

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

EDWARD WARREN HOLMES

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Consul General Holmes.]

Q: I wonder if you could give me a bit about your background, when you were born, where you grew up, and a little about your education and family, so people will have an idea of who you are.

HOLMES: Do you want my date of birth?

Q: Yes, date of birth, but also where, and then a bit about growing up.

HOLMES: Okay. I was born in 1923, in Beverly, Massachusetts, which is about eighteen miles north of Boston, on the coast. Beverly in those days was a small town. It's grown a bit since then. I grew up there and went to high school in the only high school in Beverly, which is where we all attended high school. Went on to Brown University for my undergraduate degree.

Q: What were you taking at Brown?

HOLMES: I sort of split majors between economics and political science. My college career was interrupted by the war, fairly briefly. I was out for a period of about a year, then came back and finished up, got my degree.

Worked for a gentleman who is well known in the Foreign Service, Henry Merit Wriston. After graduation, he appointed me to be his administrative assistant, sort of a personal assistant.

Q: He was the president of Brown and later gained great renown and became a verb.

HOLMES: To Wristonize.

Q: To Wristonize somebody. Because he did a study on...

HOLMES: On the personnel system of the...

Q: On bringing the Civil Service and the Foreign Service together, in the early Fifties.

HOLMES: That's right.

Q: But you were working for him.

HOLMES: I was Class of '45, and that was before those days. He was very much involved in foreign affairs in those days; a consultant in Washington, he would spend a lot of his time in and out of Washington during the war and after the war.

Q: Could you talk a little about him, because he's, as I say, a verb now in the Foreign Service. What was his background and how did he operate, from your perspective?

HOLMES: He came to Brown from [Lawrence University?], in Appleton, Wisconsin, and he was at Brown for a number of years. I was tremendously impressed by his intellect, as were, I think, most of the students. In those days, chapel was not compulsory, but whenever it was known that he was going to speak, the place was jammed with students, which is a pretty good sign that he spoke extremely well, mostly on moral and foreign-policy issues of the day.

Before graduation, I worked part time in the Admissions Office, helping the dean of admissions with applications, putting files together and that sort of thing. And then I sat on the Admissions Committee as sort of a student representative on the Board of Admissions. From that and getting to know Dr. Wriston in that position, just before graduation he asked me if I would like to work for him on sort of a personal basis as a personal assistant, which I was honored to do. Went down to his summer estate on the Cape and worked with him, essentially helping with the research materials that he was involved in.

I should also point out that he steered me toward the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, of which he was a member of the Board of Governors and was very interested in it and steered me in that direction. And so, about six months after graduation, I entered Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and got my master's degree there in international law, thanks largely to his influence.

So I only worked for him for six months, but it was great fun and an interesting period. This was long before he was involved with the Wriston Commission and all that sort of thing, although he had tremendous interest in it. And he steered me toward the idea of entering the Foreign Service. That's where the idea germinated. I had not thought of the Foreign Service. I had thought of what one thinks of, you know, something perhaps in the foreign-affairs field, maybe business or maybe aid or something. But he steered me very much toward the Foreign Service.

So I took my Foreign Service exam actually while I was still at Fletcher. That was in '46, one of the early exams after the war, when, every three months or so, they were giving the Foreign Service exam. I took one of the early ones while I was still a student, and passed, and they let me finish until I got my master's degree. And then, a couple of days after getting that, I entered the Foreign Service, in '46.

Q: How did it work in '46 when you came in? In the first place, how did they receive you and train you? Or did they do much in the way of training?

HOLMES: I took the written exam in '46, and shortly thereafter went down to Washington for the oral exam, with a number of other people who had managed to pass. I squeaked by in my written, as I recall, a few points over the floor that was necessary. Then, I think the same day, they told us we were in or out. I was in, and so I reported for duty very shortly thereafter.

There were about twenty of us in a class of new FSOs. We had a three-month basic course, which was in the old Lothrop House off Connecticut Avenue in those days, not in the Department as such. That's where we met, and Perry Jester was our mother confessor, the head of the class, as it were. We had the usual consular, how to keep the books, some few words of protocol, and travel vouchers and all that sort of thing, getting ready. And then most of us shipped out overseas upon the conclusion of the three-month course. It was the summertime. Lothrop House was not air conditioned. It was beastly hot, I remember that, and we sort of suffered through the classes. I think we went out in about August or September.

Q: You went where?

HOLMES: I went to Managua, Nicaragua.

Q: Where you served for what, about a year, year and a half?

HOLMES: A little over a year, a year and a half, I think.

Q: What were you doing in Managua?

HOLMES: Let's see. First post. Trying to learn what the Foreign Service was all about. I had a wonderful boss, Ambassador Fletcher Warren.

Q: One of the major figures.

HOLMES: Who was a wonderful first boss, I must say.

I should mention that amongst the lectures that Perry Jester gave us was one word of advice to all the young men in the course (I don't think there were any women in the course in those days), that if any of us had any thoughts of getting married and were planning to put it off, don't put it off. Get married before going to your first post, because marriage at a post can cause all sorts of problems and difficulties, or coming back here, and so on and so forth. So three or four of us, I believe, got married shortly after the end of the course, as did I.

My wife was in Europe at the time, working for an organization. She got back one week before I was due to go to Nicaragua. I had my orders. In those days, it was extremely hard to travel, to get places on the airplanes and so forth.

Q: Because it was the immediate post-war period.

