekeeping areas, there were small Buddhist Spirit Houses erected on the outdoor railings. It was common to see a housekeeper place a garland of flowers or a stick of incense next to one of these small shrines with oriental roofs and stop in prayer before beginning her day.

The Imperial's Thai restaurant was my favorite place to eat in Bangkok for many years. The waiters all wore 19th century Thai court livery: white leggings, green silk trousers buttoned just below the knee, ruffled white shirts, silk long-sleeved short jackets with Chinese collars and black shoes with pilgrim-like buckles. Service was impeccable. The restaurant featured white tablecloths, clean glasses, sparkling table ware, clean floors and (a Thai tradition) fresh orchids on every table, with a large display of these flowers as you walked into the front door.

The restaurant offered an excellent, seasonal menu which was designed to introduce guests to Thai food. There were warm Thai salads like Larb Gai, Tom Yum Goong Tiger Prawn soup and many curries from both green and red curry stock. Pad Thai noodle dishes with peanuts and other delectable food slid in and out of the menu at different times of the year. The menu would explain the nature of the dishes and their point of origin in Thailand. It was a great learning experience for both your palette and your mind.

On our tour in New Zealand, Gail and I traveled to Bangkok for a conference. I wanted my wife to see the Imperial Hotel and dine in the Thai restaurant I remembered and liked so much.

We looked all over Wireless Road for the hotel. It had completely disappeared. Downtown Bangkok had gone high-rise, and the Imperial Hotel with its extensive grounds had vanished. In its place was an elaborate new hotel, business center and apartment complex, all made of steel and glass. The restaurant and its menus were no longer there: gone with the winds of change.

255. DÉJÀ VU

Another war story:

On my first tour in Vietnam, I was assigned to a “Radio Research” Company in Phuoc Vinh, located in an exfoliated rubber plantation North of Saigon. Our company was housed in wood-frame barracks with netting where windows would otherwise be. Each of these structures had a slightly-peaked roof of corrugated material that was probably asbestos, and was surrounded by a ring of sand-filled 50-gallon drums. Inside, there was a poured concrete floor. On top of the drums were three rows of olive drab sandbags, and some of these barracks had additional sandbags in front of the steel drums. There were about twenty men in single bunks in each of these buildings. In Vietnam, the area where you lived was called a “hootch”.

Other than your bed and a footlocker, there was no furniture in your hooch. Each soldier was issued a helmet, a flak jacket, a rifle and several magazines of .223 ammunition. This material was normally not carried around the Division Base where we were located, but was kept under your cot in the hooch.

We occasionally took incoming fire from rockets, recoilless rifles and mortars. Our base was large, and the incoming fire usually originated in wooded areas at some distance from the base, so the fire was seldom accurate. However, a lot of the incoming fire occurred at night when men were sleeping. We had outgoing artillery fire missions all through the day and night, and it was not always possible to distinguish incoming from outgoing fire. To warn our personnel, there was a loud siren placed atop of the Operations bunker that was activated when the first rocket or mortar round came in. The understood message was: “Danger. Take shelter immediately”

If you were in bed when the siren went off, the drill was to roll out of bed and get on the floor. You reached under your cot in the dark and pulled out your helmet and flak jacket, and you put them on quickly while keeping low on the floor. Then you picked up your rifle and a bandoleer of magazines and moved over next to the outer wall where you were protected by the steel drums and sandbags. After a delay (and after the incoming fire had stopped) the siren would sound again and people would put their gear away and go back to sleep. After a while, this middle-of-the-night activity became second nature to all of us.

I left Vietnam in 1972, traveled to the Washington area and almost immediately found a job as a Technical Writer with a U.S. Navy contractor, working on nuclear submarines. I found a place to live in a new apartment complex in Beltsville, Maryland. I did not have much in the way of furniture: a sofa bed, a small kitchen table and two chairs. The apartment complex was brand new, affordable and featured a good-sized swimming pool. The commute to my job in Silver Spring was easy. I moved in, set up housekeeping as best I could, and started my life as a civilian.

On my third night in the Beltsville apartment, while I was sleeping, a loud siren went off very near my apartment complex. My body knew what to do. I rolled out of my sofa bed and hit the floor, reaching under the bed for my helmet and flak jacket.

They weren't *there*.

My heart rate went way up, and I began groping wildly in the dark for my combat gear. The siren continued to blare, even louder than I remembered it, and I started to crawl towards the outer wall. Then, with my mind racing, I realized I was lying on a carpet, which I did not have in the hooch.

It really took a minute or two to come back to reality. Shaking from adrenaline, I stood up, walked over to the window and looked out.

There was a volunteer fire station on the hill above my apartment complex, and the siren could have been transported there from Phuoc Vinh: they were very similar. At that point, I heard a fire truck toot its horn and put on its siren. It left the station and went out on call, followed by another fire truck.

It took me all of six months before I could feel comfortable during a fire alarm.

256. AN AGENT FOR CHANGE

On my first and only visit to Shanghai, our team was installing most of the Security Enhancement improvements in an historic old building. I enjoy wiring, and offered to lay out, fabricate, install and wire in the Security Interface Cabinet on this trip. As many of you will remember, this involved drilling a lot of holes in a big steel cabinet to support the installation of terminal strips and to allow wires of many different types to penetrate and exit the cabinet. I found a vacant office to work in, assembled the tools I would need for the job and got started.

For this trip, our team was housed in a luxurious new hotel in Shanghai named the “Shangri-La”. The Admin Officer at the Consulate had arranged for support teams to stay on the Executive Floor of this hotel, which was decked out with very modern furniture designed along traditional Chinese lines. My king-size bed, for example, was made of Asian teak wood with an elaborate Ming-appearing headboard and powerful scrolled feet meant to suggest the hooves of horses. (That hotel was probably the finest-appearing facility that I ever stayed in on a TDY.) One of the great benefits of being on the Executive Floor was that *breakfasts were included* in the cost of our rooms, and we ate them on the same floor of the hotel where our rooms were located.

As at other Asian hotels, the breakfast room featured two buffet lines of food. One line offered Western cuisine, such as pancakes, little omelets, Danish pastries and yoghurt. The other line offered Asian food, such as Egg Foo Yung, smoked eel, Chinese porridge and steamed dumplings. Diners sat in small booths housing either four people or only two, and the little dining room was crowded. As I entered on the first day, I saw that my crew already occupied two of the four-person booths, so I went through both of the buffet lines and sat at one of the two-person booths.

A very attractive Chinese woman in western dress entered the dining area behind me and walked through the Asian buffet line alongside me. As I sat down, she realized that nearly all of the tables were full and asked me in excellent English if she might share my table. I was intrigued by what she might be doing in Shanghai and welcomed her to join me for breakfast. She began by asking what I was doing in Shanghai, and I told her I was working at the Consulate.

She told me that she was Canadian, and that her family owned a clothing manufacturing factory in Shanghai which made clothes for sale at stores in Canada but especially in the United States. She explained that the government of Canada had an interesting immigration policy: people from foreign countries who were willing to invest a million dollars in the economy of Canada were welcome to apply for Canadian citizenship. Her family had apparently taken advantage of this policy to immigrate to Toronto and start a business there. We each made a

quick trip back to the food lines for coffee and more eel as we talked. Then the Consulate van arrived and it was time to go to work.

The next day started out in almost exactly the same way. I went through the breakfast lines, sat down at the same table and was approached by the same Chinese/Canadian lady, who again asked to join me and then resumed our conversation from the day before. As we finished breakfast, she invited me to come out and visit her factory and said that she had a present for me, handing me a shopping bag with an expensive shirt in it that seemed to be just my size. Suspicious old security officer that I am, I began to sense a False Flag approach from the Chinese intelligence services. When we reached the Consulate, I asked to speak with one of the Political Officers and took my new shirt along with me for the interview.

I related the above circumstances to the Political Officer and asked for some advice. Was I violating security by just talking to this mysterious lady? Should I break off all contact with this supposedly Canadian woman? Should I return the shirt and possibly offend a Chinese Canadian who might become an important asset to either the British Embassy or even our own Embassy? Who was the woman, and had she approached other personnel in the Embassy? The Political Officer said that he would look into it and get back to me that day.

By this time I was connecting the wiring in the new SIC cabinet and was involved in wire stripping, the installation of terminals on the wires and the interconnection of systems. I was using a special ratcheting crimper for this work that made the job a lot easier and which produced a professional crimp on every spade lug I worked with. As I labored, I kept thinking about my breakfast companion and what she might be leading toward. She had not asked anything about my work, but I thought that questions about the Consulate and our team might be the new topic for the next morning's breakfast chat.

Just before we were to return to the hotel that evening, I was summoned back to the Political Section. I was informed that the woman was exactly who she said she was; she came from a family that was doing very well in business in Canada. Wanting to keep her favorably disposed toward the Consulate and its personnel, it was suggested that I keep the shirt. I did so.

The shirt came with a Pierre Cardin label.

257. AUDITIONING MARIACHIS

In much of Central and South America, when your daughter reaches the age of 15, it is time to throw her a big birthday party. The Quinceañera celebration is an important announcement to your community that your daughter has become a young woman. Elaborate and somewhat formal parties are planned, similar in some respects to Cotillion Balls in the United States, with food, music, dancing and a supporting group of your daughter's friends all in the picture. As this is a traditional celebration, traditional musicians are appropriate, and (in Mexico City) you find these musicians at Garibaldi Square.

Mariachi music has evolved from tunes played on native Mexican instruments to music provided by large bands with harps, guitars, violins, trumpets and many other European instruments. Mariachi usually turn out in Charro (Mexican cowboy) costume, with cowboy boots, big sombreros, long bow ties, tight-fitting pants and vests and jackets decorated with lines of metallic studs along the seams. Many Mariachi sing as well as play instruments, often in exquisite harmony. Groups playing Mariachi music are concentrated around Garibaldi Square in the Mexican capital, and competition for your pesos is hot.

Although the city is very crowded, when I visited the square in 1978 there was some parking available around the square and in lots at either end. As soon as you left your car, you found yourself facing a group of Mariachi in costume, instruments in hand, ready to audition for your daughter's celebration. The band would select a song and begin playing while their agent told you how good they were, what a bargain that particular band would be and handed you printed cards with a picture of the band and a phone number to reach the agent. Prices were often negotiable. I believe we were stopped four times by outdoor Mariachi as we walked across the garden square. Interaction between these different groups showed both manners and respect: each group seeking your business would allow the first group to finish and move away before they began to play.

Around the square, in old Spanish-style buildings, were a number of restaurants for more serious (and more expensive) auditioning. There were two types of restaurants. In one type, there might be six different Mariachi groups in the restaurant, each working a specific dining room. A signboard showing where each group was located was prominent at the front door. At these restaurants, patrons usually came to listen to musicians they had heard about; they would request a dinner table in a specific room. In the other type of restaurant (to which we went) you simply asked for a table and wandering Mariachi groups would stroll by as you were eating dinner, giving you exposure to different groups. In both types of restaurants, the musicians would take requests for a modest donation. The food in both types of restaurants was good, and the novelty of hearing wandering music as you ate was delightful.

We started with salt-rimmed frozen Margaritas, which I will recommend to anyone. I am partial to enchiladas, and I ordered a plate with several different types of these. Others at our

table ordered Fajitas. As we sipped and dined, group after group walked by, first singing a tune they selected and subsequently asking for requests. From one group, I asked for “La Paloma”, which I enjoy. I donated \$10, and the musicians obliged me with a beautiful rendition of the song.

On leaving the restaurant, we crossed the square to return to our car, encountering three more Mariachi groups with agents and cards along the way.

258. AIR CHINA

Early in 1990, I made my first flight into Beijing, China. To get there at that time, I had to travel from Seoul to Tokyo to catch a ride on a different airline. There were no direct flights from South Korea into China, and China was trying to get its own airline system working. I was booked from Tokyo on an Air China flight to reach the Chinese capital.

At the time, Air China was trying to compete with European carriers. They were using Russian Ilyushin aircraft, but they were beginning to imitate the style of airlines like Air France and SAS, outfitting their personnel with more modern and stylish uniforms. Flight personnel were schooled in customer service behavior: smiles, little courtesies, quick service. The seat pocket in front of you was filled with travel pamphlets for China, information on your airplane, an air-sickness bag with the logo of Air China, and an in-flight magazine. (I would add here that Special Agent Steve Bernstein, who worked with us in DS/ST Operations, at one time had a remarkable collection of (unused) air-sickness bags from all over the world.)

The flight from Tokyo to Beijing was relatively short: we took off, were served an in-flight meal, we filled out boarding cards and we landed. I believe we had roasted chicken on that flight, but the attention-getter was the dessert.

After the meals were collected, each passenger was handed a thin, rectangular box made of white cardboard. Inside the box was a grid of cardboard separators, making the box look a little like a Chinese Whitman's Sampler with twelve little bins. Each compartment was labeled with Chinese characters and contained a little treat. It was hard to tell what was inside of each compartment, but everything was obviously intended to be eaten. I started to explore the box.

My first treat was a tiny purple plum with intense sweetness.

The next item was a Wasabi radish pellet hidden by a white coating: unexpected heat, requiring water immediately.

The third item was a little brown ball similar to marzipan in consistency, but with a bean curd flavor rather than almond extract.

Each item was a surprise: some were sweet, some were sour, some were awful. Others were unusual but also unrecognizable. I finished most of the items in the box, handed it back to a flight attendant and started on my landing card. We landed, and I arrived in China for the first time, meeting Jon Jomeruck in Immigration.

259. GETTING MY LICENSE

I was informed in late 1989 that our Embassy in Seoul, Korea had established a position for me: DS and the EAP Bureau wanted me to head to post immediately. I was enrolled in the Korean Language Program at FSI at the time. I would really have liked to finish the course before heading to Post, but DS thought that our interests would be better served if I proceeded to Korea in January of 1990. My children were in the middle of a school year and we thought it would be best if they finished the school year in the United States and then joined me in Seoul after school let out in the summer. I accordingly headed out to Korea on my own.

On my arrival at Post, I was assigned very nice quarters in the Embassy compound on the Yongsan Military Base. We were in a house made of cinder blocks, painted a mint green, with a traditional grey tile Korean roof on top. It was a four-bedroom Rambler with a huge kitchen, a walled-in garden and plenty of entertainment space, looking directly out on a large common area used for community picnics in the summers. A manicured golf course began just past the common area. I sent pictures of the interior of the house back to Gail so that she could have an advance view of what the new home looked like.

My wife began to plan the decorations. She wanted to do a special window treatment, and sent me pictures of what she would like. The drapes she had in mind needed to hang from something substantial, so I proposed making six wooden valences for the living and dining room windows in a Chinese style that could be covered with drapery material. She agreed to the idea.

Like many of our military facilities, Yongsan Army Base had a Hobby Shop that supported carpentry projects. It offered many power tools, had wood for sale, and provided participants with a place to store their projects while they were under construction. I found the Hobby Shop and became a card-carrying Hobby Shop member on my first weekend in Seoul.

There was only one problem with this facility. You needed a license to operate any of the power tools. To get the license, you had to go through a three-day training course taught by Mr. Kim, the Hobby Shop manager. This course was presented during the evenings for one hour per day over a three-day period. On reflection, this was a smart move for the military command. There are lots of equipment items in a carpentry shop that can injure people, and the military wanted to be sure that people using table saws and drill presses not only knew what they were doing, but what they *shouldn't* do. There was a heavy emphasis on safety: eye protection, hearing protection, not leaning boards or plywood panels where they could fall and hurt someone. You were taught to clean up after yourself, where to put scraps, how to select wood for your projects and the prices of wood and plywood that were available.

The course of instruction included thorough lessons on the safe use of:

- A table saw
- A planer

- A radial arm saw
- A drill press, and
- A router

There were two soldiers also enrolled in my course. Mr. Kim demonstrated how to use each tool, how *not* to use each tool, and then had each of us process a piece of wood on each tool several times until we were comfortable with adjusting the tool, using it correctly and securing it for the next user. Little things became important, like not leaving the chuck key in the drill press when you started it up, and I gained a great deal of respect for the table saw.

At the end of the course, I received a license, signed by Mr. Kim. (I still have it.) I bought some wood and proceeded to cut out, construct and mount the Chinese valences. When my family reached Korea, Gail had the valences padded and upholstered by GSO with fabric she brought to post, matching her drapes and producing a very unusual and interesting window treatment in our living and dining areas.