HOLMES: Yes, immediate post-war period, troops were coming home, transportation was all very, very jammed up and hard to get. So she arrived in New York on a ship after having great trouble getting home. She came home finally, I think, on a Swedish ship, jammed on sort of a semi-freighter-type thing, because she kept getting bumped. She had reservations to get home, but kept getting bumped for troops, I suppose, or more important travelers. She was just a young person out of Fletcher. I met her at Fletcher, by the way. This was her first job, and she had attended a conference in Luxembourg about the post-war world or something of that nature. So she got back one week before I had to leave.

It was the Labor Day weekend, and we got married in New York City by going to a Supreme Court judge, showing my official government orders, and getting a waiver. This was the war period, and the judges were used to servicemen. I was not exactly that, but I fit that pattern, and the judge was very nice and signed the papers. It was all sort of a hazy rush, but I went here and there, and blood tests and this and that, and getting the waiver and so forth, and finding a minister. My wife is the daughter of a minister from the West Coast, but her father had a friend in New York and so forth. We found the minister, and we got married. She didn't come with me, obviously, right then; she went back to the West Coast to see her family. But that was quite a hectic time, just, as I say, a few days before taking off for Managua. So that was my introduction.

Q: What were you doing in Managua?

HOLMES: I think I did probably consular work at first, for a while. The ambassador sort of moved me in different sections of the embassy, basically. I think I did consular work, I think I did some economic work, and then went into the Political Section, as I recall. Anyway, I think consular to begin with, as was quite common, giving visas, American citizens, the whole consular range, because this was a very small post. There must have been not more than ten officers.

Q: What was the political situation in Nicaragua in those days?

HOLMES: Well, Somoza (the first), Tacho, was in control of things, very much in control of things. We were, of course, fairly close to him, let's say. And things were peaceful. There were always rumors of coups, and there were a number of underground opposition groups. We tried, I think, to ameliorate the rigors of the Tacho regime, let's say. But he had been a faithful friend during the war. Although there was some disdain for him, I think, within the American community, on the other hand, he was a friend. So it was just sort of a balancing act.

He himself, although he has obviously a pretty notorious image, was personally a very charming person, who loved parties and he loved dancing. If he would come to a cocktail

party, as he often would, near what would have been the end of the cocktail party, he would suddenly summon his jazz band from the palace. And once the jazz band arrived, that meant the party went on all night. In those days, no diplomat could leave as long as the chief of state was present. So cocktail parties often went on until two or three a.m., until he tired of dancing and enjoying the party. This was a frequent occurrence. And so if you could get out before, you could perhaps escape, but once the band arrived, he would say, "Nobody's to leave. We're all here to have fun and dance."

So this was quite an introduction to the Foreign Service, to get to know the chief of state, not too well, but meeting him at parties. He was a very, very gregarious, open, friendly sort of person, and very friendly toward Americans. And so one did get to parties at the palace, and he would come to diplomatic parties, and stay, sometimes. Sometimes he would go off.

Q: How did we report on political events there? Here we were, we were friendly to the...to Somoza.

HOLMES: The dictator.

Q: But from what I gather, there was some unrest. There must have been some people who didn't think...

HOLMES: There was some unrest. There were some opposition parties, legally.

Q: Well, obviously, you were at the lower level, but it was a small embassy, did you feel under any constraints or problems? Because it's usually the lot of the youngest political officer to take the opposition under his wing and report more on them.

HOLMES: I would say that it was a little more open than that, that the chief of the Political Section, who was Maury Bernbaum, a career officer, later ambassador to Ecuador and other places, would see opposition leaders. There was a parliament and there was nominally an opposition party. So it was not a total dictatorship, as in some countries that we all know since and before that time. As part of our friendship, I think, we did lean on Somoza to maintain at least some semblance of democracy. So one could see opposition leaders. And I remember they used to come into the embassy, and I would escort them from the door up to Maury's office, and then withdraw, perhaps as he discussed political things. So we constantly reported on opposition groups. And there were a lot of not only threatened coups, there were attempted coups from time to time.

I can remember my home was in the center of the city. It was a not-terribly-desirable location, but then I was brand new and I couldn't afford to get out of it. Many of the Americans and foreigners lived out on the hills on the outskirts of Managua. I was right in the center of town, near the main military base, Campo Militar. From time to time, tanks would roll out of there, and we'd say, "Uh oh, another coup." And sometimes there was firing and shooting around. We got to be quite accustomed to early morning tanks rolling

by and shots being fired. We would just stay put and it would usually be over in a day or so.

So all during my entire period, he was still there. When we left, he had not been overthrown. But there were the usual threats and attempted coups and that sort of thing.

Q: How did Fletcher Warren, a big figure in foreign affairs in that period, operate his embassy?

HOLMES: Oh, just as a family, I would say. He was completely open. I found it extremely heartwarming that he would treat me so well and give me all sorts of advice, not just on how to report things. Maury Bernbaum was a superb draftsman, and I learned an awful lot from him as far as the technical part when I was in the Political Section under him. But Ambassador Warren trained me for the Foreign Service as a whole, the Foreign Service life.

I can remember when my wife and I both got malaria at one time, which was very, very rampant there, he came down and sat in our bedroom and talked to us, because we both felt pretty low, with a terrible case of malaria. He and his wife came and sat with us a long time, in our not-very-desirable house. I mean, he was that human. He was like an uncle or a favorite person in the family, you know. Fantastic.

It was a wonderful introduction to the Foreign Service, aside from the disease. The illness there was in those days rampant. Our house, for instance, was totally unscreened, and at night there would be swarms of mosquitoes from Lake Managua, which was right there in the City of Managua, and we got malaria a number of times. In fact, we were medevac-ed, finally. That's why I left early, frankly, we were both pretty ill. They sent me down to Gorgas Hospital in Panama, and the doctor said I should not go back to that place because I had had repeated attacks of malaria and it had bothered my liver and stomach and so forth. But that was not uncommon in those days. Now I think, since then, there has been a tremendous improvement in living conditions. But this was right after the war, and everything was scarce. Screening was scarce then. We had to import food, I remember, at one... Some food was simply not obtainable there because of the war. Basic things.

So he was marvelous, and his wife. His wife was very, very nice to my wife and trained her in the intricacies of calling on other ambassadors' wives. Of course, my wife had no idea about all these protocol things. She was very patient with...

Q: Well then, in 1947, you moved to Caracas.

HOLMES: Right, right.

Q: What were you doing there? You were there from '47 to '50.

HOLMES: Yes, that was a regular three-year tour. That's when I transferred, when the doctor said basically this officer should not go back to Nicaragua, which was not uncommon either; a lot of people cut short their tours. And I remember the ambassador even issued an edict: No families with children would be permitted to come there, because there was so much disease and illness.

It was like going to heaven, because Caracas is up in the mountains, it was cool, flowers were blooming when we arrived there, all over the place. It was like a reprieve.

I mean, I liked Nicaragua, and the Nicaraguan people were terribly friendly. We took Spanish lessons, and so we got into learning some Spanish and these parties. And it was such a small community that we knew all the others. The diplomatic community was very small and very closely knit. So from that viewpoint, it was excellent. But the heat and the disease were sort of overpowering, in a way. So Caracas was great.

I went into the Consular Section, to begin with, for one year. The consulate was separate in those days. It was headed by a consul general, but it was separate from the embassy. So I was, in fact, under the consul general and worked in a separate building, doing consular work.

Q: What were the main types of work you were doing?

HOLMES: I can't remember precisely. I think it was the full range of consular duties, once again. It was and is still a small post. I think I did American citizens, the protection, passports, visas, immigration, and MIDs, the usual.

Q: This was still not the time of a lot of American visitors.

HOLMES: No, not really.

Q: You weren't having Americans in jail and things like that.

HOLMES: No, no, just very rarely. I would have been the junior consular officer. As I recall, there was one other officer. In fact, he was an American citizen who had been out of the United States for something like thirty years, which was in those days not uncommon. He had, I think, eight or ten children and couldn't afford to get home leave, and was more like a Venezuelan than an American, although technically he was an American citizen. It was one of those situations that I don't think happens anymore. But he'd been there forever, and he was my boss, you might say. And then there was a consul general, overall.

I worked under him, as I recall, one year, and then the ambassador transferred me into the Political Section of the embassy, which I was very happy about, really, because the consular work was pretty much routine work. I had had a smattering of it in Nicaragua, and I was keen, like most young officers, I think, to stay in that political cone. We didn't

have cones in those days, but I wanted to get into the Political Section; that's what I really wanted. I'd had a taste of that in Managua for about six months, as I recall, the last six months, I think. So I was very glad. And so I moved over. Actually, at first I was in the ECON Section for a while, and then, when an opening came in the Political Section, as the ambassador had promised would happen and it did happen, I moved over to the Political Section. That's what I wanted most of all.

Q: What was the political/economic situation in Venezuela in this '47 to '50 period?

HOLMES: Once again, there was threats of coups and attempted coups rather frequently.

Q: What was the system?

HOLMES: I think it was Pérez Jiménez, as I recall, who came in while we were there, or Aguelo, I've forgotten exactly. But there was a successful coup and rather some bitter fighting. We had some escapades, as I remember. We were playing cards one night in Caracas, and the tanks rolled by and machine gun fire came right through the house. So we all dived under the card table and yanked out the cord for the lamp. That particular coup was successful, and I think it was Aguelo who came in (one forgets the names). ['35-'41 Eleazar Lopez Conteras, president; '41-'45 Isaias Medina Angarita, president; Oct. '45-Dec. '47 Rómulo Betancourt, headed civilian-military junta; Dec. '47-Nov. '48 Rómulo Gallegos, president; Nov. '48 Lt. Col. Carlos Delgado Chalbaud and Maj. Marcos Pérez Jiménez, headed military junta; two years later Chalbaud was assassinated; '51-'57 Jiménez, dictator.] So there was a lot of political reporting to do at that time.

Q: What was the attitude toward the situation there? Had it been a coup from a democratically elected to a non-democratic, or was it just one...

HOLMES: There had been a dictator in Venezuela for many years, dating way back, and this coup successfully threw him out and changed regimes. So I think we were very hopeful that it was a more encouraging democratic-type regime, some fresh air, at least.

Q: Did you have the feeling that we were particularly involved, or was this just something we sort of sat back and reported on?

HOLMES: I have to say, really, I think if we were involved, it was on a level that I perhaps didn't even know about myself.

Q: But you didn't have the feeling that we were...

HOLMES: We were not openly involved, certainly, no, no. No, I think restraint was the general sort of rule, although we, in little ways, may have hoped that there would be a change. I don't think we were directly involved, not in Nicaragua nor in Venezuela, as far as I recall. I think, since that time, we've become more involved in situations. But it was sort of hands off in those days, that's my impression, other than giving student visas to

people whom we thought were perhaps the opposition groups, or their families were, and hoping to help spread democracy in a very indirect and long-range type of way.

Q: How did you find the Venezuelans as far as the people you would get to know in order to do your political or economic reporting?