260. NAVY GURA

Another Pre-DS Story:

If you traveled in Africa, from time to time you would encounter a wall decoration consisting of a local African shield with a couple of spears crossed behind it. The shape of the shield and the length and tips of the spears changed from country to country, but the decoration was popular in both East Africa and West Africa. (The national flag of Kenya carries a device like this, with a Masai shield in its center.)

My first overseas assignment in the Army was to Asmara, Ethiopia (which is now Asmara, Eritrea.) This was a large communications facility; I worked at a receiver site. Our facility was perched on the edge of an escarpment that dropped sharply a distance of 7,000 feet to the plains of Sudan. To acquire RF signals without interference, all of the receiver sites were grouped on the top of our plateau, and the transmitter sites were situated fifteen to twenty miles away.

There were two of these transmitter sites. At a time before geosynchronous satellites were in general use, the Army transmitter site communicated by microwave signals with a chain of intermittent satellites that passed overhead with great regularity, something like a data-collecting paternoster elevator. The transmit dish would swing to the East, acquire a satellite, track it as it passed overhead and send data to it as long as it was in range, then swing back to acquire the next bird.

The Navy, which was also represented in Asmara, had a receiver site up on the plateau and had located their transmitter facility in the town of Gura, about fifteen miles Southeast of Asmara. This site was situated about a thousand feet lower than the plateau in a niche on the East side of the escarpment. From this location, it was able to transmit to the Persian Gulf and the U.S. Fleet in the Indian Ocean. This facility was generally called "Navy Gura".

The Naval facility tract was about the size of a football field and was sited on a low hill in the middle of a large slice of farmland. Several large HF antennas ran out into this crop area, which was cooperatively farmed by Ethiopians. The transmitter cabinets were located in an air-conditioned room with a raised floor and the transmit antenna cables ran out to the antennas in heavy sheaths which were pressurized with nitrogen. The sheathed cables were laid in poured concrete troughs which ran all the way from the transmitter facility out to the antennas. These cable vaults were covered, but not tightly, with concrete slabs.

Most of the crops grown on the shared farmland were of wheat. During the growing season, vermin would hide in the cable troughs while eating the grain. Snakes learned to enter the troughs, too, for an easy meal.

During the heavy rainy season, water would enter the cable troughs and push whatever wildlife had entered it up into the transmitter building. The snakes liked the warmth of the concrete floor beneath the transmitters and often set up housekeeping there.

These were, often, very poisonous snakes. There were Egyptian Cobras, Black Mambas, Puff Adders and the occasional Green Mamba, which happened to be nearly the same color as the young wheat crop. A technician opening a transmitter door to service it was more than likely to be confronted by an angry Mamba trying to protect its nest. This was a deadly snake with the ability to move very quickly.

To prevent deaths, Navy Gura organized and trained a volunteer Snake Team. These men learned to shut down the equipment they planned to service, to open the transmitter doors carefully and quietly while a team member stood by with a flashlight, and to use tools like long-handled snake hooks and snake clamps to capture poisonous snakes from a safe distance. These snakes were kept alive and were bagged.

The Naval command set up an anti-venom processing facility at a nearby Ethiopian hospital. When a snake was captured, it was taken to this facility. There, venom from the snake was extracted to form anti-venom for use in treating local snake bites. The snake was then decapitated, and the head was given back to the Snake Team in a Ragu-sized glass jar of formaldehyde, with the jaws opened to expose the fangs.

There was a Navy mess hall in Navy Gura, and the Snake Team built a long shelf along the wall leading into the dining area. On this shelf were arrayed some fifteen snake heads in jars, to attest to the team's prowess and to remind technicians of the requirement to have a Snake Team present anytime they serviced the transmitters. The collection was interesting: brown Cobras, tan Puff Adders, the occasional yellow-green Green Mamba, and lots of silver-grey Black Mambas, the interior of whose mouths were pitch black.

Over the door was an Ethiopian Shield with a long Snake Hook crossed over a long Snake Clamp behind it. Beneath the decoration was a banner with the Legend "Snake Team/Navy Gura". Members of the Snake Team were allowed to wear a shoulder patch with this emblem on their fatigues, and the patch occasionally earned team members a free beer at the Stag Bar.

261. CHECKING OUT

Ah, the end of an era. This will be the last weekly story from me, but I encourage all of you to dig into your travel memories and Foreign Service experiences and write a tale or two. I will send out an additional story every month or two. My thanks to Jules for setting up this forum and for finding an alternative when Yahoo Groups pulled the plug.

It will come as no surprise to most of you that some offices are more efficient than others. This is even true when I speak of government offices.

For example, in the early day of computers, you could walk through the ADP office areas of many government buildings and quickly see a bit of inefficiency. The programmers were often troubleshooting lengthy programs and were absorbed in their work, not even noticing visitors at times. They were looking for glitches and did not like to be interrupted. These ADP positions were usually sedentary jobs and were often located in the bowels of government buildings.

Everywhere you looked, you could see core dumps: stacks of computer printouts showing the condition of system memory at a particular time in the processing of programs. There were *piles* of these printouts, placed on desks, on available chairs, and even stacked on the floor, waiting for review by the programmers. Looking around, you could see reels of computer tape on desks next to sandwich wrappings and empty coke cans.

In 1995, not having been selected for the Senior Foreign Service, I was forced to retire. I attended the Retirement Training Seminar for over a month at George Mason University, leaving that program with a strong feeling that the material presented in the program should have been shared with me at the *beginning* of my career in order to take better advantage of the excellent investment counseling presented to us.

In the following week, I learned to write a resume the State Department way.

Then I needed to put in my retirement paperwork. So, one morning, I walked over to the Retirement Offices, which were then in the basement of a building in Columbia Plaza.

In the government, as all of you will recall, there are some early indications of the importance and power of the office you are visiting. These offices scored rather low on those visual markers. For example:

- A. The Retirement Offices were not in the Main State building where most important offices were located.
- B. The offices were situated in poorly-cared-for rented office space that was accessed through a basement.
- C. The required contract guards for that building were talking to each other and did not seem to look at the metal detectors as I walked through.

- D. The elevator to the second floor did not work, and I had to use the fire stairs
- E. No one was present at the reception desk when I arrived.

Looking past the empty reception desk, I could see *stacks* of personnel files. They were on chairs, on shelves, on windowsills and on the floor. Each file had a person's name on it. The reception desk had several candy bar wrappers on it next to a jar of nail polish.

After about eight minutes, I saw a woman emerge toward the back of the main office; I waved at her. She was talking to someone in an inner office and she just continued her conversation. Two minutes later, she came forward to ask me what I needed.

I told her I was there to start my retirement processing.

“What's your last name?” she asked.

In the State Department, retirement office processing was based on Alphabet Roulette. Your HR Specialist was assigned to you based on the first letter of your last name. There were six personnel specialists, each with their own office, three offices on each side of the central aisle in the office space ahead of me. She sent me down to the second office on my left.

The first office was labeled “Mrs. ____:ABCDEF” No one was in the office. Personnel files were piled everywhere, but no one was in the room. I looked back at the receptionist, who said cheerfully “She's on maternity leave!”

Across the hall was another office. This was labeled “Ms. ____:UVWXYZ” This office also reflected a lot of disorder. Most of the personnel files were stored haphazardly in open cabinets except for a large pile placed on the corner of the desk. There was an open newspaper on the center of the desk and several other newspapers and magazines stacked on the single visitor chair. No one was in the office. I began to fear for the correct completion of my retirement paperwork and the hoped-for arrival of my needed pension funds. After all, I would be out of job in September.

Walking a little further, I reached the second office on the left. This one was labeled “Mrs. Kim: GHIJKL”. Looking in, I saw an elderly Korean lady sitting at her desk. She was well-dressed and alert. The office was a little oasis of efficiency in a desert of disorder. Nothing was out of place: there were well-cared-for African Violets blooming in little pots on the windowsill, the visitor's chair was empty and the office was spotless. I saw a few pieces of Korean embroidery hanging on the walls as decorations.

I greeted Mrs. Kim in Korean and introduced myself. Then I explained in English that I was there to start my retirement processing. We talked about Korea, about my tour there, about her family and then started in on the processing. All of my paperwork was correctly filled out in forty-five minutes. My application went into a file, which she put into a box on her desk. The box was otherwise empty. She said she would enter my data that afternoon.

I felt greatly relieved to have had Mrs. Kim as my HR Specialist, and told her so. She expressed her thanks and commented that she *herself* would be retiring in two months. Somehow, I felt even more relieved that she was in place when I came through.

I retired on the 29th of September, 1995.

Readers, thanks for your patience over these last five years. If some of you have wondered about it, there is a *reason* for all these stories.

My father led a full and interesting life, with perhaps even more variety than my own. He often spoke of a desire to “write his memoirs”. As a missionary’s son born in Nebraska but raised in India, a graduate of Indiana University and Northwestern University, a US Navy Officer in WWII with six duty assignments including the liberation of the Philippines, a lawyer, a Foreign Service Officer with six overseas assignments and the father of five children, he had a lot to write about. Somehow, however, he never managed to get his stories down on paper. In his memory, I thought I would get some of my experiences in print, and I hope that you have found them interesting.

Let me leave you with a little poetic fragment. If you have not seen it before, I recommend the rest of the poem to all of you:

“An aged man is but a paltry thing
A tattered cloak upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress...”

William Butler Yeats
“Sailing to Byzantium”
1928

EXTRAS

261. THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

1995 was a difficult year for me. I had just lost my job at the State Department and was not sure what to do with myself. I applied to several defense-related engineering firms in the Washington area, looking for either an opening as an Engineering Writer or a Systems Analyst: no one seemed to be interested. My wife was concerned about how we were going to pay our bills, and I shared that worry. I did sign up for the WAE program but wanted to try to find a different job before getting back into harness at the State Department.

I began to look into other areas of interest to me.

The Washington D.C. region is *filled* with lobbyists and with small Associations that support businesses and industries all over the world. I thought that my experience in government might appeal to some of these lobbyists, so I started to look around. I found several hundred prospective occupations, along with addresses to which I might write. As I looked, I noticed that one of these Associations, the “American Medical Writers Association” had its headquarters in a group of buildings about a mile and a half from where I lived. I decided to give them a visit.

On a Thursday, I walked into a small office containing four elderly ladies, who seemed to be engaged in packing handouts into folders. I introduced myself and explained a little of my background, wanting to learn more about Medical Writers. They were interested in talking to me, but they were busy. They were preparing materials for a national convention of medical writers and doctors and hospital representatives that was to be held in Baltimore the following week.

I offered to help stuff folders.

As we tucked agendas and speaker biographies and dinner schedules and useful handouts into the folders, I asked about the training required to become a medical writer, the salaries of such individuals and the types of work that they were asked to do. As they talked, it seemed like an interesting line of work. Doctors working on new surgical procedures, for example, are eager to share their knowledge and new techniques with other doctors, but seldom have the time to write up those procedures. They need medical writers to explain the new process. Generally, there is artwork involved as well as writing in such assignments and there is a second occupation (Medical Illustration) that works with medical writers to produce the new guidance documents. The products might be sent to influential medical journals, getting the doctors a lot of attention and speaking engagement offers. The pay varied with your experience, success in writing publications, and whether you worked full time for a hospital or worked freelance, but it was generous. I was interested.

There was a catch. Medical writers needed to know a great deal about human anatomy in order to follow the procedures that the doctors sought to improve. The Medical Writers Association was structured to *teach* this information to writers through a volunteer force of

medical doctors, each of whom would speak on their area of specialty. The courses set up by the AMWA were demanding, thorough and costly. Usually, the price of such courses was paid by the hospitals hiring medical writers, unless you were self-employed. Then you paid the tuition fees by yourself.

Towards the end of the day, with the folders complete and packed into boxes, the Association President asked me if I would like to help them with the Convention in Baltimore. I saw an opportunity to learn more and perhaps meet some medical writers, so I accepted the invitation.

The following week, we were in the Baltimore Convention Center, close to the Inner Harbor area of the city. I arrived early and helped to bring in the material to be distributed; I was asked to staff the receiving desk and sign in the participants. The Association President sat on my left as I did so. As writers, illustrators, surgeons and internal medicine specialists and bone doctors arrived, Sarah knew many of them and introduced them to me. All the Association staff members were wearing special nametags that facilitated our recognition by the assembled guests, and I received such a nametag. When I left the desk to look around, as one of the hosts, I was greeted very politely by every attendee I bumped into.

Some of the above training sessions were in progress at the convention, and I popped into several of them. A class might consist of a doctor and eight students, learning about a new artificial knee and ways of avoiding nerve damage as you prepped a leg for its insertion. The nomenclature of muscles, tissues, nerves, arteries and parts of the replacement knee were all important in describing the process.

I had lunch with the AMWA staff and their principal speakers. At the end of the day, a list of participants was prepared and was circulated to all the attendees electronically, in case a doctor or a hospital needed the services of a medical writer. My name went on that list; at Sarah's suggestion, I entered "AMWA Staff" on the form in the "Affiliation" column.

For the next several months, I was invited to attend medical conferences all over the country. Like the classes, however, the registration fees for such conferences (several hundred dollars), the costs of transportation to and from locations like Phoenix, Arizona and the hotel stays and meals there would all have been on me. *Employed* writers were generally sent to those conferences by their supporting hospitals or medical practices. Reluctantly, I passed up each offer.

Early in 1996, I was invited to attend a symposium on the Human Brain at the National Institutes of Health, just down the road from me in Bethesda. I accepted the invitation for the three-day event, which filled Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of a February work week. We met in a lecture hall at NIH, honestly structured like a medical amphitheater with a small well in the center for the speaker and a circular seating area in tiers looking down towards a work table,

a podium and a huge projection screen. The seating tiers were filled with white lab coats and stethoscopes and a few suits. My credentials were checked; I was given a seat in the front row.

The next three days were an adventure. Doctors who had spent years learning about one part of the brain, say Broca's Area in the frontal lobe linked to speech processing, were each given an hour to divulge everything they had learned over the past fifteen years. The symposium organizers had filled the agenda with excellent speakers of national repute, and they were very strict about keeping to the schedule. I heard from surgeons, radiologists, neurologists and psychologists and psychiatrists. I learned about new Open MRI systems and (new to me) Positron Emissions Tomography scanning systems. The first few speakers addressed the structure of the brain and areas of special interest to them, helping me to understand the internal processes and pieces of the human mind as well as the rest of the presentations. Each subsequent speaker shed a little fresh light into the mysteries of human thought and the processes by which the brain worked. I was taking notes but was in way over my head as much of this material was discussed. Still, I was learning. From time to time the doctors on either side of me would nod or shake their heads. One of them asked what I was doing: I whispered "I'm a writer" which generated enthusiastic nods and explained my notes.

At the end of the three-day session, another list of attendees was prepared and was circulated electronically to interested brain doctors throughout the nation. I continued to receive invitations, many more invitations now that I was associated with both AMWA and NIH, from similar symposiums and conferences in the United States and Canada. By that time, I was enrolled in American University to get a teaching degree, and was obliged to forgo the invitations, but it was fun to think about the profession that got away from me.

261. LEAVE THE DOG ALONE

In 1969, I was assigned to an Army Base in Ethiopia. I had an active schedule there, but also some time on my hands. Being interested in Army ceremonies, I decided to join the Post Honor Guard.

At Kagnev Station, our Guard was an entirely ceremonial outfit, used to present the colors at various post ceremonies and to welcome Ethiopian dignitaries to Post. We were up on a hot, arid plateau 7000 feet in the air. The climate was nearly always sunny and warm, so the Guard dressed in cotton khaki summer uniforms. Our Guard uniforms, however, were trimmed with white gloves, white boot laces, white belts, white aiguillettes, white ascots with the Post's gazelle crest and chromed steel helmets.

One member of the Honor Guard (Johnny) had previously served with the ceremonial 3rd Infantry Division in Washington D.C. (Old Guard). Members of that Division guard the Tomb of the Unknown at Arlington. Many Old Guard members knew and practiced trick drill: Johnny was an expert. Over time, he taught a little of what he knew to all of us.

We learned to make the rifle "talk" as we went through the Manual of Arms. We learned to spin the rifle between stages of the Manual. We brought our rifles up from the ground in a spin and practiced passing weapons between marching soldiers. It was interesting to participate in a platoon of soldiers doing these moves in unison while marching. Our drill was similar to that of marching bands in the U.S., but we drilled with WWII-era M1 Garand rifles. Our Honor Guard was accompanied on State Visit turnouts by the (small) Post Band, dressed in the same outfits we wore.