HOLMES: Not quite as friendly as compared to Nicaragua, let's say, because there were a lot of Americans in Venezuela. The oil companies were, of course, very active in Venezuela, and as a result, as I recall, even when we were there, there were ten thousand Americans in Caracas and the environs. And so I think there were so many that the Venezuelans were turned off--just one more American. Well, there were lots of Americans and lots of wealthy Americans, and they lived in the country club set sort of thing, in a sense, more than we could afford as a junior officer. These were well-paid oil executives. And so there was a whole group of wealthy Americans who spoiled the market, in a sense. Whereas in Nicaragua, there weren't many; there were very few Americans. There were a few missionaries and a few businessmen and the embassy. So I think we were welcomed as more of a curiosity. But, as I recall very strongly, Venezuelans were much less interested in us. So it was harder to get into their homes, let's say, to be entertained by them, to get to know them as friends. It was more difficult. They were more standoffish, I think, as I recall our feelings. So from that viewpoint, we weren't as happy, in a sense, although the whole ambiance, the climate, the living conditions were much, much, much better than in Nicaragua.

Q: Who was the ambassador during your time?

HOLMES: Ambassador Donnelly.

Q: Was he a career officer?

HOLMES: I think so. This was a bigger post, and I didn't have at all the same intimate relationship with the ambassador. I would see him at staff meetings; occasionally we'd be invited to the residence. But it was a much larger post. My feeling is that he was a very able career officer, but I didn't really know him as I knew Ambassador Warren. It was quite a different situation. I was a junior officer, after all, I'd only been in the Service a year and a half, one post, an FSO Eight, I guess, unclassified C, right then maybe unclassified A or something.

My first salary, I remember very vividly, was \$2,500 a year. That was my initial salary in the Foreign Service. This was before the Foreign Service Act of 1946.

Q: At that time, and really for not too long, a top salary in government was \$10,000.

HOLMES: Was it that low, top salaries? I know mine was \$2,500; I remember that very vividly. And then the Foreign Service Act came into effect, and that raised it a bit. Then

there was a restructuring of the FSO grade system, and so it went up. So it kept going up, but the first year or two... and we had college debts to pay off.

We didn't have an automobile at first. My first automobile was a surplus Jeep that we got from Panama. The Army declared a whole lot of Jeeps surplus at the end of the war. I arrived down there on the air attaché's plane and picked out this Jeep, and I think it was \$200, as I recall. We somehow got it back to Nicaragua, and it was our first car. We were delighted to have wheels, because originally we had to depend on friends to take us to parties; weekends to get out of town, always with a friend, and that was not an ideal situation.

Q: By the time you left Caracas, you were getting a little bit seasoned in the Foreign Service. You left in 1950 and you went to a place that must have been quite a change.

HOLMES: A big change.

Q: You went to Tel Aviv, where you served for about two, two and a half years or so?

HOLMES: Yes. That was sort of exciting. As in those days, one day a cable came that said: You will report to Tel Aviv within ten days.

Q: Good God!

HOLMES: First of all, we had to look it up--quick, get an atlas, where is Tel Aviv? It was our first embassy in Tel Aviv and they were desperately desiring to staff the embassy. And I think they had had an illness or something and had lost an officer. This was, as I say, the initial embassy. Ambassador McDonald, who was a very prominent friend of Truman. Truman named him as our first ambassador. He was very pro-Jewish. He had been active in the American-Jewish community funds and organization. He was not a Jew himself, but a very well-known pro-Jewish person and a personal friend of Truman. So he opened our first embassy, and he had priority, I guess, in getting people wherever he needed them. And somehow or other, he chose me and said, "In ten days."

Q: Well, how does one get there? In 1950, it couldn't have been easy?

HOLMES: It was very, very interesting, we managed to get aboard a ship. It was an Italian ship that was going from La Guaira, the port of Caracas, to Milan, and it was sailing very soon, very, very soon. Of course, it was totally booked up, but through some friends and so forth, an agent and whatnot, we managed to get the doctor's cabin. The doctor moved out. The shipping line would do this sometimes, if people would pay the price. The U.S. government in those days, since I had these urgent orders, paid to install us in the doctor's cabin. I should mention, we had a three-month-old baby at that time.

Q: Oh, ho!

HOLMES: So it was quite a hectic time getting ready, getting the ship, going down to La Guaira, getting on. Now the cabin itself was luxurious; it was the doctor's cabin and it was quite spacious. And that was fun. The crew was wonderful.

Q: Oh, an Italian crew with a baby, I can't think of a nicer combination. Italians love babies.

HOLMES: Yes, so they would babysit for us while we went to dinner or lunch and so forth. And if we wanted to swim in the pool, they would watch the baby with us and so forth. But my wife was not terribly keen on this sort of travel, to the unknown Middle East with a three-month-old child, our first child. But we did it, as one did in those days. There was no question. We got this telegram saying we're going, and we went.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived in Tel Aviv? Give a little feel for how you saw the situation in Israel. In the first place, we recognized Israel in 1948, didn't we?

HOLMES: Yes, we were the first country in the world to recognize the new state. When we went there in '50, the embassy had been there for about a year. We had to change ships, of course, in Milan, and got a small ship that sailed down to Tel Aviv. And the first thing we did was have to pass the baby, in a basket, over the side, lower it down into a boat, because Tel Aviv was not a real port; it was used only by lighters. So the baby went down, and then we went down the side on a rope ladder sort of thing, down into this lighter, with a few suitcases, and they took us into Tel Aviv. That was our introduction.

Q: Oh, boy.

HOLMES: Well, it was a very exciting situation. Israel was still at war with its neighbors. Of course, it still is, even today, technically. But it actively was, then. There were blackouts every night. There were sandbags around all the entrances to buildings, public buildings and apartment houses. And so, if you went to a party at night, you went in the pitch black, and you'd feel your way around the sandbags to find the door and then get in. It was total blackout until you'd get to someone's apartment, and then there would be lights there, the windows all sealed. So we lived in sort of blackout conditions, which was very exciting, in a way. Now there were no air raids, there was nothing of that sort. But the Israeli government, of course, was not at all certain there wouldn't be. With good reason, because it had been a very tough war of independence, and their independence was precarious. So the blackout was rigidly enforced. When we would drive at night, we had little slits in the headlights, just tiny, tiny little slits, the absolute minimum of light. So that was sort of exciting after South America, very, very different...