Ethiopia at that time was ruled by an Emperor: Haile Selassie. Haile was a national hero: he successfully attacked the Italian Army in Ethiopia at the beginning of WWII after the Italians under Mussolini invaded his country. The Emperor was highly decorated by many Foreign countries after the war.

Twice a year, Haile came from Addis Ababa to Asmara to inspect the Ethiopian 8th infantry division, to visit Kagnev Station and to have a dental checkup at our Post's dental clinic. He was also a luncheon guest of the post at the Officers' Club. The Honor Guard would turn out for inspection during these visits. At such times, we assembled in formation, then "opened ranks" to allow the guest of Honor to walk through the Guard with the Guard Commander.

The Emperor of Ethiopia was about five foot four. He always arrived in a khaki uniform similar to that of a British General, with a wide red band around his hat and red General's lapels. We always saw him wearing his collection of medals. There were perhaps ten rows of these

medals, stretching from the top of his blouse almost to his waist. He was elderly in 1969, and walked cautiously, looking towards the ground and at the assembled Guard.

Haile, everywhere he went, was accompanied by a small, white terrier. The dog stayed at his heels most of the time; he would, however, wander away from his owner on occasion and sniff surrounding objects. The dry-cleaning chemicals on the pants legs of Honor Guard members were interesting to the dog, and he would stop by the occasional soldier as Haile walked through the guard, sniffing at pants legs.

Before any such ceremony, Guard members were warned about the dog in advance, and were counseled strongly: “Leave the dog alone.” A soldier with a rifle was likely to take offense if a terrier peed on his pants leg; attacking the dog in reprisal would have caused an international incident that might have resulted in the closure of the Post.

Accordingly, we stoically stood at attention as the emperor and the dog inspected us, meandering down the line of ceremonially dressed soldiers on their way to lunch. To my knowledge, the dog never insulted any of the troops marshalled in his honor, but there was always the possibility of a little damage.



Kagnew Station Shoulder Patch

263. HENDERSHOTT'S

In 1986, my mother-in-law bought an A-frame cabin up in the woods near Berkeley Springs, WV. This was intended to be a family getaway, and we would drive up on weekends from Bethesda, MD. The drive, through a mountainous area, was refreshing and was especially enjoyable during the Fall when the leaves of trees were changing color.

Our drive to Berkeley Springs took us through Hancock, MD, a former railroad town. This was a small town with two long streets on a hill above the railroad tracks. Along the main street were a bakery/lunchroom, a farm produce store, a bank and several other emporiums.

Hancock was in the middle of a heavily-forested area where three States came together: Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia. There was a lot of wildlife in this area and outdoor sports were popular.

Hendershot's, a sporting goods store, was located on the main street in the middle of town. This facility consisted of two long, adjoined row houses with their common wall knocked down and replaced with metal columns. This was the principal hunting store in an area popular with hunters from three States. Everything in the store focused on hunting, camping, fishing and outdoor activities. Its contents comprised every deer-hunting commodity imaginable.

The store was an outdoor enthusiast's dream. It had *atmosphere*. It was filled with hunting mementos, outdoor merchandise posters, forest finds and examples of taxidermy. This material was seen on the walls, above the shelves and suspended from the ceilings of the two joined houses. On the wall and atop store shelving, you could see:

- Stuffed deer heads and racks of antlers along with many mounted heads of African game
- Stuffed black bears and other animals: raccoons, possums and squirrels

On the ceilings, there were:

- Big hornets' nests
- Aluminum boats with camouflage paint, and canoes and kayaks hanging from the rafters.

The central floor area was *filled* with clothing for hunters and campers. Every pattern and color of camouflage imaginable was presented on hangars or folded on shelves in many sizes. Other shelves contained Coleman lanterns, pack frames, pop-up tents, trail cameras, camp stoves, boots, heated socks, compasses and maps, dried jerky, deer scents, scent masking sprays, mosquito sprays, shooting glasses and ear plugs.

Employees stood behind glass-covered floor cases along the long walls with racks of weapons behind them. A long row of shotguns along the entry wall phased into a longer row of rifles that reached the corner, turned West and went part-way down the back wall. The floor cases held smaller, more expensive items: pistols of many calibers, hunting knives, archery

broadheads, holsters, rifle magazines, telescopic sights, scope mounts and archery sights. Hendershot's had a pistol range in the back of the store and they sold hunting licenses; they also provided gunsmithing services and custom reloading services. These features were expensive: a lot of bucks were dropped right in the store.

During hunting season, the store's focus shifted dramatically to managing the rapid inflow of many groups of eager hunters from three States. Hunters wanted to get in to the store, buy what they needed and start hunting. The store was filled with wide-eyed men and women looking purposefully for new things that might help them in their hunts. Many of these patrons were proudly wearing their hunting tags. The store stocked up at the end of summer to meet the coming demand.

In Fall, as you entered the store, the entry way was almost blocked by archery merchandize. There were *racks* of bows: Straight, Recurve, Compound and Crossbows. There were *boxes* of arrows: aluminum, carbon fiber and traditional wood with great variance on fletching. There were also paper targets, Straw-stuffed targets, Styrofoam block targets and Styrofoam animal targets. I saw Archery sights, quivers, stabilizers, silencers, overdraw rigs and much more. Then you went inside.

Within the store, boxed ammunition for shotguns, rifles and pistols was stacked about two feet high on the floor *in front of* the display cases so that hunters could select sufficient supplies of the ammo they needed and buy it quickly. Many hunters also bought extra magazines to hold the ammunition. The store was *packed* with eager buyers: it resembled a basement fire sale at Macy's.

Both men and women were involved in this preparatory process, and the merchandize was designed to appeal to both sexes. There were, for example, Weatherby rifles with pink camouflage synthetic stocks, for which stylish matching field jackets, hats and hunting pants were available. Orange or camo hunting hats with the logos of famous hunting equipment manufacturers were popular: Browning, Matthews, Ruger, Winchester. Here and there, you could see customers trying on these items, sighting new rifles, hefting crossbows and otherwise getting ready for the hunt.

The parking lot was full of pickups, some with camouflage paint, off-road tires and extra racks of spotlights. Many of these already contained tents, axes, water supplies, deer scales and rifle racks, usually seen in the windows behind the drivers. Children, themselves in camouflage clothing, were seen either with their parents or sitting in the pickups watching the exposed gear. Hunters emerged from the store with a characteristic "Buck Fever" look in their eyes, hopped in their trucks and headed for the woods. Afternoons and evenings were filled with the echos of distant shooting.

264. GOING UP IN A GLIDER

(A College Story)

It was 1967. I had just graduated from college and had enlisted in the Army. I was not due to report until mid-August and had some time on my hands. I was living in a leased house off-campus with another student, who was waiting for his report date to join the Navy. Bill and I were acting as house-sitters for several other students who leased the old home year by year.

Bill had a zippy sky-blue Sunbeam Alpine sports car and we drove around a lot that summer. Bill was taking flying lessons at a small airfield outside of town. I used to accompany him to the airfield and watch him fly, as well as watching aircraft owners work on their planes. I met several of these owners through Bill.

One day, while Bill was getting ready for his lesson, a medical doctor I had met at the airfield was about to go up in a two-seat glider. He asked me if I would like to fly with him. I had never been up in a glider and welcomed the opportunity.

I got into the back seat of a very streamlined white glider. After considerable research, I believe it was a Schweizer SGS-2-32 training sailplane. The Doctor clipped a tow rope to a release beneath the aircraft; he then entered the glider in front of me, closing the hinged hatch. After a couple of minutes, a single-engine plane taxied over our way; the pilot got out, hooked the other end of the tow rope to the end of his plane, and got back into his cockpit. The engine roared, there was a tug on the tow rope and we headed down the grass runway, picking up speed. Our rise into the air was almost like a lunge: the long, elegant wings of the glider gave us lots of lift, and we soared higher and higher as the tow plane gradually circled the field. When we were up several thousand feet, a small radio in the glider announced that we should drop the tow rope, and we did.

The first impression of glider flight was the almost complete absence of noise. Where previously we had heard the thrum of the tow plane, there was now only the sound of rushing air. The second impression was one of supreme vulnerability. I saw the pressure altimeter unwinding rapidly on the instrument panel, indicating that we were losing height. Wait! This aircraft did not have an engine! How were we going to get back to the airfield, and what would we do if we missed the landing?

Not to worry. It was a glorious summer day, with cool skies and large clumps of Cumulus clouds. The doctor banked over toward a large cloud and there was a sudden feeling of lift, as you might feel in a fast elevator. There was a heated thermal area beneath each cloud, and hot air rises: it acted like strong updraft, and in less than a minute we had regained and exceeded our starting height.

For over an hour, in stunning silence, we skipped from cloud to cloud. Sometimes we soared up through the cloud into cooler air, spiraling back down toward another cloud and repeating the process. The view through the large plastic canopy that was so close to us was stunning, and the sense of control as we flew engine-free from cloud to cloud was very strong. The doctor kept his eyes on both the clouds and the airstrip, gradually guiding us back to our point of origin.

We started our descent a long way from the grass landing field: I again became apprehensive. There were only two little wheels on the glider, both located under the fuselage. In every other plane I had ever been on, I was always seated at least ten feet in the air (or much higher) when we came down to land. On the glider, with a wheel about a foot in diameter beneath me, the seat of my pants was perhaps a foot and a half above the ground. We came in very slowly, with lots of lift, and the doctor centered the glider on the grass landing strip. The green ground came rushing up at us and I felt (accurately) that we were only a couple of feet off the ground. Then the glider's wheels touched the earth, we bounced slightly and came back to the ground, where we coasted down the runway until my pilot braked the plane. As we came to a stop, one of the wings dipped and touched the grass; the glider spun just a little in the direction of that wing. We were home again, and safe.

265. THE CLASS THAT DID NOT WORK

(A Teaching Story)

In 2002, I was teaching an introductory Chemistry class to ninth graders at Montgomery Blair high school in Silver Spring.

We had been warned that the State of Maryland was planning standardized tests for all subject areas. These would be introduced State-wide at the rate of a few subjects each year. Until those tests arrived, teachers were given some latitude to plan instructive units until a rigid State-approved curriculum for each subject was approved. That February, we were asked to teach students about the structure of the atom. I enjoy hands-on instruction and wanted to address this assignment in a creative way that would be fun for students.

In previous years, I had discovered that Periodic Tables of the Elements on plastic sheets were available in quantity (for free) from Marine Corps and Navy Recruiters. I visited the recruiters and obtained a ream of these sheets from each military service.

Plastic eggs for Easter Baskets caught my eye. They were inexpensive, colorful and would hold up for a couple of years of classes. I thought I would use the egg shells to represent electron levels in an element identification lab. Once I had the idea in mind, I decided to create a variety of atoms as **nested** eggs, with dots on each egg representing the number of electrons on that “electron shell”. (Think “Atomic Matryoshka Dolls”.) I thought I would need forty different elements for the classes I taught, broken down into four trays of ten atoms each.

The problem was finding enough eggs that would fit successively over standard plastic eggs. I could find smaller eggs, but the larger ones were expensive and had to be acquired one at a time (usually full of chocolate). Some were colored, some were transparent: I needed a wide variety of eggs and started looking for them. A few were ten inches in diameter. My wife helped me find new sources for the larger eggs and brought several home for me.

I spent about a hundred and fifty dollars on plastic eggs.

Initially I was going to use adhesive plastic “dots” from a sheet of such stickers to represent electrons, but the stickers came off by themselves almost immediately. I then decided to use a permanent marker to indicate the number of electrons on each shell. I numbered each atom, carefully arrayed the nucleus and the electron shells and placed each atom in a numbered tray. In the lab, with a plasticized periodic table of elements as a handout, each student was to take one element from each tray in turn and examine it at their desk. They were to count the number of shells, count the number of electrons on the outer shell, identify the element and find its place on the Periodic Table, predict its qualities (metal? non-metal? noble gas?), determine the number of protons and neutrons in the nucleus and return the atom to the tray. I ran the lab during my last class on a Friday.

While each student worked their way through ten eggs, I walked around to check progress. Students who initially picked obviously easy elements were to receive more difficult ones. Students who selected difficult elements would receive easy ones as their final two. Students who did not understand what we were doing received more guidance.

The lab fell apart during the first ten minutes of class. *The magic marker dots representing the electrons rubbed off easily: Even one dot rubbed off the outer shell changed the identity of the element, making that answer incorrect.* Some of the shells from one egg were put into other eggs in error. Within a short period of time, members of the class were arguing with each other over the identity of elements they were studying: “This can’t be right!” “I just did this!” “This element is missing a shell!” I called the lab to a halt and showed the class a Bill Nye video on the atom.

That night, I took out a soldering iron and repeated the marking process, carefully checking the number of shells for each atom, permanently marking the plastic eggs with the tip of the hot iron so as to leave an indelible electron in place each time I touched the egg. It took several hours, and each shell of each element received an additional indelible mark to help me keep specific atoms together. On Monday, I tried the lab again with a different class.

An engaged class is a quiet class. Once the assignment was understood and students started working, you could have heard a pin drop in the lab. The activity was very colorful, with eggs of many different sizes and colors present on each desk. Each student finished the lab before the end of the period; most students correctly identified all of the atoms they picked up. I took several pictures of the lab in progress; subsequently, I offered the lab to other teachers assigned the same topic.

266. OFFICE R AND D

In 1986, I was on my second tour as the Operations Chief in SY/T. At that time, our Office of Security had more money than it ever had before, and vendors were popping out of the woodwork to show us new systems that we could not live without. Most of those vendors headed over to our new Countermeasures Division, but we had our share of salesmen.

Some of those vendors had products that held the potential of being useful. One outfit offered us noise masking devices for protecting conversations in an office environment. This seemed like a possibly useful system, and we invited the company's representative in to demonstrate his wares. The man arrived with a white-painted noisemaker that had a grill at one end and a low-power AC power connector and volume knob on the other side. It was about the size of a one-pound coffee can. The powered end also featured two loops that allowed the device to be connected to hanging wires above a suspended ceiling.

I told the vendor that his product was interesting, but that we could not buy it without trying it out for a while. I asked if we could install some of his equipment in our office area for a two-month period and evaluate it. He was happy to loan us a masking system.

At that time, we were still in the Main State building on the second floor in the Northwest corner. Our main reception and filing area was surrounded with six or so small one-person offices in which our desk officers sat. In 1986, most of those desk officers were Special Agents on loan to us, and I decided to install the noise masker in the ceiling of one of those offices where power was easily available in the overhead. The occupant of that office was a young Special Agent who I will call "Lester" here. I would add that the entire office area could get warm and stuffy during the summer months.

The sound that the masking system produced was something like the Voice of the Sea that you might hear with a seashell pressed against your ear, amplified many times. The rushing sound of waves filled Lester's little office and made it hard for anyone listening to a phone call from his desk to determine what he was saying. Much of his day was spent in reading telegrams from Africa, and he put up with the annoyance of the masking system with very good grace.

There was a serious downside to the system, however. In the warm room, with tired eyes from reading so much cable traffic, the masking system would put Lester to sleep. It happened pretty often. This was the era when Navy Captain Dan Carlin was serving as our Office Director, and he would wander in from time to time, nearly always encountering Lester asleep at his desk. This greatly offended his Navy training. Captain Carlin would shout at Lester to wake him up, then stalk into my office and chew me out for letting my people sleep on the job.

After a month of trying out the noise making system, we returned it to the vendor with our thanks, explaining that the system did not seem entirely suited to our needs. We should probably have installed it in Captain Carlin's office.

267. THE PAVILION OF THE RAIN OF FLOWERS

I have, in these stories, mentioned several trips to the Forbidden City in Beijing. I have visited a lot of historic sites, ancient ruins, parks and cultural centers in my life, but the sense of going back into another time has been strongest for me while walking through the grounds and many buildings that used to house the Emperors of China.

On my very first trip to the city, while walking North from Tiananmen Square on the West side of the palace grounds, I encountered a strange building. It was not a formal stop on the recorded tour I was taking, but it was a unique structure, taller than all the ones around it, and the roof was decorated with four huge metal lions or dragons that seemed larger than life. There was one animal on each corner; they all had their tails extended toward the center of the roof. The tiles of the highest roof level were golden, like those on other palaces within the city, but there were glazed tiles of blue and green further down.

Beneath the roof, the whole structure seemed unique. There appeared to be two elevated balconies with screens behind them; the screens were closed but ornate. The exposed framework of the building might have been red at one time. There was a golden spike above the center of the building, emerging from a ball that might have represented a pearl.

The gates to this area were closed to the public. Although I walked completely around the facility, I could not get in. I found it hard to get a good picture of the building because of the high walls that surrounded it. After leaving the tour, I went to a bookstore in search of more information on this structure. There did not seem to be much information available. I finally found references to “The Pavilion of the Rain of Flowers” on an overhead map of the city.

On subsequent visits to Beijing, this building continued to hold my interest, although changes in the public tour took me into other areas of the Forbidden City. I continued to look for information when I returned to Korea, and even after my tour in Asia was over.

I learned that this pavilion had been built by the long-reigning Qing Emperor Quianlong at great cost: many taels of both gold and silver had been expended to finance its construction, sums worth millions of dollars in today’s currencies. Grounds of the courtyard surrounding the pavilion were apparently planted with flowering trees that dropped their blossoms onto the ground, perhaps cherry trees. The building was created using Lamaesque Buddhist architecture, as seen in parts of Mongolia, the ancestral home of the ruling dynasty. Some pictures showed that it contained a very ornate and expensive altar, which may have served as a chapel for the Emperor.

This pavilion was the tallest building within the Forbidden City. Residents of the Palace were selected from families all over China, and with few exceptions were confined behind the Palace walls after joining the Emperor’s service. This building featured a viewing area on the

highest floor that allowed some of those closeted residents within the walls to see a little bit of the world outside.

I understand that the Pavilion was finally renovated and opened to the public in 2012.

268. THE RECRUITING TRIP

In 1998, as a result of the expansion of the new Bureau of Diplomatic Security, our Office had a bunch of new positions to fill. Several recruiting trips were arranged through the Office of Recruitment in the Bureau of Personnel. They decided that the new-hire process could be speeded up by having Subject Matter Experts (read: old security engineers) travel with a BEX (Board of Examiners) team to the recruitment locale. Under this arrangement, applicants who appealed to the SMEs and who had the necessary education and experience could be examined immediately for their suitability as Foreign Service Officers by seasoned diplomats on the BEX team.

Peter Stella and I were sent to Silicon Valley in California with two BEX examiners to look for engineers with backgrounds in computer science and electronic design. Our group was housed at a motel in Palo Alto, California and we were to do our recruiting interviews near Stanford University in a large rented ballroom.

The Office of Recruitment made all the arrangements for this trip, including the issue of tickets, hotel reservations and pre-trip advertising in local papers. We offered to assist with writing those advertisements but were informed that Recruitment had been doing this type of work for a long time and did not need our help.

For the two weeks prior to our visit, large job ads were placed in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Los Angeles Times and several other newspapers with wide circulation in California. Worldwide service as an American Diplomat was mentioned in the text. As we learned when we reached Palo Alto, there were some problems with the advertisements:

- They did not mention the need for a security clearance
- They did not ask for resumes in advance
- They did not say what types of engineers were needed, and
- They did not mention the need for US Citizenship

There was, predictably, a huge turnout of applicants at our hotel. Think of opening night for a first-run movie in a big theater. Each applicant had a bundle of paperwork in their hands and the whole group was excited about their prospects. Pete and I each had a table and we divided the applicants into two groups for initial interviews. Each applicant would walk up, hand us a resume, sit down and tell us about their experience and why they wanted the job.

Given the above advertising, the variety of applicants we interviewed on this trip was fascinating. Some examples:

- I interviewed a German mining engineer in a grey wool suit fitted with traditional silver buttons and green piping. He wanted an assignment in Germany as a diplomat.
- Pete and I both interviewed several young women who were immigrants from China. They all had degrees in engineering from the same small college in Texas, which

appeared to be a diploma mill: none of them understood anything about electrical engineering or spoke much English. Most of these comely young ladies wore close-fitting fuzzy sweaters to their interviews.

- We spoke to structural engineers, civil engineers, automotive engineers, a chemical engineer and an environmental engineer. Almost all of these personnel were foreigners who wanted to work in their countries of origin as American diplomats. Many were upset that the ads had not mentioned the need for US citizenship or a security clearance.
- A couple of resumes submitted by engineers from India proudly indicated that the applicants had applied for admission to Cambridge University in England, but had failed to get in.

Pete and I were both joggers at that point in time. The motel where we were staying had extensive grounds with a running circuit that ran along the edges of the parking lot, marked here and there with small billboards that showed exercises to engage in at that stop. We got into these activities and managed a run with exercises every morning.

After two days of interviews, the few candidates who claimed to be US citizens and who claimed to have degrees in electrical engineering, electronics engineering or computer science were invited to return for BEX exams. Each applicant would begin the exam by telling the panel a little about their background and education. Subsequently, the subject matter expert would ask each applicant to solve a few real-world engineering problems. The BEX Examiner would then ask several important citizenship questions that all Americans overseas (and especially Foreign Service Officers) should be able to answer from memory. The Applicant's familiarity with the world outside the United States was also of interest to the Examiner.

Most applicants failed to pass these modest exams. In almost every case, the knowledge claimed by the applicant was not substantiated by their responses to our questions. After some really weak answers to rather simple engineering problems, I asked one engineer what transistors were made of: he did not know. Since we were in Silicon Valley at the time, I was surprised.

One applicant identified himself as "something of an expert on geography." The BEX examiner was visibly impressed. He gently asked the applicant to identify the seven countries that bordered Yugoslavia. The candidate was fairly sure that one of them might be Greece.

Of the more than forty applicants we interviewed, only one made it through the initial interview, BEX exam, education vetting, background investigation and medical exam. He left the Department after two years on the job.

269. THE DOW-HERRMANN MUSEUM

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

During her summers as a student at Indiana University, my mother earned money by working as a Girl Scout Camp Counselor in Kenosha, Wisconsin. She did well in college, graduating in the Class of 1941 and she served as her Class alumni secretary for over 50 years. While at Scout Camp, she became a storyteller. I believe she might have been influenced in her youth by the story of Scheherazade and the Arabian Nights.

In the early 1950's after our tour in Lahore, we were living in Silver Spring, Maryland. I was seven at the time; so was my friend and neighbor Gordy Dow. My brother Bill, aged four at that time, also figures into this picture.

Before we hit the sack at night, with Gordy being a frequent overnight guest, our mother either read to us or told us a story. From time to time, other children in our apartment complex would also participate in sleepovers.

The stories were legendary, with a common framework. Grammy imagined us all as curators building a museum from scratch. The "Dow-Herrmann Museum" grew from a humble warehouse to a Smithsonian-sized entity, back when the Smithsonian was just a castle with an outbuilding on one side of the Mall and the Museum of Natural History on the other side. (Some of you may remember climbing on the fiberglass Triceratops that used to stand on the Mall outside that museum.)

Things we saw during the day (especially from visits to the Smithsonian) became themes for Grammy's stories. Each story might last thirty minutes and always included new guests as members of the museum's search team. New arrivals were swept into that evening's story, becoming active participants in the work of the museum. Each story was different. As we children became interested in new features of the world around us (butterflies, dinosaurs, plants, rocks) those interests became entwined in the stories and were fodder for new adventures.

We had several carpets in the house from Pakistan. One of these became a Magic Carpet, a vehicle to take us different places in the world and bring things back for the museum. We learned to "steer" the carpet by lifting its corners like the tiller on a sailboat. We pointed up to rise and down to descend. If a child needed water or a potty break, we would land, park the carpet and wait until the child returned, resuming the story.

Generally, unless there were additional children to entertain, we sat in a line on the carpet, with the kid in front steering, the one in back braking occasionally and the child in the center reaching over the side to pick up museum treasures or help other children we

encountered in precarious situations. The kids we “rescued” might be struggling in the water, stuck on high mountain ledges or waving at us from the railings of ships that were about to sink.

We had many adventures. We visited famous buildings, soared above mountain ranges and encountered foreign cultures. Think “Aladdin starts collecting for the Smithsonian” and you have the picture.

Dow-Herrmann Museum stories continued until my brother and I reached our teens, after which they continued for our three sisters. Each of my siblings appeared in the stories, had a constructive part in the episodes when they sat on the carpet and learned a lot about the world around them as their imaginations flew to different areas of the globe.

270. A TRIP TO THE GREAT WALL

If you travel to Northern China, you *have* to see the Wall. The Great Wall of China was begun in 221 BC and was added to from time to time by successive Chinese Dynasties in an effort to protect the Empire of China from invaders to the North. The initial wall of packed earth was gradually replaced with stone over the ensuing centuries, with much of the stone work accomplished during the Ming Dynasty in the 1500's. The Wall is 5,500 miles in length, about thirty feet high and twenty feet wide. That is about long enough to reach across the United States, turn around and come halfway back. The closest viewing point from Beijing is a place named Badaling, which is some distance outside the capital. On one of my visits to China, Field and Jenny Cooper were courteous enough to take me there.

In Badaling, you park your car in a large lot at the foot of one of the observation towers. You enter the base of the tower and climb up on stone steps until you reach a platform at the top and step out onto the wall. From there, as far as you can see, the wall extends to the North, zigzagging from watchtower to watchtower. The top of the wall was about twenty feet across at the top of the tower we climbed.

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+great+wall+of+china+badaling&rlz=1C1GGRV_enUS749US754&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiJycOjpZPoAhV4mHIEHd0eDfsQ_AUoAnoECA8QBA#imgrc=shW3p0RD1_6XDM

I would mention here that it's not just a wall we're talking about. It's a wall sitting on top of a chain of mountains. The entire wall ran along the ridges of mountains as far as my vision could see. An assault on this fortification would not be easy: to attack the wall, you would first have to climb a steep mountain, carrying all of your arms and scaling equipment with you. At the top, if someone on the wall pushed your scaling ladder backwards, you might easily fall several hundred feet.

I somehow thought the top of the Great Wall of China would be a smooth surface, suitable for a couple of horses to ride on as they traversed the distance from watch tower to watch tower. I was gravely mistaken. At least in the area where we were, the top of the wall consisted of little flat places connected by a series of steps that could be gradual in one area, steep in other areas and almost a vertical climb in a few places. Where there were no steps, the flooring at the top of the wall was of large flagstone rectangles. The attack side of the Wall was crenelated to protect archers, and featured knee-height holes between the crenellations, possibly for the use of spears or pusher poles with Y-ends to repel ladders. Many of the connected towers seemed to hold guard houses, as evidenced by narrow windows in those towers and arrow slits near their roofs. I had thought that the guard supervisor might check on the towers in a given area by visits on horseback: if this happened at all, the guard supervisor rode on the ground on the protected side from tower to tower at the base of the wall, and not along the top.

We were allowed to walk on top of the wall from the first guard tower to two connecting towers, and it was a hike. It took us about forty minutes to reach the first tower, at which point we decided not to go on to the second one. We enjoyed the view for a while and then turned back. As far as my eyes would take me, the wall stretched from guard house to guard house, erected along the tops of mountains to take advantage of the terrain. Several movies I have seen depicted the guard towers as sites for signal beacons, to rapidly announce the presence of invaders somewhere along the wall to forces at the capital: I think the towers were probably used in this manner.

When we came back to the parking area for buses, I heard some music in the air. Looking around, I saw a Chinese soldier sitting on the roof of one of the older buildings at Badaling, playing a simple flute. The melody was entirely Chinese, and pretty; the soldier seemed to be playing for himself rather than for an audience, as he stopped from time to time and went over musical passages he appeared to be practicing. It was possible, with the music, to envision an ancient Chinese community at the base of the wall, welcoming soldiers who were released from duty to evening meals and family gatherings.

271. BUYING A BRASS TRAY IN BEIRUT

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

Shortly before my graduation from high school in Beirut in 1963, my father decided to purchase the first of several Arab brass trays he eventually owned. On a Saturday morning, I went with him to a store which was then located on Rue Bliss, just past the entrance to the American University of Beirut where the hill dips downhill toward the port.

In the early 1960's, Lebanon was a country of merchants, especially small shopkeepers with specific types of items to sell. Not all these entrepreneurs were Arab, however. As we walked into the tray store and encountered the proprietor, he seemed to be of Indian descent. Our tour in Bombay had helped me to recognize Indian faces.

My father was looking for a "mansaf" tray. This was a vessel used throughout the Middle East (especially in Jordan) to serve a communal dish of rice topped with lamb. The traditional trays were often made in Damascus, and were fabricated of brass with raised, crenellated rims. The designs followed Muslim standards: usually, they featured an incised central figure of Arabic calligraphy, ornately formed into sections by extended lines of the Arabic letters. This design was surrounded by a circle of smaller calligraphy with similar complexity. To keep these large trays polished after a meal, the trays were usually washed, then polished with lemon halves rubbed over their surface; the citric acid did well at removing small stains and left the brass well-polished.

On entering the store, we saw many trays of different sizes mounted on the walls. Most of the trays had a hinged triangle of brass wire soldered to the back to facilitate such mounting. In the store were also smaller items for sale, including sets of carving knives and forks with teakwood handles which were housed in teak holders. I recognized these items from India.

The proprietor came over to us, welcoming us in English. He was friendly, and his accent again suggested an Indian origin. My father spoke to him in English and explained what we were looking for. The owner smiled and took us over to a large tray on the wall, perhaps four feet in diameter.

The men began to discuss the tray. My father, who had completed the Foreign Service Institute's Arabic language program at our Embassy in Beirut, traced some of the central characters on the tray, recognizing that the design contained the names of Allah. He followed one character through a block outlined by the pattern and said "magnificent" in Arabic.

The proprietor was impressed. "You speak Arabic! And read it, too!" The two men switched into Arabic and began to identify other names as they worked over the tray. Both seemed to enjoy the exercise.

When they reached “eloquent”, my father (a missionary’s son who grew up in India) pronounced the word first in Urdu, then corrected himself and said it in Arabic. The proprietor was astonished. “You speak Urdu, too!” “I speak Urdu!” and the two men switched languages again, slowly at first (since both were out of practice with Urdu) but picking up steam quickly. My father asked the man how he came to be a storeowner in Lebanon.

The proprietor was from Lucknow, a city in northern India. He was a Muslim who had been impacted by the separation of Hindus and Muslims in India when the country was partitioned in 1948. He left Lucknow, went to Lahore and, finding it crowded, relocated to Lebanon.

My father grew up in Aligarh, in the same province in India where Lucknow is situated. He went to high school in Mussoorie, a missionary-founded school high in the Himalayan foothills. We had previously experienced a two-year tour in Lahore, where Urdu was spoken. The two men eased back into the language of their youth, recounting their backgrounds and adventures in life. At this point, the proprietor was doing most of the talking.

The conversation switched to English again. There was a little bargaining over the price, but not much when my father indicated that he would gradually like to acquire some other trays. The proprietor gave us a really good price on the big tray and looked forward to seeing us again.

I had a hand in all this: I carried the tray to the car.

272. SNOW DAYS

One of the little joys of a Foreign Service assignment is the addition of local holidays to the office calendar. Not only did we celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas and the Fourth of July, we observed Boxing Day and Bastille Day and Holi and Watangi Day, depending on where we were assigned. It was always enjoyable to return from a trip to a constituent post and discover that the next day was a local holiday; missed time with your family could be addressed and you could often observe local celebrations that were unusual and fun.

Teaching high school, my follow-on job to SEO assignments, was a different experience. The job involved daily preparation and grading, a tight academic schedule to follow and a need to adapt lessons to the experience and vocabulary levels of your students. There was the added complication of teaching more than one subject at a time. This situation gave you two or three classes to prepare for each day, again with the grading. In science teaching, this sometimes meant multiple labs, equipment-sharing with fellow teachers covering the same assignments, and periodic reviews to assess how the labs might be better presented.

Preparing to teach Earth Science required me to gain additional knowledge. I had plenty of geology, geography and chemistry and a modest physics background. However, I needed to learn about astronomy, oceanography and meteorology to teach this subject area. I took an Astronomy course at the University of Maryland and an Oceanography course at American University. Both were great classes. It was, however, hard to find a school teaching Meteorology in the Washington Area. Other Earth Science teachers encountered the same problem.

I started teaching at the old Blair High School in Silver Spring. We moved to a brand-new building the next year: the largest school in Montgomery County. There was an enormous amount of classroom space, great lighting, new furniture and a strong interest in educating teachers. Once we settled in, Earth Science teachers were offered a free graduate course in Meteorology.

Recognizing that teachers needed to know more about the world's weather, the Datastreme program was developed for teachers by the American Weather Service. The program offered us three credits: it was composed of three class sessions and featured three on-line evening assignments each week. We learned about isobars, isotherms, the right-hand rule, cloud formations, occluded fronts and jet streams. We had homework of our own to do along with grading the work we assigned our students, but it was a challenging and interesting class. Supporting the program, I used my DS installation experience to help set up a weather station on the high school roof (I can still see it on Google Earth.)