But it was a very exciting time. The people of Israel were extremely friendly. The people that we dealt with in the Foreign Office were extremely well-educated, highly intelligent, proficient people to deal with. I mean, these were refugees from Germany, Poland, Hungary, or wherever, who had come to the new state. They were the elite, obviously, the intellectual elite who were in the Foreign Office. That was under Ben Gurion, who was

the prime minister. Moshe Sharett was the foreign minister, who spoke seven languages and at a reception could flip from one language to another just effortlessly in the receiving line. I was always impressed that he would jump from German to Hungarian to, of course, Hebrew, to French to English. A brilliant, brilliant man. So the quality of the government was incredibly high, and I was struck by that, I must say. Not drawing any invidious comparisons, but it was a type of brilliance that you rarely see in a government, all the way down through the Foreign Office, even to the more junior people. So that was interesting, and the whole situation was interesting.

While we were there, we traveled all over the country, with the assistance of the government. We had to go in convoys to the outlying areas; it was not wise to go on your own. We went to the Hula swamps up north that they were draining in those days, Stu, for agricultural purposes. They were channeling it into the Jordan River, draining the swamps. That was a big project. Took us all the way down through the Negev to the south. We'd drive cheek by jowl with Arab troops with machine guns, right along the border. It's a very narrow border, and the road goes right along the border.

We could get to Jerusalem once a month, the old city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a divided city, with barbed wire right down through the city. We could get to the other side through arrangements with our consulate general in Jerusalem. That is, they had to get permission from the Jordan government, and they would give us a certain time to cross the border, like a Friday afternoon. That was the typical time; you could go for a weekend. Then we would drive up through no-man's-land in Jerusalem. There was a little opening in the barbed wire, through this no-man's-land, which we were warned was heavily mined on both sides. So we'd stick to just the track. We'd drive along there, and as we approached, the Arab Legion, which was the Jordan army, would have machine guns trained on us all the time as we went along through no-man's-land. Then we'd get to their post, where they often spoke no English. They would have a list of border passings for that particular time frame, and it was all in Arabic. So the Arab officer would look at this list, and we would present our passports, and if he could find something in Arabic that sort of corresponded to Holmes, he'd let us through. If he couldn't, you couldn't get through. There was no way if your name was not on the list. That was the list that was arranged through, as I say, the Jordan Foreign Office, which would send it to the military people and so forth. So, once a month, we did try to get over, basically to buy food. We had the one baby, and food was extraordinarily scarce in Israel; there was very strict rationing. Sometimes a half a can of peas, for instance, would be a ration. You'd go and you'd bring a jar with you, and they'd pour half a can of peas and take your little ration ticket. So it was very rational, and they were spreading out the food they did have to feed the population. But it was hard, with a new child, to get the types of food that we particularly wanted. And so, once a month, we'd go over and load up with food. We could bring food back; neither side cared if we did that. They would inspect it. We would buy for lots of other people, always, lots of meat and vegetables and milk and just everything, and bring it back.

Q: What was your job in Tel Aviv?

HOLMES: I was supposed to be in the Political Section, but when I got there, though, there was a need for me to be in the consulate. So I was in charge of the consulate, which was very, very busy.

Q: I'm sure it was.

HOLMES: Those were the days of American citizens who had been over fighting for the new State of Israel during the independence war and now wanted to go home, and the question was, had they lost their citizenship? Our citizenship laws were quite strict: if you enrolled in a foreign army and took an oath of allegiance, you jeopardized your American citizenship. So we had lots of those cases that were handed to me, I remember, to deal with. There were all sorts of things, but the big problem there was American citizens of Jewish faith and the question of their citizenship. A lot had come over to help the new State of Israel, and a lot had voted in the first election. Now voting in those days was enough to make you lose citizenship. Well, not exactly, it was sort of a grey area.

Q: Well, it was very complicated.

HOLMES: It was complicated.

Q: But essentially voting, service in a foreign military, and an oath of allegiance all could jeopardize your citizenship. And we enforced it in those days.

HOLMES: We did enforce it. We tried to enforce it. But I used to get lawyers in and argue with me the fine points of American law and decisions, and already the law was beginning to change a little bit. It's changed a lot since then, I believe, but in those days, we were told by the State Department to enforce the law, basically. But then the question was: did a young man take the oath of allegiance? Because the State of Israel permitted people to be in the army without an oath of allegiance, knowing our immigration law. So the question was: did he or didn't he take an oath of allegiance? Well, that's rather hard to prove. There were certain lists available. So my time essentially was taken up with the whole question of American citizenship problems. I don't think I did much with visas at all; I think there was some other officer that handled visas. So it was sort of interesting.

Q: Well, I'm sure. Speaking as a veteran consular officer, I can imagine what you must have been up against. Later it became very powerful, but did you find there was what one could call a Jewish lobby in Congress that was giving you a great deal of trouble on taking away citizenship from these freedom fighters or whatever you want to call them?

HOLMES: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. There was a very powerful lobby in Washington, and it affected us in many, many ways.

Ambassador McDonald, you may know, was not very au courant with the State Department. His line of command was President Truman. And he would pick up the phone, frequently, and talk to President Truman whenever he wanted certain instructions.

And within a few hours, we'd get the instructions that he wanted, which he had arranged with President Truman. He had that close in. In those days, the State Department was torn on the whole Israeli policy. There were many who said we shouldn't have recognized the new state; we did it prematurely, allegedly, by certain elements within the State Department. It was alleged that the Middle East Division was pro-Arab, anti-Jewish. So it was a very interesting political problem. As I say, Ambassador McDonald was a very able person, and he utilized his friendship with President Truman very much and, in a sense, would circumvent the State Department if he felt that it was important. He was very desirous to help the new State of Israel progress in as many ways as possible, with our AID program (it wasn't called AID in those days; Point Four, I think it was called) and different things to assist the new state get its feet on the ground and develop. He was very interested in Israel as a functioning entity, a new state, and did everything he could to help the new state develop.

Q: Well, now, give a little of the spirit of the officers. All right, you have this well-connected ambassador, McDonald.

HOLMES: A political appointee.

Q: A political appointee, who was extremely pro-Israel. You have the Department of State, which was very dubious.

HOLMES: It was mixed.

Q: Mixed, but essentially a very practical, pragmatic approach was, you've got a lot of Arab countries, and you've got one small country that's going to be a thorn in the side. And now, forty-odd years later, it's still a thorn in the side and causing all sorts of trouble.

HOLMES: And you had a president who was pro-Israel.

Q: A president who was way ahead of his Department of State on this. Now here you are, an officer coming in with no particular commitment one way or another--you're not an Arabist, you're not of the Jewish faith, you've come out of Latin America. I think it's important to get a feel. How did you feel, as an officer there? Israel was a dynamic place. Did you get caught up in this? And not just you, but the others around you. And did you feel that maybe your colleagues in Egypt or in Jordan or in Syria were almost kind of the enemy? What was your feeling when you got into that situation?

HOLMES: I think you summarized it very well. First of all, the ambassador, McDonald, made it very clear that if people didn't agree with his mission, they might as well leave.

Q: It was really a mission in those days.

HOLMES: In his view, it was a mission, in that he was placed there by the president to carry out certain functions. In his view, it was to help Israel, okay? In those days, we had no military assistance or anything like that, but it was to assist the new state. That was his mission and his function, and he made it clear that's what he expected his staff to do. Once again, it was a small embassy, quite small. It was a new embassy, and there were very, very difficult living conditions. We lived in a beauty parlor, I remember that, amongst all the dryers and blowers and things. That's where we lived because we couldn't find anyplace else at first. We lived there six months, in a beauty parlor, with a new baby, in amongst all this machinery.

Q: What had happened to the owner?

HOLMES: The lady was a Hungarian, and she had gone back to Hungary for a while, for a long holiday. We were extremely fortunate, because up to then, we had to live with members of the staff in their homes until we found this thing. She was a hairdresser and went back to Hungary for a long visit, and said we could live there until she came back. So that's where we lived; it was tough living.

But I think the morale was high in the embassy. I think people absorbed this mission idea. It was an exciting place.

Q: Oh, of course it was.

HOLMES: The Israelis were doing all sorts of things. I mentioned the draining of the Hula swamps. Well, that was a tremendous project, but it was progressing. And they were doing all sorts of forestation work, and they were putting in irrigation, and they were having tremendous groves of trees and agricultural development, which was happening. You know, they didn't just talk about it, they did it.

Q: This was a natural affinity to the American can-do feeling.

HOLMES: Yes. They were dedicated people, and they were brilliant people, working hard. And, of course, they had all the kibbutzim movement, which we used to be invited to visit and see. The spirit was tremendous amongst the Israeli people, and I think the embassy absorbed that spirit. As I say, if somebody was anti, then I think he would not stay. I mean, I think the ambassador would suggest that perhaps he should move on.

In a sense, the ambassador was fighting about five other ambassadors in the surrounding countries. But he was an able fighter, and he wrote very well, and the backing of Mr. Truman in the White House sort of helped his hand. But it was a constant battle, in a sense, because some of the other nearby embassies didn't care much for Israel, and they would see it from their viewpoint.

There were frequent border incidents, the usual things, stealing sheep across the border, and incidents at night where there would be some firing on the border, and who fired the first shot? God, you know.

We were trying to assist Israel by bringing peace with Jordan, and we were dealing with Abdullah, the king of Jordan. Through secret negotiations, we did manage to have negotiations take place, secretly, across the border in Israel and in Jordan, by emissaries of Ben-Gurion and the king. I don't think they ever met, themselves, but their emissaries did. We were knee-deep in this, and this was a major desire of U.S. foreign policy, to bring peace with one of the countries. The feeling was that if they could get it with one country, then maybe you would start the process with other Arab countries, to bring peace. This was building up to a very hopeful point, when Abdullah was assassinated, which ended that possibility for the time being.

But that is what Ambassador McDonald was involved in...I shouldn't say full time, but a large portion of his time was involved in it. He personally with Ben-Gurion, and our ambassador on the other side, trying to do this. So I don't think people would fight that sort of thing; both sides were agreeable. That is, our embassy in Amman. I think we were both trying to get this to happen. That is, we weren't dictating the terms, but we hoped that if they would negotiate, maybe they could draw a border and establish relationships.

It made enormous sense from all sides, if they could get over the war period and have a period of cooperation. Israel had, as I mentioned, brains and ability for development, and they could help the other side very much. And they needed food; they would buy the produce of Jordan. So, economically it made a lot of sense. And then the Jordan River could have been used both intelligently and in a very good way, by both sides, in irrigation schemes. Elaborate schemes were developed by us and consultants and so forth, with the idea of helping both sides. It didn't come to happen; Abdullah was assassinated. I think it was Abdullah.

Q: It was Abdullah. He was the grandfather of King Hussein. I think the crown prince was not right mentally or something like that.