The Datastreme course gave us insight on the weather and challenged us to make accurate forecasts. Around the end of November, we started to use our training as forecasters to predict what the weather was going to be like.

During snowstorms, schools in the US generally close by county. In the Washington DC area, WMAL was the radio station teachers listened to regarding weather and the state of the school system. Teachers are always up early: it was delightful to predict a snowstorm, sit down with WMAL and a cup of coffee, and hear the radio say: “Montgomery Co. Public Schools are closed”.

In teaching, snow days were our closest equivalent to a public holiday in Abidjan or Seoul. You had prepared for all your classes for the day and all your grading was done. Yet you had a day off, with pay, and you were already prepared for classes when you returned to school. You had a day (sometimes *two* days) to spend at home with your family, doing whatever you wanted to do, with the novelty of snow to add to the fun. Not only were you off, you had *predicted* you would be off, and that added to the enjoyment.

[DataStreme Atmosphere Junction \(ucar.edu\)](http://ucar.edu/DataStreme/Atmosphere/Junction)

Visit this URL; click on NWS Homepage, then select “radar” and zoom in.

273. BOATING ON THE PANAMA CANAL

During our tour in Abidjan, I acquired two of Mark Stevens' French friends, and was able to experience an interesting lifestyle based on boats and small islands. Abidjan was surrounded by inter-connected lagoons, and one of the French families owned a house right on the water with access to a lagoon through a gate in a chain-link fence. Jacques' boat sat on a trailer above an angled concrete launch slip that descended to the water. The gate was opened and closed by an electric motor with two stop/start stations. The family could load their boat, open the gate, launch the boat electrically and close the gate on the way out. Once in the water, the two families would head for a small uninhabited island for cookouts, with their kids water-skiing on the way out and on the return trip.

When we arrived in Panama, we learned that the Panama Canal is essentially a lake with three locks at either end. Ships go up the locks from the Pacific, transit the lake and go down the locks on the Atlantic side, and vice versa. During the days of the Panama Canal Zone, the lake was within the Zone and was equipped with several marinas. The lake was stocked with Peacock Bass, and both fishing and boating were popular activities. After the Panama Canal was ceded to the people of Panama by treaty, those marinas began to decline, but were still in use during our tour.

The U.S. military was very much in evidence when we arrived in Panama, and their Special Services facilities offered little aluminum boats with motors that service personnel (and Embassy personnel) could rent. After our experience in Panama, however, I decided to look for a boat of my own so that my children could experience boating and fishing in greater comfort. In doing so, I ignored the standard warning: "A boat is a hole in the water into which you throw money."

After watching bulletin boards for about six months between trips, I was able to buy a used boat from a departing Warrant Officer in the Defense Attaché Office. This was a 17-foot fiberglass split-windshield runabout with two seating areas and an old but powerful Chrysler outboard motor. It came with a trailer, and I found that I could store both the boat and the trailer at one of the marinas for a reasonable price. The marina was filled with weeds, but the owner had a tractor and would move the boat in and out of the water whenever we came up.

When boating on the Canal, it was important to stay out of the commercial shipping lanes. Each of the ocean-going ships generated substantial wakes that made the process of passing them a choppy experience. On our first trip out, with all of us wearing life jackets from the PX, I opened up the boat and crossed several of those wakes, to the delight of my kids and the serious discomfort of my wife. She declined to accompany us on future trips, letting the boat outings become something that I did with the children.

Gatun Lake, the central part of the Canal, was created by the construction of a dam across the Gatun River. As the lake filled up, the tops of mountains surrounded by water became islands in the surrounding jungle. Some of those islands featured picnic areas and little piers, others were too weed-choked to approach with the boat. On your return from these jungle areas, however, you often encountered a freighter, a luxury liner or a warship traveling through the canal, giving the kids a chance to wave at passing ships.

On our first outing without my wife, we went out for a fishing trip. Gail made us “fisherman sandwiches” similar to Egg McMuffins with bacon, and we loaded the car with fishing tackle and coolers. On the way out, before dawn, we stopped and bought live bait in the dark from a Panamanian who sold the fish from a tank on the back of a pickup truck. We launched our boat and headed out into the Canal with everything running smoothly. I rounded a corner, approached an island, ran into a heavily-weeded area and lost our propeller.

This was a serious problem. In those days before cellular phones, we had no radio or other means of calling for help. The summer sun was fierce, and I had two small children with no available shade on the boat. Using an oar, I pulled us to the island, which had a little shaded eating area on it, and we sat down with our food and water to wait for a rescue.

After about two hours, a Panamanian man came by in a small boat and noticed our dilemma (I had rocked the outboard out of the water and our missing propeller was evident.) He asked us to wait and motored off. About an hour later, he came back with another propeller and a cotter pin to hold it on. I installed the new propeller and our rescue man asked me to follow him. We came upon another boat with a Chrysler motor: it was the same motor, but their engine was no longer working. We tied the two boats together with a line and I towed them back to the marina. This took most of the day. My wife had expected our return hours before and was really upset, thinking that we had capsized. She tolerated other boating trips but was always ill at ease when we went out.

When the Canal Zone went away, the Chrysler dealership in Panama folded. An old Chrysler mechanic, Pedro, went into business for himself as a repairman. Pedro would arrive at your boat with a roll pouch of tools, tune the motor right there in the marina and charge you a very reasonable price. There was a catch, however. In addition to his small fee, Pedro liked to eat shark, and he wanted you to take him to a particular restaurant in the old Canal Zone that served this dish, of which Pedro consumed quite a bit on my tab.

On one occasion, we hosted a Congressional Staff Delegation in Panama. Instead of taking our guests out barhopping, I picked them up at five in the morning and took them out fishing in the boat, with the obligatory stop to buy bait on our way to the marina. No one caught anything, but we did pass the “Queen Elizabeth II” on the way back to land.

On my final trip, a group of us went abalone diving in the Pacific Ocean. We went out in two boats, mine and a large Zodiac. Both boats were heavily loaded with diving gear and ice chests to hold our catch. After diving, the motor of the Zodiac failed, and I had to tow it back to

Panama City, a long and tiring experience. I was again late (arriving home after dark) and my wife again feared the worst.

I accepted a Washington assignment one year earlier than my expected rotation date and had to sell the boat on short notice. No buyers appeared. I left a Power of Attorney with Don Schurman and headed North. After three more months passed, Don was finally able to sell the boat and its motor for half their value.

274. COROMANDEL SCREENS

Since our tour in Korea, our living room has been decorated by a Coromandel screen. Produced in China, this is a folding wooden screen with four panels connected by long hinges. The front and rear of each panel has been decorated, with the principal scene on the outside and a more modest set of decorations on the inside. The major scene was carved into the wood of the screen and extends from panel to panel to form a complete picture with several levels of relief. Once the panels were carved, many (typically twelve) layers of black lacquer were used to color the frame and much of the major picture, with brightly-colored lacquers used to complete the scene.

Coromandel screens first came out of China in the late 1700's and early 1800's: they were shipped to Europe by the Dutch East India Company. That firm had a number of warehouses in the Far East, principally in what is now Indonesia but also on the Southeast "Coromandel Coast" of India. From that area, many of these screens were packaged for shipment to France, England and the rest of Europe. Some of these screens featured inlaid mother-of-pearl scenes, a form of furniture decoration that is still popular in Korea. (Our screen is simpler.)

On their arrival in Europe, many of the Coromandel screens were cut up and used as decorative panels on the doors and drawers of European furniture. Some of this furniture was very elaborate and today brings high prices on the antique market.

Our screen shows a popular Chinese theme: "100 Children Playing". This pattern is seen on the drapes providing privacy for the Imperial bed in the Forbidden City within Beijing. On those curtains, and on our panel, all of the children are boys.

When we were in Korea, my wife found an embroidered panel with the same theme, except that all the children shown are girls. We have that panel framed behind glass somewhere downstairs.

https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coromandel_lacquer

275. UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

I was an avid snorkeler in high school, but I did not learn to use SCUBA equipment until I was sent to Ethiopia in the Army. The post there had a large pool that was often vacant, and I took the NAUI certification course during my first year at post. Our military facility had a number of Scott Air Packs for use during fires, and there was a large Joy compressor in the back of the building which produced very pure filtered air, suitable for diving. The facility Operations Officer saw us filling tanks there one Friday afternoon and called us over. He smiled at us. He said he had no problem with our using the compressor for diving air, *so long as we were willing to fill the tanks of anyone else who wanted to go diving as we filled ours*. In time, a small line of 72 cubic foot SCUBA tanks would appear alongside the Operations building on Friday afternoons; we used a 50-gallon oil drum cut in half as a cooling bath when we charged them with air.

My instructor had purchased a Rolleimarin underwater camera; we took it diving in the Red Sea. Back in the film camera era, this was like diving with the Rolls Royce of underwater photography equipment. Inside the crackled green cast aluminum housing was a twin-lens Rolleiflex camera with Zeiss Tessar lenses. Its large viewing screen was visible through a window at the top back of the housing, great for composing pictures under water. There were levers to smoothly operate all of the camera controls. My instructor took great care to grease all the O-rings protecting his camera before a dive; we found that the large housing handled easily underwater. On our first outing, he took a picture of a large Manta ray from beneath the fish, silhouetted against the sunlight like a dark shadow.

My budget did not extend to such a fine camera system, but I did purchase a Nikonos II near the end of my tour in Vietnam. It was much simpler than the Rolleiflex, but it did not need a housing and was easy to use. The flash attachment, however, used flashbulbs. The trick to having these handy when you needed them was to cut little slits in a long strap of neoprene and insert the bulb bases in the strip like pearlescent buttons. I did not dive with the Nikonos as often as I wanted, but I did take it on a trip to Palau where John Fitzsimmons and I did some snorkeling over giant clams.

Time passed. Digital cameras arrived. For usage on land, I purchased a few early cameras and eventually settled on a Nikon Coolpix that I liked. It had a viewfinder and many automatic features including Autofocus, which I was starting to need. I used various models of the little Nikon for about ten years until the loom lens froze on the last Coolpix with a viewfinder. I switched over to a little Sony RX-100 series camera with an electronic viewfinder and am delighted with the beautiful pictures I am suddenly able to compose and take.

Back to underwater photography. They use film, to be sure, but older Nikonos cameras are almost indestructible. They are still around at much, much lower prices than they originally cost. Exploring Ebay last month, I found another Nikonos II with a 35 mm lens for \$35 from

Japan (shipping costs extra) and it arrived in excellent condition. I then found a Nikonos V for a little over \$150 from Florida. Finally, I purchased a rare Nikonos 15 mm f/2.8 lens and matching viewfinder for \$230, again from Japan. (That lens and viewfinder cost nearly \$3000 when they were new.) I will use it with the cameras I have, but adapters are available that allow new mirrorless digital cameras (in housings) to use that fabulous lens.

I have two grandsons, and they are growing up. I taught them to snorkel on a recent trip to Michigan. Two years from now, I hope to give each of them a Nikonos II, teach them to care for the cameras, and instill the fun of underwater photography in each of them. With a lot of luck, I will live long enough to go diving with them.

276. PTSD

A final war story:

A wonderful movie was created a number of years ago that dealt with PTSD among servicemen. Titled “Ryan’s Daughter”, it involves a British Officer who earned a Victoria Cross while fighting in the trenches of WWI. This officer, who suffered greatly from PTSD, was assigned to a small British company in Northern Ireland, where he fell in love with a bartender’s daughter. Watching the movie, filled with beautiful cinematography, can teach you a lot about PTSD triggers.

I believe that most military personnel who have served in the active part of a war zone return from their experience with a little PTSD. Few of us are aware that we have it until some event occurs that puts us back in combat mode. The events are sometimes humorous (dropping flat on the street when a car backfires near you, for example). At other times, common events can cause us to be very apprehensive. I have previously written of one experience (Story Number 253, Déjà Vu) but have another one to share.

After working for a year in Vitro Laboratories’ main building in Silver Spring, our section relocated to brand-new offices in an industrial complex off Route 270, which was then being developed as the “Industrial Corridor” of Montgomery County. Our new facility was a two-storey brick and steel structure that initially featured open work areas with stand-alone desks sitting out on the floor. Throughout the building, all the floors were covered with a brand-new looped nylon industrial carpet in burnt orange.

After three months in this facility, Vitro management decided that we would probably be more productive if our stand-alone desks were replaced with cubicles. At that time, technology had not reached the point where every employee had a computer terminal at their desk, but each of us needed a workspace with a little privacy and shelving on which to put reference material.

The installation of prefabricated cubicles progressed while we were at work. The installation crew would bring up a wheeled dolly on the service elevator with the components of a cubicle, measure out where it was to be installed according to a set of plans, and begin to place the footings on the floor to hold up the cubicle walls. Their instructions were to drill through the carpet into the concrete, slip in anchors to those holes and bolt the footings to the floor.

Almost immediately, the nylon loops of the carpet fouled the drill bits of the installers. You would be reading and suddenly the sound of a hammer drill would erupt behind you, followed by the sound of a drill binding up (and usually a curse) as the drill bit became twisted in the new carpet and snapped in the hole. After two days of this, the crew was taken off the job and the installer did some rethinking.

Several days after the drilling stopped, the installers were back. This time, they used a Ramset powdered charge tool to set threaded studs directly through the carpet into the concrete. With so many anchors to install, the formalities of warning people about what was about to occur

were set aside. Instead, I would be sitting at my desk: without any notice, a “firearm” would be discharged right behind me. Each time this happened, my head would pull down toward my shoulders and my elbows would come in against my body in an entirely reflex action. My eyes would squint tight and my pulse rate would skyrocket.

The cubicles each sat three people: there were two anchors for each of the six footings that secured the walls and desks. I began to count the firings after the first cubicle went in, to reduce my tendency to flinch by knowing what was coming.

I was not alone in this apprehension: many employees complained. After two days of simulated fire fights, the crew was rescheduled to come in after hours and finish their installation. The office became much more relaxed, and we got back to work.

277. THE THIRD ARCHITECT

As I neared the end of my first tour in Abidjan, I looked long and hard at the list of available vacancies before making my bids. With two pre-school age children, I looked primarily for small posts in Europe within the Soviet Bloc, hoping to get some exposure to an increased technical threat level and to have the option to visit other parts of Europe during the tour. I initially asked for Sofia, Bulgaria and was told I might have it, only to lose that assignment to George Beckett. I was then selected for Moscow, but as that assignment approached Mac Musser (who already spoke Russian) offered to fill the vacancy immediately. I faithfully read the area handbooks for both Bulgaria and Russia, but we were pulled back to the Department where I became the Operations Officer. Wally Gilliam was in charge of SY/T at that time.

Shortly after my return to the U.S. in 1981, there were a series of attacks on American personnel in Europe. The DCM in Paris was shot at; the Commanding Officer of U.S. Forces in Europe was shot at with an RPG; someone threw an incendiary device at our Consulate in Bordeaux. Senior officers at European Embassies, who had noticed that security money was basically going to South America, Africa and Asia, began to call each other and exchange telegrams. Shortly thereafter, a round-robin telegram from several influential Ambassadors reached the Department and the U.S. Congress almost simultaneously, expressing their collective concern that our Government was ignoring its posts in Europe, which were evidently under attack.

Congress leaped at the offer to craft and pass a Congressional Supplemental Budget authorizing millions of dollars in security improvements for small posts in Europe. The problem was that the money they made available had to be committed if not spent during a single fiscal year. SY/T needed to send people out to do surveys immediately or the State Department would lose the money.

Field Cooper, who was assigned to London, was chosen to visit small posts in Great Britain and Ireland. Someone else who had recently served in Frankfurt was sent to Consulates in Germany and Northern Europe. This left all of France to do, and Wally wanted to send someone who spoke French. Just back from French-speaking Abidjan, I coughed and gently raised my hand as a volunteer. Alors! Whoosh! I was on a plane to Paris within a week.

Mark Mulvey, who was then the RSO in Paris, was our host for the survey visit and our point of contact with the Embassy in Paris and our Consulates in Lyons, Marseille and Bordeaux. I seem to remember that we came in on a Thursday, met with Mark on Friday, briefed Post personnel the following Monday and left for Lyons on a Tuesday morning. We were to study the security systems at three American Consulates in France and recommend improvements. Our team was relatively small: there was an RSO, a Physical Security specialist, a Turkish architect hired by the Foreign Buildings Office and me. Mark Mulvey elected to join us on the survey

trip. During the weekends, when we were on our own, I became the translator for the Washington-based personnel, with my principal job being to interpret menus at mealtimes.

It was November, and the weather was either very pleasant or rainy and a bit chilly. I was impressed by the waterproof down coat that the Turkish architect had brought with him. It was lightweight, warm, impermeable, and folded up into a little package the size of a hand towel. I have never seen another one like it, but it was perfect for our trip.

In Lyons, we briefed the Consul and his staff on our intentions. Mark had found us scale drawings for each of the buildings we were sent to survey, and the architect began to familiarize himself with those plans. The RSO, Physical Security representative and I went separate ways, with me working on improvements to television systems, door controls and public address systems and the Physical Security rep working on ballistic barriers and locks. Each of us drew up our requirements and went back to the architect, who quickly integrated our ideas into a beautiful set of new plans for the Post. Since money for these improvements had already been appropriated, and since the new designs uncluttered the existing security office and increased security for Lyons, getting the Post to approve our recommendations was easy. We prepared a Bill of Materials to complement the new plans and roughly costed our recommendations. On Thursday morning, we briefed the Consul and staff, informing them of our intent to document all the areas in which we planned improvements photographically to help answer any questions that might arise in Washington.

The Consul explained to us that we were to attend a luncheon as guests of the Post at noon that Thursday. It was important that we all go. It was the third Thursday in November, the very day that the new *Beaujolais nouveau* hit the streets of France, and he expected us to enjoy the occasion and drink a lot, because America was becoming a major market for the new wine. We accordingly met for lunch, dined and wined together and then wobbled back to complete our photo essay.

On Friday we returned to Paris, where we put our first survey together, gave the architect a chance to formalize several of his drawings, and took a quick peek at Marseille.

Two days later, we were off to Marseille for a week. The Consulate General in that city was housed in an old Ducal palace. The CG was a rich businessman and political appointee who was using his own funds to restore the beautiful inlaid parquet floors in the building. There were some severe functional security problems: the main entry to the Consulate was through a dirty doorway and crowded passageway at the back of the building where space was so tight that the metal detector, screening table and local guard barely fit. It made a strong statement of inefficiency and poor security to any visitor.

Our Turkish architect, a student of history, realized that the proper entrance to the Consulate was originally intended to be on the *other* side of the building. This was blocked off during our visit by an ivy-covered steel gate, but it featured an oval driveway for carriages with an elaborate portico. The gate had been closed off and converted to a garden, which was not used. After thinking about the problems involved, he proposed to move the security team to the actual front of the building, create a proper screening area in a gatehouse just inside the gate, reopen the gate and restore the entrance portico using security money. More space would be created within the building, the back door would become a needed Fire Exit and an attractive walkway would connect the new guardhouse to the front of the building. All of this would be funded by the Supplemental: the CG was delighted.

As we worked on other aspects of the survey, we had to go out and eat during the evenings. It was memorable: French food, especially French seafood, in Marseille. We met the CG and his wife for dinner one night and had fun. They invited us to their residence another night. Mark Mulvey took us to a Sicilian restaurant on the port waterfront for Bouillabaisse one evening; we crawled back to our hotel full of wonderful food. In the mornings, two of us got up early and jogged through crisp Autumn air down to the harbor in sight of the old Louis Quatorze fortress on the other side of the water. We again drew up plans, equipment lists and recommendations, and packed up for the next stop.

After five days in Marseille, we were off to Bordeaux for a day. This was a small building and was easier to survey. Here again, the architect was able to greatly improve the entrance to the Consulate with a small amount of funding.

We returned the Paris to write up our surveys, spending two days there. Our team went back to Washington, except for me. I had to travel to Frankfurt to brief Casper Pelczynski on what we planned to do in France, since Frankfurt was responsible for technical security at the posts we had just visited.

278. THE WATCH COLLECTION

I like watches. I trace this affinity back to my time in India, where some of my Indian classmates came from very wealthy families and sported Omega Constellations at the age of thirteen. I was given an Omega Seamaster as a graduation present from high school and was on my way to a collection of my own. Over the years I have owned a number of interesting timepieces, such as the digital Seiko World Traveler which showed every time zone in the world and would jump from one zone to another at the touch of a button.

I got into diver's watches in the Army, where I learned to scuba dive in Ethiopia. Since then I have kept an eye on the world of watches, looking for interesting products but not buying many of them. (Consider the Tissot Sea-Touch, as an aside for other watch enthusiasts.)

On a trip to Laos in 1994, I happened to look into a small jewelry shop with some watches in the window. In front of me was a stainless steel dive watch with a Russian paratrooper's insignia on the dial. Intrigued, I asked to see the watch and found that it was manually wound but seemed to work fine. I asked about the price and was told that it was the Laotian equivalent of twenty dollars. I bought the watch, although the leather wrist strap was falling apart.



The author's Russian watch

Until I retired and moved to Delaware, I had never met a Russian man of my own age. I find this surprising in light of all the jobs and activities I have been involved in since 1967 that were meant to counter what our country perceived Russians to be doing. Here in the Rehoboth Beach area, restaurants and shops are full of Russian students who work at summer jobs in order to learn to speak English, but they are not my age. To the best of my knowledge, I have never met a Russian soldier.

In our military, if you wanted a watch and did not have one, you could find an extensive selection at most Post Exchanges; an even wider selection was available through the AAFES Catalog. As I said, I lean toward diver's watches, but even that category of watch was amply represented in our military stores.

In Russia, soldiers earned less than we were paid, and there was less choice in communist stores than we enjoyed. There were, however, watches produced only for the Soviet military. These were available to Russian military personnel with ID cards and were produced at a factory in Chistfol in Tatarstan. The movements for these "Vostok" watches were either manual or automatic, and they came in 17-jewel and 31-jewel configurations. The faces of these watches were embellished with designs that indicated which branch of the military the soldier or sailor was serving in. There were watches for tankers, for jet pilots, for submarine sailors and for paratroopers (and perhaps more).

Morale in the United States Army was pretty low near the end of the Vietnam War. Those of us who served there understood quickly that our service was not much appreciated by a large segment of the U.S. population. When we watched the fall of Saigon and the catastrophic evacuation of the American Embassy on television, we wondered anew why we had been sent to Vietnam in the first place.

I can only imagine how Russian troops felt after the Soviet Union began to fall apart. Many of their personnel were left in pretty dire straits at overseas locations as the Soviet Republics obtained their independence, one or two at a time. In Mongolia, I encountered stacks of Russian medals and campaign ribbons sold to local vendors by soldiers in order to raise a little money for their trip home. I understood that the soldier who wore the watch I had purchased was probably hungry enough to sell his timepiece.

On our return to Bangkok, I began to notice other Russian watches for sale. The same two watches were everywhere (the 31-jewel watch has a movement with a date and is sometimes gold-plated). Each watch had one of perhaps five crests on its face, and many of them came from soldiers.

279. PETRA

(A Foreign Service Dependent Story)

In 1962, I was attending the American Community School (an international high school) in Beirut, Lebanon. I had a friend in school (Jimmy Hagood) who was a missionary's son, and he lived at the seminary run by his father. The seminary was up in the mountains to the East of Beirut, and Jimmy commuted to school every day on a Vespa motor scooter. He hid this vehicle behind a little restaurant to the side of the school: students were not allowed to drive to ACS.

I occasionally traveled up to the seminary with Jimmy. Raised with Arabs in the mountains, he spoke Arabic with native fluency. Jimmy was also a weight-lifter who had made his own weight set out of steel pipes and large steel cans filled with concrete. I found the ride up the mountains on a scooter to be a great experience, with unusual vistas, opportunities to see a lot of the rural life of Lebanon and opportunities to chat with his father, who was a well-educated man.

That year, in my Junior year of high school, Jimmy's father invited me to accompany him and Jimmy on a trip to Petra during a school break. This was an ancient city in the South of Jordan at some distance from Beirut. We were to drive down there as a group; on the way back, Mr. Hagood would drop us off in Amman and we would catch a Service (a hired car shared by several riders, pronounced "Sur-veece") from Amman through Damascus and back to Beirut.

Missionaries raise money by taking pictures of the area where they work and showing those pictures to congregations back in the States, asking for donations. Mr. Hagood wanted pictures of Petra for his next trip to Texas.

Petra is an abandoned Nabatean city in South Jordan that was carved out of red sandstone. Several of the civic buildings are actually just carved facades in the rock, with chambers carved into the mountains behind the facades. Most of those facades look Greco-Roman on the outside, with roughly cubic interiors.

Outside dwellings, where most of the citizens lived, were shaped by water and wind. Little family-sized caves were everywhere. The red sandstone was banded with lines of yellow, shades of red and purple seams. Where streets turned corners, the rock had been smoothed by the action of both wind and water. The effect was very colorful and memorable.

The entryway to Petra was through "Wadi Musa", the Valley of Moses. This was an angular chasm caused by an earthquake which split the red sandstone to form a narrow, winding passageway. Little defensive niches for archers had been carved above our heads all the way along this gravel-bottomed passageway. The long corridor was rather dark, with little bits of light bouncing down to us off the walls of the chasm.

Wadi Musa was almost too narrow for a jeep to drive through it. Instead, tourists rented horses for the trip in and back out. When our turn came to pick mounts, there were not enough horses to go around and I was mounted on a donkey. I had never ridden one before and I think the donkey knew it. He would not move an inch once I got on. Jimmy and his father set off on horseback and I sat there on my little grey steed looking silly.

After about two minutes of embarrassment, the son of the horse-renter walked up to me and smiled. He grabbed the donkey's tail and twisted it roughly, causing the donkey to break into a run. The boy stayed with me all the way through the narrow cleft, twisting that tail whenever my mount decided to take a break.

At the end of Wadi Musa, the entry way opened to a red cliff face on which was carved a three-storey columned façade. This was "The Treasury". There was an urn above the small doorway to this building that Arabs thought might contain treasure. It bore pockmarks from people shooting at it and there were a series of holes on the right side from the ground up to the urn where people had climbed up to try and get the imagined treasure. This building was featured in "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" if you have not previously seen pictures of it.

https://www.nationalgeographic.com.es/medio/2013/10/18/zon-2301388_1333x2000.jpg

Mr. Hagood, who had disappeared during my ride in, popped up on one of the archer's niches, sitting cross-legged, taking pictures with a 35mm camera.

From "The Treasury," we turned into the main area of the Nabatean city. Leaving our rides behind, we engaged in a long hike up the side of a mountain to "The Library", another massive façade with a cave behind it.

We had "room reservations" for the night in one of the larger caves. Each "room" had three plywood sides and a door, but no ceiling. Each cubicle had two beds in it. Light bulbs were strung here and there in the cave to provide illumination. There were several other rooms in this cave, and a couple of them were occupied as we settled in for the night.

There were guests in the room next to us: our neighbors were smoking hashish. The odor of smoke drifted over into our cubicle. Jimmy pulled himself up on the wall between our "rooms" to peek over at this illegal activity. In the morning, we got up, ate breakfast and headed back to Amman.

As a diplomat's son, I was traveling on a Diplomatic Passport at that time. When we reached Amman, Jimmy went to several Service pick-up points enquiring about a ride back to Beirut. One driver talked to him for a while and asked to see our papers, since we would be crossing two international borders on the ride back. When the driver saw my passport, he smiled and went over to a stall that sold cigarettes. He bought about twenty cartons of different brands of tobacco and hid them in his car (most Services were diesel-engine Mercedes 190s). The driver then found two other Arabs who needed transportation back to Beirut. We drove to the

Syrian border, with Jimmy conversing freely with the other passengers and the driver; I looked at the scenery.

When we reached the border, the driver piled all of the passports in a stack with my passport on top. He walked up to the border checkpoint and showed them his license and the passports. The Diplomatic Passport got us a quick approval which the driver was counting on: he was smuggling those cigarettes across the border to avoid customs fees. We drove on, transited Damascus, had a similar experience at the Lebanese border and drove down into the Beqaa valley, with the ruins of Baalbek on our left. We chugged up the second mountain range, crested the peak and descended into Beirut, where they dropped me off. I caught a local Service from the car terminal back to my home.

280. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In 1987, I was on my second tour as the Operations Officer for SY/T. I was sitting at my desk one morning, reviewing SEO job applications. Among these, I spotted an Army captain with an Engineering Degree who had experienced some interesting assignments. He had done some research work in radar at Fort Belvoir and had combat experience in Vietnam.

Captain Grey, who was based at Fort Ord in California, included a letter in his application. He explained that he intended to resign from the Army and move to the Washington, D.C. area in search of a government job. He looked like a good prospect. I wanted to encourage the Captain to come in for an interview and a Board of Examiners (BEX) exam when he reached the East Coast. I went through the application, wrote down the number he provided and gave him a call.

The number on the application connected me to the headquarters switchboard at Fort Ord. I asked to speak to Captain Grey and was connected to his office. He was reportedly in his company area that day. The switchboard operator forwarded my call to his company.

Captain Grey was not in the company area, either. He was taking his company to the firing range for practice that day. The phone operator then connected me to the Post Armory.

At the Armory, I was informed that Captain Grey had *just* left the Armory for the actual firing range after drawing weapons and ammunition. I was going to hang up, but the Armory Officer offered to connect me to the firing range by field phone. He patched the call over to that instrument for me and rang the phone, which made a loud buzzing sound at the range.

I reached Captain Grey on the field phone, identified myself and expressed interest in his resume and job application. I explained the interview and BEX processes, gave him my telephone number and encouraged him to call us when he got into town. He expressed renewed interest in the job, and promised to call.

At the end of our conversation, he said: “Thanks for calling. But I have to ask: how in the hell did you find me out here?”

281. SHARD BOXES

Chinese people have been turning out porcelain for centuries: much of the output is decorative as well as functional. Tea pots, urns, small water vessels for calligraphy ink, drinking cups and even thimbles received careful attention at a time when most things in China were made by hand.

Inevitably, some of the vases and water vessels featuring beautiful artwork were dropped or fractured. We would probably toss the resulting pottery shards, but the Chinese found a practical way to reuse broken pot parts: shard boxes. An artist, working in either wood or metal, would eye a broken piece of porcelain and design a box that would embed the broken shard in the box lid. The shard might portray a galloping horse, a limb of wild peach blossoms, a poem in calligraphy or a Chinese dwelling. If a wood base was used, the top of the box (which was frequently arched to match the curved shape of the broken vessel) would be incised with a chisel and carefully gouged to allow the porcelain shard to fit perfectly into the provided setting. The lid would be sanded by hand to exactly match the height of the shard, and the decorated pottery slice would be glued in place. Inexpensive in Beijing in the 1980's and 1990's, these small boxes decorated a lot of Embassy coffee tables.

Other shard boxes were formed of bright metal, tooled for interest, with the box again made specifically for a broken but beautifully-decorated piece of pottery.



Two shard boxes belonging to the author.

282. CRIBBAGE

My father, a Naval Officer during WWII, liked to play cribbage. He taught me and my brother and sisters to play, and we played often. Usually two of us played at a time, but sometimes we played with partners and sometimes we squeezed three players on to a board, dealing five cards to each player, discarding one into the crib and filling the crib with an extra card from the dealer. When we traveled overseas, cribbage was the game that brought us together as a family.

When I traveled out of Abidjan, I discovered that our Seabee Electrician (Pete) also liked to play cribbage. I had a small silver-plated portable board that I received as a gift, and we would set it up on a bar or a table after work and play a few games when we were traveling. We were evenly matched and the games were enjoyable.

On a trip to Lagos, Nigeria in 1981, Pete and I were seated on a plane with a French citizen sitting between us. The flight made a number of stops, and to pass the time I challenged Pete to a game of cribbage after we left Ghana. We asked the Frenchman if we might put the board and the cards on his tray table, and he, interested, agreed. Pete and I played one game of cribbage, which the Frenchman followed with great interest. We then invited him to play three-handed cribbage, which requires a little pin-juggling to share the board smoothly.

I explained the game to him and we started to play. By the time we had completed our first lap of the board, he was getting the hang of it and started to score some points. When we finished the first game, he wanted to keep playing, so we did. He left the plane in Yaounde, Cameroon in good spirits and wished us well on our trip.

283. WORK ETHIC

In 1991, I was working at the American Embassy in Seoul, Korea. I had taken the East Asia Areas Studies course and eleven weeks of the Korean language before my tour, but I found Korean hard to learn and my travel schedule kept me away from Korea and opportunities to practice for weeks at a time. Still, I tried to use the language when I was in town, especially with FSNs in the Embassy.