HOLMES: Yes, he was dealing, he was dealing, and they were gradually coming to the point where they might have achieved a peace agreement. The entire time I was there, that was our number-one objective.

Q: Were you in the Consular Section all the time there?

HOLMES: No, no. No, just at first. Once again there was that situation where there was a sudden need for me in the Consular Section. And so, when somebody else arrived, in x months, then I moved over to the Political Section. That's what I was slated to do originally.

Q: Because it was a small embassy, can you remember who the DCM and who the chief of the Political Section were?

HOLMES: [chuckle]

Q: Well, we can fill this in.

HOLMES: I remember Milton Freen was the labor attaché. He was very, very active in the Political Section. It was of course the Labor government there, his side was government, and he was a very able labor attaché. He was the son-in-law of a very prominent American labor leader. When I was in the Political Section, he and I worked very, very closely together; he was labor attaché, I was political officer. I was the only political officer.

Q: How did you deal with the Israeli government? What did you do in order to report?

HOLMES: Well, all the usual functions.

Q: But remember, I'm looking for somebody who is not familiar with how it works. What are the usual things that you do?

HOLMES: Well, a lot of dealings with the Foreign Office on whatever, all the minutiae, let's say, of relationships. Now there we had a lot of visitors. The ambassador told me he wanted visitors to be handled properly, and, as the political officer, my function was to be sort of in charge of visitors. And by visitors, I mean congressmen, prominent businessmen, journalists, a lot of political people. A lot of senators and congressmen come to Israel in great numbers, or they did in those days.

Q: They still do.

HOLMES: Still do, I'm sure. So I had to do a lot of the arranging of their schedules. And this took a lot of liaison with the Foreign Office, to be sure. And the Foreign Office was very good about it; they wanted these people to have a good view of Israel. And so this meant arranging for transportation, programs, visitations, where to go and when and so forth. These visitors wanted to see the kibbutzim; they wanted to see the countryside; they wanted to see this, that, and the other thing. And Israel was keen for them to do it. But we were operating under difficult conditions. They couldn't go some places because it was unsafe, so they would have to go with convoys. That meant liaison with the army to arrange protection for them. So that took a lot of time, as well as reporting.

Now we didn't have any threat of coups, as in Latin America, none of that sort of thing, but there were opposition parties. There was the Herut Party, which subsequently has become the government, but in those days was the opposition. It was headed by a well-known terrorist who had been involved in the King David situation, Menachem Begin. He was a member of parliament.

Q: How did you view him, as somebody sort of basically... You just put both of your thumbs down. He was sort of a scary figure, wasn't he?

HOLMES: Well, he was a well-known terrorist, there was just no doubt about it, and he was an extremist, whose speeches were...

Q: And Shamir had been involved with an assassination.

HOLMES: Shamir, oh yeah. But I don't remember Shamir, I remember Begin. Begin was the head of the Herut Party.

Q: Later became the Likud Party.

HOLMES: Yes, Likud is an umbrella organization, I believe, Herut and some others.

Q: But basically Begin was the...

HOLMES: He was the powerhouse. He was a brilliant guy. I did meet him, and he was very impressive, in a sense. I mean, mentally he was a very powerful guy. Of course, he was a young man in those days. One never thought he would ever become prime minister, I don't think, in those days. It didn't seem possible. The Labor government was well ensconced, well run, and it had all sorts of, of course, connections with the Histadrut, which is the federation of the labor organizations.

But we reported on all these things, the currents of the opposition party, debates in parliament, the politics of the country, which were very interesting and very intricate; they were not easy. You had the religious parties, which were allied with Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion was Labor, but if he got a certain number of votes, he was allied with the ultra-religious parties. And they had their own agenda. So we very much had to report on what their agenda was, their outlook. It was a very busy political time.

Q: I'm sure it was. Did you feel any constraints, which came later, maybe, that whatever you reported would immediately end up on the desks of either the Jewish lobby or the senators from New York or California who had large Jewish constituencies? This later became quite a problem. I was wondering if it was at that time?

HOLMES: I don't recall such constraints. A lot of it was setting the framework of a new government. It was a new country, so the State Department wanted information and information galore.

Q: You were just scooping up information.

HOLMES: Yes. What is the Teachers' Union, for instance, and how does it fit into the picture? Sometimes there were little strikes of different groups, so how does that fit? Why were they striking? The doctors went on strike at one point. Why? What is their political

influence? Each group had influence, in a way. I never could do enough reporting; I always felt there was more I would like to do.

Q: It sounds like a young political officer's dream. Here you were, in a new nation which was obviously on the front burner as far as American foreign policy. You were in on the ground floor.

HOLMES: It was very exciting. It was an exciting time to be there. There was an enormous amount of enthusiasm in the country, and idealism. For the first time in hundreds and hundreds of years, the Israelis had their own state, and they were excited about it. A lot of the people we met were out of concentration camps, escapees from the horrors of the holocaust. They had lost their whole family, many of them, and they were the only surviving member. But they were there in Israel, and they were totally dedicated to helping develop this new state. Tremendous idealism and enthusiasm.

Q: When you went over to Jerusalem, did you talk to our officers at our consulate general?

HOLMES: Not really. No, I didn't go over in a political mission at all. It was a food mission, plus tourism. We saw all the holy places, which was wonderful to be able to visit and to walk through the streets of Jerusalem, with no automobiles, you just walk through, as well as buying a few rugs and being a tourist, basically. Well, I met some of our people over there; they would invite us sometimes. But it was a constant flow. They knew we came over to shop, basically, and to be a tourist.

Q: How did your wife find this? I can understand her traumatic arrival and having to live with the hair dryers and all that. How did this work out?