The security office in Seoul was supported by three FSNs who were former Korean police officers. They were Mr. Song, the lead local investigator, and two other gentlemen whom I will call Mr. Park and Mr. Cho. Both of these men were older than Mr. Song and had come to the Embassy after retiring from their police careers. All of these officers had worked together for many years. My interactions were primarily with Mr. Song, but I would run into his two helpers several times a week and we liked each other.

One day, Mr. Park came up to my office. He entered, bowed politely as Koreans do, and invited me to his daughter's wedding the following week at Seoul's national cathedral. He said the wedding would occur on a Wednesday. I said I was honored and would be pleased to attend. I asked him what I might get for the bride and groom as a wedding present. Mr. Park insisted that I was a guest and asked me not to bring a gift, just to appear at the wedding. I asked about the cathedral's location and ways to get there. Mr. Park explained that his co-workers were going to drive there and would take me.

On the day of the wedding, (my first Korean wedding) I decided to wear a conservative, tailored suit. I was going through some correspondence about 10:30 when Mr. Song came up to get me. We went down to the parking lot, got into Mr. Song's car and set out into Seoul's heavy traffic, winding through busy streets and driving through tunnels filled with cars and trucks. After about a twenty-minute drive, we reached the cathedral and found a parking place.

When we entered the building, I discovered that Korean weddings are not quite the same as ours. Both the bride and groom, in their wedding outfits, were in the lobby before the ceremony to greet guests. So was Mr. Park, our host.

Mr. Park introduced me to his lovely daughter and her husband-to-be, and I wished them happiness and a bright future. Then I walked past them to find a church nearly filled with people, all of whom were waiting for the ceremonies to start. This was a Catholic wedding, and I was interested in observing the rituals followed in Korea.

I had no sooner settled into a pew when Mr. Cho, looking wildly about, found me and asked me to come with him. I was confused: weren't we there to observe the wedding and support Mr. Park and his family on an important day? I followed Mr. Cho back to the lobby, where Mr. Song was waiting. The three of us descended a stairway to the basement of the cathedral. There, covered with sheets, were three long lines of six-foot folding church tables,

groaning with a Korean feast. One of Mr. Park's relatives greeted us and slipped the sheet off one of the tables, inviting us to eat.

I had been to several Korean restaurants at that point in my life, but the quality and quantity of food set before us was overwhelming. In Korean, "Bon Appetite" is expressed as "Manni chop su say oh" which means "Please eat a lot". We did. Noodle dishes, different forms of pickled vegetables such as kimchee, roasted meats, sea food, sauces, seaweed salads, steamed rolls and many dessert items invited exploration by chopstick. Mr. Song and Mr. Cho took up large plates and began to fill them: I followed suit. When our plates were full, we headed to a dining room next to the tables that was beautifully decorated for a wedding feast. We sat down to eat.

Korean chopsticks are made of stainless steel and are thinner than the Chinese implements I was accustomed to: it took me longer to eat than my Korean colleagues. They did not look at their watches while I was eating, but they were clearly anxious to get back to work. When we finished eating, they guided me back up the stairs, out to the car and we drove straight back to the Embassy. Mr. Song parked the car and thanked me on Mr. Park's behalf for coming. Then they headed back to their desks.

Koreans have a strong work ethic.

284. FUNDRAISER

(a Foreign Service Dependent Story)

In 1957, we were assigned to the U.S. Consulate in Bombay, India. My mother was a member of the American Women's Club, an organization created between the Consulate and the American Business Community to raise funds for Indian charities.

The Women's Club put on a show every year to which tickets were sold and at which pledges to charities were obtained. This was the era of Ester Williams movies, most of which were filmed in swimming pools, and the Club decided to put on a Water Ballet at the city's Olympic Swimming Pool that year.

Embassy and American Business wives ordered several matching swimming costumes and bathing hats. Under the tutelage of a choreographer, they began to practice swimming routines that produced elegant patterns in the pool. All of these were set to music; I especially liked "Blue Tango" by LeRoy Anderson. The swimmers practiced three days a week for three weeks to get their routines down pat.

Consulate children and their friends from American business families were also pressed into service. Clown costumes were made for us and we also practiced antics off the pool's several diving boards.

Male employees of the Consulate and businesses worked on their part in secret. All we knew was that it involved a large swiveling spotlight. All of the above activities were to occur on a single evening in the summer.

On the appointed evening, guests were welcomed to the pool, seated in bleachers at either side of the pool along the long axes, and were addressed by our Master of Ceremonies, who introduced each act. The Wives filed out in costume, stood in a line at the edge of the pool, and dove into the water in sequence, like a gentle wave. In the water, they formed several patterns in time to the selected music, looking something like the patterns in a kaleidoscope. They linked arms, joined hands, pivoted around a center and otherwise formed geometric figures that looked interesting and elegant.

After each musical number, the ladies went in for a quick costume change. We had asked two skilled Indian springboard divers to help us entertain the crowd, and the divers were introduced by the clowns. The crowd watched each diver complete several somersaults, after which the next water ballet routine occurred.

Toward the end of the evening, the Emcee requested charitable contributions from the assembled crowd, bringing in a large number of pledges. The crowd was informed that a powerful American swimmer had joined the cast and would display his talent to the audience. Lights around the pool dimmed, and a spotlight swung up to the top of the five-meter platform,

where Superman stood in full costume, flexing his muscles. The crowd roared in appreciation. Superman dove neatly off the platform into the pool, cape flowing in the air, and went under water for a second or two. Then he emerged, swimming with astonishing speed down the pool while using only a single arm; the other arm held on to a submerged rope that was pulled swiftly by a hidden six-man crew. At the end of the pool, Superman climbed out of the water, waved to the crowd and disappeared when the spotlight went off.

The evening raised a lot of money for local charities, was fun and was considered a success. The following year, the Wives' Club staged a Can-Can dance show.

285. BAD BLOOD

Before I joined the Foreign Service, I worked as an Engineering Writer for Vitro Laboratories in Silver Spring, Maryland. Vitro was a large lab supporting both the surface and subsurface Navy, and there were many veterans with Navy backgrounds working there. I enjoyed my stay with the company and might well have stayed there had I not seen an advertisement for Technical Security Officers at the State Department.

From time to time, Vitro would hold a blood drive in support of the American Red Cross. Many of the employees at the laboratory were regular donors, and some employees were recognized for their contributions. Those men and women were proud of their donation record, and I thought (being an O positive universal donor) that I might join their ranks. Then the State Department job was offered to me, and I processed in at the Department to join SY/T.

Shortly after my arrival in 1975, I learned that the State Department was going to hold a blood drive. The donation station was set up on the ground floor of the building on the West Side, where M/MED had a small nurses' office to dispense vaccines, weigh personnel who needed to watch their weight regularly, and examine employees who were not feeling well. I slipped down to this area one afternoon and stated that I would like to donate blood.

A young volunteer from the American Red Cross was staffing the screening desk. She asked if I knew my blood type, if I was in good health and if I had donated at the Department previously. I answered yes to the first two questions, then explained that I was a new employee.

With this, her questioning changed a bit. Had I been in contact with anyone I knew to have an illness? Had I been out of the country recently? I told her that I had been in the United States for the last three years, but that I had previously served overseas in the Army. Smiling, she asked where I had been stationed.

I said: "Vietnam".

Her eyes opened wide and her right lip curled up. She said: "euchh!"

The volunteer told me that there were so many diseases running rampant in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos that they were under instructions not to accept donations from anyone who had served there during the last five years. I told her that I didn't have any diseases, but my offer to give blood was rejected. People with *good* blood, standing in line to make *their* donations, overheard our conversation and looked warily in my direction.

I dodged the Red Cross blood drives for the next two and a half years. At that time, I was given orders for Abidjan and moving my family overseas for the first time filled most of my time. I had low blood sugar at that point in my life and decided to forego trying to donate blood for a while.

After I left the Department, I attended American University for a graduate degree in Teaching. I started to teach Science classes at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring. On the 11th of September 2001, I was teaching when an announcement was made over the school's Public Address system. A plane had flown into one of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York. We were directed to stop teaching, turn on our classroom television sets and let our students watch a little bit of history. I turned our set on. Within about twenty minutes, a second plane impacted the other tower. All of the classes in our school were directed to leave the TV sets on throughout the rest of that eventful day.

On the following day, the casualty count up in New York and at the Pentagon was staggering. Realizing that a lot of blood would be needed, I told my wife I would be home late and drove over to our local Red Cross office after school. When I arrived there, I was surprised to see that the parking lot was almost empty. I went up to the door and found it locked.

There was a sign on the door. It said "So many people have come in to donate blood that we have run out of donation bags and cannot accommodate additional donors. Thank you for trying to help."

Now thoroughly convinced that no one wanted my O positive blood, I went home.

286. NAVY COFFEE

In August, 1972, I moved from Silver Spring to New London, Connecticut to work at the Navy's Underwater Sound Laboratory. I found an apartment in the forest slightly North of New London and commuted to work in a Volkswagen Karmann Ghia.

Most of our work took place either at the Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics, over in Groton, or at the actual Laboratory, a large building perched above the Thames River which led North to the Submarine Base at New London. We supported several research projects being pursued at the Laboratory, including the development of Submarine Towed-Array Sonar Systems (STASS) which are now visible in protective tubes on the decks of most nuclear subs.

One of our projects took place on a barge which was moored along a lengthy pier far below the Laboratory. There was parking for our vehicles at the top of the cliff, but to get to the barge we had to walk down an old iron staircase that was completely exposed to the elements. We made descents and ascents of this staircase in all weather and all wind conditions. This was the era of double-knit clothing. On a cold winter day the wind would blow across Long Island Sound, hit the face of the cliff and sweep right up your pants legs, all the way along your climb or your descent.

The interior of the barge featured two open wells through which sonar transducers could be lowered into sea water via electric hoists. As you looked through these wells, light from the sun ran under the barge and illuminated the waters under the boat, usually revealing five or six large eels swimming in the area. Each eel was three to four feet long.

A trip down the staircase on a cold day was usually an occasion for a cup of coffee. The only coffee maker on the barge was a large thirty-cup Presto aluminum percolator/urn at the very back on the barge in a tiny mess area. The available coffee for this kitchen instrument was usually the cheapest brand available, and coffee was brewed with water piped down from the Laboratory in rusty pipes and rubber hoses. The water itself was slightly saline, as close as we were to the ocean. A Navy Chief assigned to the barge usually made a pot of coffee each morning and a second pot in the afternoon; after the coffee percolated, it sat bubbling in the aluminum urn for hours. We drank this brew out of Styrofoam cups, which added their own flavors to the elixir.

To the best of my memory, the Chief never washed his coffee cup. Instead, he would hold it under the little tap on the coffee urn, pour himself a cup, and carefully walk back to a tiny office area where he sat to support projects on the barge. He never spilled a drop, although the barge could be unsteady at times.

There were two activities in which we engaged with the eels. The first way was to pour the last tarry dregs of a cup of barge coffee through a hold into the water. This would cause the eels gather around the spot in the water where the coffee landed, after which they would swim to

other locations under the barge. The other way was to lower the large SQS-26 sonar array into the water and activate the supporting sonar system. This had the opposite effect: the eels stayed away from the area for about two days. They came back, however, probably because of the coffee.

287. AROUND THE WORLD IN FORTY DAYS

As a Foreign service dependent, I had traveled extensively from the United States in an Easterly direction, reaching as far as India before returning to the West. In the Army, I again traveled East to Ethiopia, then returned by the same route. Finally, I traveled West across the Pacific to get to Vietnam.

At the end of my first tour in Phuoc Vinh, I was leaning toward a return to College in the United States to major in marine geology. There was a good program in existence at the University of Alaska. I needed to save a little more money, however, and I wanted to adjust my departure schedule from the Army so that I came out of the service just before school was going to start. I did not intend to re-enlist but was informed that I could *extend* my tour in Vietnam for another year on my current enlistment. The war was winding down, and my outfit was about to move South to a safer location outside of Saigon. This option seemed like a possible solution to my scheduling and saving problems.

In 1971, the Army was having a lot of difficulty in filling its recruiting quotas. No one wanted to go to Vietnam. Servicemen who had in-country experience in Vietnam were especially sought after, especially if they were willing to stay in the war zone. A significant reward was attached to extending your tour in Vietnam: the US Government would pay to send you anywhere in the world you wanted to go on a thirty-day leave and would then bring you back to Vietnam.

I did some serious thinking about where I might like to go. I considered traveling to Kashmir and living on a houseboat for thirty days. I had not seen South America; I considered a thirty-day trip to Rio de Janeiro. I also missed my family; they were living in Amman, Jordan at that time. I liked the Middle East, and I decided to go home on leave.

My ticket to Amman ran through Bangkok, Dharan, and Beirut. Pan Am was the carrier on this leg of the trip.

Leaving Tan San Hut Air Base, I had six hours in Bangkok between flights. Thailand was one of our allies in Vietnam, and American servicemen did not need a visa to enter the country. Walking around the airport, a local taxi driver offered me a ride into town, promising to return an hour before my flight left. We saw a little of the city, but my driver kept stopping at steam baths full of Thai girls when I wanted to see the temples. True to his word, my driver had me back at the airport an hour before the ongoing flight.

In Beirut, I bought some civilian clothes for the leave period. I went into Khoury Brothers on Rue Jean d'Arc, part of the in-bounds area for my former high school. I visited a family of Turks who lived down the hill from our former house to say hello; I asked if I could

take a shower and change clothes in their apartment. They were glad to see me and were gracious hosts.

There was a short aircraft hop between Beirut and Amman. I came in in the evening and joined my parents at a party at their house. My mother was overcome with emotion at seeing me back from the war without a missing limb, and the party ended early.

I then spent a pleasant thirty-day period with my family in Amman. We basked around the pool at the Intercontinental Hotel in the mornings, visited the Roman ruins in town, and often spent evenings at a restaurant with a Greek/Irish band.

Leaving Amman, my trip back went through Beirut to Athens, Athens to Paris and then from Paris to Philadelphia on American Airlines flights.

I arrived in Philadelphia on the day that my brother (coming out of the Air Force) was about to enroll in college in Philadelphia. I went to the school early, happened to meet the Dean and told him I was hoping to spend some time with my brother before returning to Vietnam that day. He had served in the military: Brother Bill was moved to the front of the Registration line, was processed in quickly and we were able to have lunch together.

I took a bus over to Fort Dix, was processed in from leave, re-issued new fatigues and was given a ticket for a military charter flight. That plane left McGuire Air Force Base and went first to Anchorage, then from Alaska to Manila, and from Manila to Saigon. This was a stretch DC-8 with every seat filled: Seaboard World Airways was the charter carrier.

I hopped on the plane, landed briefly for refueling in Alaska and Manila, arrived in Saigon and was ferried to Bien Hoa on a military bus. I checked back in to my company and started work in a brand-new comm center the next day.

All the way around the world in about forty days. (That was the first of two round-the-globe trips.)

288. LEARNING TO SPEAK MAORI

In September 2003, we had just started our tour in Wellington, New Zealand when an Embassy notice came to my attention. The Ministry of Foreign affairs had invited foreign Embassies in Wellington to send personnel to an introductory one-week class in the Maori Language. This class was to be taught at Victoria University on a large hill above the city.

In Wellington, I was a dependent with a part-time job as a retired WAE SEO, working for ESO Canberra. I asked the Administrative Officer if I might attend the class. No one else from the U.S. Embassy expressed interest, so my request was granted.

Three other Embassies sent their Ambassadors: Russia, Spain and Fiji. A number of other younger Diplomats from several missions also attended.

A little background here. The Maori people are indigenous to New Zealand and were resident on its islands long before settlers from England arrived. As more and more immigrants arrived, clashes occurred between indigenous people and the new arrivals. The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) promised the Maori the retention of their lands: British settlers broke this treaty. Subsequently, two wars were fought between the British and the Maori in the later 1800's. After peace was restored, a significant and unique effort was made to preserve both cultures on the islands, to ensure that the government represented all New Zealand citizens and to treat people evenly regardless of race or origin. The national anthem of New Zealand, for example, is sung twice on formal occasions: once in Maori and again in English.

Maori people are organized on a tribal structure. Several families from specific tribes traditionally occupy villages structured around a Marae, or meeting house. Family succession is Patrilineal. Each tribe has long-standing myths and oral traditions, much like American Indian societies in our country. Many of these myths and traditions are carved into the poles supporting Marae roofs and the inner walls of the building, much like totem poles are carved by American Indian tribes on our Northwest coast.

(Note: for a great introduction to the Maori culture, watch Whale Rider, a movie from 2003, available on-line.)

Certain courtesies are followed each time Maori tribes get together or entertain people from other countries. In New Zealand, this is both traditional and a basic root of diplomacy, so these customs are important for foreign visitors (especially Diplomats) to understand.

Among many colorful practices, some Maori hospitality involves ritual challenges, including the *Powhiri* and the *Haka*. There are again similarities to American Indian cultures. (For a good Introduction to the greeting challenge (Powhiri), watch or remember the scene in Dances with Wolves, a 1990 movie, where an aggressive Sioux warrior named "Wind in His

Hair” rides up to Kevin Costner’s outpost and challenges him orally while sitting on a horse.) (This movie is also available on-line.) Then compare that challenge to:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=new+zealang%3a++welcoming+guests+to+a+Marae%3a++video&docid=607990086461098954&mid=783FC26A35514BC6BFAF783FC26A35514BC6BFAF&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

New Zealand sports teams traditionally begin matches with a Maori challenge: the Haka. Here is the national Rugby team about to engage the Australian Rugby team:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Ka+Mate+Haka&&view=detail&mid=82E8DAA242DB08F5BA1182E8DAA242DB08F5BA11&&FORM=VRDGAR>

When our language class showed up at Victoria University, we were informed that much of our class work would take place in the Marae. Victoria University actually has such a facility on campus, and it was a treat to enter. Showing respect for the facility, we entered the Marae without shoes and sat primarily on the carpeted floor. We were in a darkened meeting area surrounded by tall poles with carved faces, coated in red and highlighted with mother-of-pearl. We received an introduction to the Victoria University Marae and to the myths and family histories represented there.

After two days in the Marae, we moved to a classroom with better light. We learned a basic vocabulary and the formal process of introducing your tribe to other tribes. Afterwards, we did a little classroom work on grammar. Subsequently, we were given an assignment: write a speech to introduce yourself and your Embassy to the rest of the class in Maori. Practice the speech, then deliver it to the class. This was a two-day effort.

After our presentations, we attended a final meeting in the Marae, followed by a Photo Op for the campus newsletter and the Foreign Ministry. I obtained a copy of the picture.



Victoria University Maori Language Class for Diplomats, Class of 2003. The gentleman in the middle of the front row with the greenish tie is a Maori Instructor. He is flanked by the Spanish Ambassador with the red tie and the Ambassador from Fiji on his right. I am in the back row next to the Russian Ambassador on my right and a bearded Anglican priest on my left. The young woman in the center next to her daughter is also a Maori instructor. The carved column at the right side of the picture is typical of the more than forty interior columns, each of which tells a unique legend or story and is different from all the others.

Photo presented to graduates of the language program by the New Zealand Foreign Ministry, 2003.

GLOSSARY

9mm: A type of ammunition commonly used in handguns and submachine guns

A/C: air-conditioning

AC: alternating current

Accelerator spring: a spring within a mechanism that initiates rapid movement

ACWG: Audio Countermeasures Working Group

ADP: Automated Data Processing (Computer Operators and Programmers)

ADP: Automated Data Processing (Computer Operators and Programmers)

AES: American Electronics Systems, an electronics contractor to the Department of State

AFB: Air Force Base

AK-47: a .30-caliber assault rifle manufactured in Russia and China

American Flag Carrier: A ship or an airplane registered in the United States of America

Ammeter: an electrical tool used for measuring current flow

ANZAC: Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, a cooperative military organization between the two countries

AR: Acoustic Research, a loudspeaker manufacturer

ARSO: Assistant Regional Security Officer, usually the first overseas position for a DS Special Agent.

Asian Tigers: Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea: major business centers

ATM: Automated Terminal Machine, used by banks to dispense money

Beer: An important beverage for Security Engineering Officers

Bernina: a Swiss-made sewing machine

Bollard: a vertical pole of concrete and steel placed to stop vehicles from entering an area

Bosch: a German manufacturer of tools

Bridge of the Americas: a highway bridge across the Panama Canal entry way, connecting North America with South America

Bruel and Kjaer: a Danish manufacturer of high-quality sound measurement instruments

C-130: an Air Force cargo plane manufactured by Lockheed, sometimes called the “Hercules”

C-141: a large USAF cargo plane, sometimes called a “Starlifter”

C4: Plastic explosive

Cam: a rotating or sliding piece of a mechanical system that converts rotary movement to linear movement

Carioca: a way of life in Brazil, focused on outdoor activities, sports, having fun and working at a job in between those more important pursuits

CCTV: Closed-Circuit Television Systems

Charge d’Affaires: a Title given to the senior officer in an Embassy when the Ambassador is out of the country

Chase: a vertical space in a building allowing floor-to-floor wiring runs, often surrounded by an Electrical Closet or a Telephone Closet on each floor

Chief of Mission: the ranking Foreign Service Officer at an Embassy, Consulate or Mission. Usually an Ambassador or a Consul-General.

Chop: a carved stone or wood signature stamp, similar to a signet ring, used with red paste

CLO: Community Liaison Officer

CO: Contracting Officer

CODEL: a Congressional Delegation to the Embassy and the host country

Commercial Attaché: an Embassy Officer assigned to boost commerce with America in the host country

Commissary: a food storage facility attached to an Embassy or Consulate

Community Liaison Officer: an Embassy officer addressing the needs of embassy personnel and their dependents, often an organizer of local travel opportunities.

Concord: An early manufacturer of closed-circuit television equipment used by the Department of State

Constituent Post: Either an Embassy or a Consulate assigned to an Engineering Services Office or Center

Crescent: an American tool manufacturer

Cribbage: a card game that uses a wooden board with holes and small pegs to keep score

CRT: Cathode Ray Tube, the large front window on old TV sets

Curtain-wall antennas: Giant antennas used by the Voice of America, roughly the size of a football field.

Cycleo: a three-wheeled rickshaw powered by a cyclist who sits in the back and pedals

Cypher Lock: an electric pushbutton lock used for access control

DAO: Defense Attache Office, formal U.S. military presence in an American Embassy

DAO: The Defense Attache's Office in an Embassy

Dash: Nigerian slang for a bribe

DCM: Deputy Chief of Mission, an Embassy's most senior officer after the Ambassador.

DEA: Drug Enforcement Agency

Delta Barricade: a hydraulic anti-ram barrier for vehicles manufactured by the Delta Scientific Corporation

DIA: Defense Intelligence Agency

Diplomatic Pouch: A diplomatic pouch (or "bag") is any properly identified and sealed package, pouch, envelope, bag, or other container that is used to transport official correspondence, documents, and other articles intended for official use. In accordance with Article 27.3 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR), properly designated diplomatic pouches "shall not be opened or detained."

Disintegrator: a machine that turns paper into dust

DOD: Department of Defense

Double-cylinder lock: a keyed lock with a cylinder on each side of the door, to prevent someone outside from breaking a window near the door and reaching in to open the lock bolt

DS/PSD: Diplomatic Security/Physical Security Division

DS/ST: Office of Security Technology within the Bureau of Diplomatic Security

DSC: Delta Scientific Corporation

DTS Standards: Department Telecommunications Standards, the "Bible" for electrical work in a Communications Center

Dynelectron Corporation: a government contractor providing electronic technicians to the Department of State.

EAP: East Asian and Pacific Affairs, a Regional Bureau within the Department of State

EER: Employee Efficiency Report, and annual performance rating at the State Department

Electric Boat Division, General Dynamics: a facility in Groton, Connecticut where nuclear submarines are manufactured

EPA: Environmental Protection Agency, a U.S. Government agency

FAA: Federal Aviation Administration, which inspects airports around the world

Faber: a German manufacturer of engineering drawing aids

FAV: Fully-Armored Vehicle

FB: Fire Base, an artillery post during the Vietnam War. Usually elevated for better range

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigations

FBIS: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a U.S. Government agency

FE/BR: Forced Entry/Ballistic Resistant (usually a door or a window)

Feng Shue: A Chinese belief system using architecture to repel evil spirits and ensure harmony

Flag Rank: in the U.S. military, an officer with the rank of Brigadier General, Lieutenant General, Major General or General (who are entitled to flags with 1, 2, 3, or 4 stars on their ships or vehicles)

FMO: Facilities Maintenance Officer

Folger-Adams: a manufacturer of electric locks (often used in prisons)

FSI FAST program: for “Foreign Affairs Specialist Training”, a 10-week intensive language program

FSN: Foreign Service National employee, a “local hire” at an Embassy or a Consulate

Garrett Wand: a hand-held metal detector used to screen personnel for weapons

Glock: a manufacturer of handguns with plastic parts that often do not show up in X-ray scans

GSO: General Services Officer, an Embassy’s Supply and Maintenance Officer

Hardline: an internal barrier within Embassies separating personnel who have not been screened for weapons from screened personnel.

HF: High Frequency

HF: High Frequency

Host country: the country in which an Embassy is located

HP: Hewlett-Packard, a U.S. manufacturer of electronic instruments and computers

IC: Integrated Circuit

Ink stone: a carved stone object with a center well in which water and an ink stick are blended to create ink for Chinese calligraphy

Inspection Trip: Visiting a constituent post to perform a countermeasure inspection

Insulgard: A U.S. manufacturer of ballistic doors and windows

IR breakbeams: an outdoor intrusion alarm system based of infra-red beams

Isolation cradle: a spring-mounted assembly supporting a disintegrator to reduce noise and vibration

ITC: the Interagency Training Center, site of a course for Security Engineers within the Federal Government

Itemizer: a portable explosives detector

Jensen: a U.S. manufacturer of hand tools for electrical engineering applications

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L3: a manufacturer of cabinet X-ray equipment used to screen briefcases and backpacks for weapons and explosives

Lexan: a tough plastic used for ballistic protection

LOF: Local Operating Funds, for use in purchasing items for ESOs and ESCs in their assigned territories

LP: Long-Playing vinyl phonograph record

Mag lock: a remotely-controlled magnetic lock used to secure entry and exit doors

Mamba, and Black Mamba: One of the world's deadliest snakes

Maori: the ethnic people of New Zealand, a Polynesian race

Marantz: a U.S. manufacturer of high-end stereo equipment

Marché: French for "market"

Mardex: a remotely-controlled visitor identification system for Embassy and Consulate back doors

Medeco: a U.S. lock manufacturer producing high security locks

Mil Group: a group of military personnel attached to an Embassy, generally providing U.S. military support to the host country

Moped: a small motorcycle with pedals

MSI: Medium-Scale Integration, a family of integrated circuit chips used in computers and machinery

Multimeter: an electrical tool used for measuring voltage and resistance

Mustang Program: a State Department program established to prepare qualified communicators and secretarial personnel for positions as entry-level Foreign Service Officers.

NOAA: National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, a U.S. Government agency

Nomex: a woven, fire-proof fabric used in Firefighters' clothing

Non-Pro Courier: a Foreign Service Officer (not a regular Diplomatic Courier) carrying a pouch with classified material

NVA: North Vietnamese Army

OCR: Optical Character Reader

OIC: Officer in Charge of either an Engineering Services Office or a larger Engineering Services Center

Omni-Spectra: a "radar fence" alarm system for outside use on large compounds

Optima Cabinet: a grey steel electronic equipment cabinet used in many Marine booths

OSHA: Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a U.S. Government agency

Pan Am: Pan American World Airlines, once a major American Flag carrier

Papal Nuncio: an Ambassador from the Vatican

Paternoster: "Our Father": an early form of elevator that moves in a loop and only stops momentarily at each floor. You jump on and jump off these contraptions, dangerously, hence the name.

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Pelco: a U.S. manufacturer of pan and tilt units, giving mobility and direction to closed circuit television cameras.

Per Diem: Latin "for the day": funding provided to TDY personnel to cover hotel and meal costs

Peugeot: a French car manufacturer

Pioneer: a Japanese firm manufacturing stereo equipment

PMEL: Precision Maintenance Electronics Laboratory, an Air Force facility where electronic instruments for measurement are serviced and calibrated

Polar Beer: the national beer of Venezuela

Pouch: a sealed canvas bag or sealed container, carrying official correspondence and equipment for an Embassy or Consulate

Poumanu: Maori word for “greenstone” or nephrite, used for tools and jewelry

PRC: People’s Republic of China

Psi: pounds per square inch

PSO: Post Security Officer

PVC: Poly-vinyl chloride, a rugged plastic used for plumbing applications

R&D: Research and Development

Raking: using a special tool to rake the pins within a lock, allowing the core to turn

RCA: A later manufacturer of CCTV equipment used by the Department of State

RDF: Radio Direction-Finding

Rebar: Steel reinforcing bars used to strengthen concrete

RF: Radio-Frequency

RF: Radio-Frequency

RMB: Chinese money for Foreigners

RMO: Regional Medical Officer

RPG: Rocket-Propelled Grenades

RSEM: Regional Security Engineering Manager (for Asia and the Pacific region)

RSO: Regional Security Officer, often with a Law Enforcement background, employed by Diplomatic Security

RTC: A Regional Technical Center. This was a large regional office, a precursor to the ESCs

S&G locks (several varieties): Combination locks manufactured by Sargent & Greenleaf

SA-7: State Annex 7, a warehouse

SafeMasters: an American manufacturer of locking devices

Sahel Region: the area of Africa just below the Sahara Desert, a very dry and dusty region

Sally port: A controlled exit route from a building

SALT: Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty

Sandinista: at one time, the governing party in Nicaragua

Sarong: a skirt-like cloth wrapped around a person's lower body, from the waist to just below the knees

Seabee: An enlisted, active-duty seaman in the U.S. Navy, from a Construction Battalion (CB). These personnel were assigned to ESCs and ESOs through the Naval Support Unit attached to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security at the Department of State. Seabee skills include (with abbreviations for their specialties):

- Builders (BU)
- Construction Electricians (CE)
- Construction Mechanic (CM)
- Engineering Aide (EA)
- Equipment Operator (EO)
- Steel Worker (SW)
- Utilitiesman (UT)

Selectone: a public announcement system with built-in tones to declare certain emergencies, such as fires or attacks

Senufo: an African tribe living in a region of the Ivory Coast

SEP: Security Enhancement Program, a multi-billion dollar effort to improve security at American Embassies and Consulates all over the world

Shredder: a machine that cuts paper into tiny particles

SIC Room: a secure area where the above cabinet resides

SIC: Security Interface Cabinet, a major connection point for security circuitry

Simplex lock: A push-button combination lock used for access control

SitRep: Situation Report. A report sent to Washington explaining a set of circumstances in the host country.

SLR: Single Lens Reflex, a type of camera

Solenoid: an electro-magnet used to pull or push a lever

Sound enclosure: a padded rectangular baffle surrounding a disintegrator to reduce noise

Spread-Jamming: a technique for opening locked doors by prying the door and the frame apart from each other

STS: Security Technical Specialist

STU-III: an encrypted digital telephone

SY/T: Division of Technical Services in the Department's Office of Security. Precursor to DS/ST

Tang: a piece of metal connecting the cylinder of a lock to the lock bolt

Tapcon: a wall mounting system using special screws that do not require anchors in concrete

TCU: Telecommunications Unit

TDY: Temporary Duty

TDYers: Personnel on Temporary Duty

Technical Security Officer: an earlier term for a Security Engineering Officer

Tektronix: a U.S. manufacturer of electronic test equipment

The Detail: a Protective Security group accompanying the Secretary of State on his or her travels

TOC: Tactical Operations Center, the Command bunker for a Fire Base

Trine electric lock: a cheap lock used for entry control, operated by a doorbell button

TRW: a U.S. government computer and electronics contractor

TS: Top Secret

Unican: a pushbutton lock manufactured by the Simplex Corporation

USIA: United States Information Agency, charged with telling foreign countries about the United States

USIS: United States Information Service, precursor to USIA

USO: United Service Organization, a publicly-funded organization for the U.S. Military

Vickers: A British manufacturer of aircraft parts, notably hydraulic valves

Von Duprin: a U.S. manufacturer of high-quality exit locks, particularly push bars for exits

WAE: When Actually Employed. Part-time job at the State Department for a retired SEO.

Wallabee: a small species of kangaroo, and the name of the Australian National Rugby Team

Ward Room: an area on a U.S. warship where officers meet. Often used as a dining room (the Officers' Mess) as well.

Welcome Kit: a booklet prepared by Embassies and Consulates for new personnel, containing important information about the post

Western Electric: a U.S. manufacturer of telephone equipment

WTMD: Walk-Through Metal Detector

Yale 197: a keyed lock used all over the world to secure entry doors

Yuan: Chinese money for Chinese people

End of Volume 3