HOLMES: Well, it was tough. It was tough, particularly with a young child and the lack of food. I remember we had cases of baby food under the bed. We finally found a small apartment and managed, one way or another, frankly, by paying in U.S. dollars, the only way we could possibly get it, which was illegal under our regulations at the time. (I don't know if I should leave that in or not.) There was just no other way. There was no other way. We got an apartment, which was very hard to get; housing was just incredible. So we moved out of the beauty parlor into an apartment, and that was nice. Well, it was one bedroom, but we felt ourselves fortunate, because it was on the ground floor and had a nice terrace, so the baby, a boy, could be out on the terrace, which was fine. It was right on a busy street, but the terrace had grillwork, so the baby could be out there and sort of watch the passersby, who would speak to him. The Israelis love children. So we felt, you know, this was wonderful. But it was tough, the whole thing of buying food three months in advance.

And then, too, it was just an awfully embarrassing thing that we would have food for the children, and the other people in the apartment, whom my wife got to know, didn't have food. We were told we can't possibly share it. Well, we did share it a bit, because

sometimes a woman would come down, weeping, and just say, "I have nothing to feed Yanni," who was the little boy who played with our little boy, you know, just little toddlers. And so, obviously... Under our bed were just cases of stuff, so we would share it to some extent, when we weren't supposed to. There were lots of things you weren't supposed to do, but frankly, I think the ambassador said, "You've got to live here."

Q: We've all gone through that.

HOLMES: We'd get paid in dollars, and through a New York bank account, we'd send a check or something. What the heck. I mean, I don't think it was too illegal. But we felt it because the ambassador would say, "These are the regulations." On the other hand, he tended to look a little bit the other way--he didn't ask. In those days, the embassy didn't help get a place. You found your own place; you went out and knocked on doors to find someplace to live. The apartment we found was owned by a prominent actor in the Hadassah Theater there (I think it was called Hadassah). He was going to live in it himself, but he liked the idea of some dollars that would permit him, then, to visit the U.S. and so forth, which he wanted to do, so we got the apartment.

Q: Did you have any dealings with any of the people who were in the leadership, particularly of the Labor Party?

HOLMES: Oh, yes.

Q: What was your impression of them?

HOLMES: Just the same as the government: outstanding people, devoted, able. The whole labor system is extremely interesting. It was a labor government, after all, and the labor unions controlled an awful lot of companies; the construction companies and so forth were owned by the labor union. It was fascinating, just to learn this. Once again, there was this voracious appetite back in Washington for reporting on what things are; they wanted information on this brand new state.

Q: There weren't really real policy divisions from a...

HOLMES: Oh, there were, there were battles. There was a leftist Mapam Party, which was to the left of Mapai. Mapai was the government. They were both labor, but there was a split in the labor movement. They were more leftist than what we would call middle-of-the-road. Socialist, but the others were more left. They weren't Communist, but they were more left wing.

So it was reporting on all these things, on all these currents, and then the defections. One would defect from that group to this group. There were maneuvers. It was a fascinating political scene, more than I could ever report. I just felt I had to report some of the highlights, but there were so many things I'd have liked to report more.

Q: Did the American labor movement, the AFL/CIO, intrude much into what was going on, sort of getting involved on one side or the other?

HOLMES: They were very, very close to the Histadrut, the Mapai Party. Each of the parties had its own cohorts in the United States, its own supporting elements and groups. For instance, the extreme religious parties had strong religious groups back here, fundamentalists, I guess you might call them, Jewish groups. So each had its supporters.

Basically we reported; we were not involved in any way. We dealt with the government, which was Mapai, the centrist group, Socialist. We dealt with the government, that's all. And we were right up to our necks. Busy. Busy, busy. It was a busy, busy place.

And these visitors took an enormous amount of time. The ambassador had told me, "This is just as important as anything else. Be sure that the visitors get to see what they want to see and meet the people they want to meet." He's probably right--it was politically very important, but when a senatorial delegation came, they...

One great visitor we had was Mrs. Roosevelt. I was assigned to be her liaison officer. Of course, they loved her in the country, they knew her. We had this wonderful two-week tour of the whole country, and I went along as her aide-de-camp, you might say.

Q: Well, how did you find her?

HOLMES: Absolutely fantastic. One of the most interesting, vibrant women I've ever met in my life. I've never seen such energy--from morning till night, energy. This meant orphanages, hospitals, schools, politicians--all day long, this was scheduled. The Israelis had one fault: they would tend to over schedule visitors, because they wanted them to see everything, and they'd put too much in. And she was not a young lady when she came. She was at the U.N. in those days. She came with a doctor, a young man who was her doctor, and he would be flaked out in the afternoon; he was exhausted. I was exhausted; everyone was. But she would go on. Incredible energy. And vibrancy. And wonderful warmth. I think it was her first visit there, and she wanted to see everything. She kept up with the schedule, even, which meant every half hour another group, with more flowers, more speeches, more little talks. And she just carried it off brilliantly. A fascinating woman. And then, in the evening, she would talk to us about her early days with Franklin, and the polio, just as though we were longtime friends. She had incredible warmth. Outstanding woman.

That's just one visitor. We had Senator This and Senator That. Congressman Powell, I remember, came.

Q: Adam Clayton Powell.

HOLMES: That was difficult.

Q: He was very controversial. In the first place, he was a black congressman at a time when there weren't many black congressmen. And he had a reputation as being a ladies' man, very much, but at the same time he was, I suppose today you might say, in your face, or more confrontational than was considered prudent in a still-segregated United States.

HOLMES: Well, there, he wasn't confrontational. He came simply to visit, the way so many did. But he was very demanding, let's say, demanding on embassy resources, which were limited. It was a small embassy. I'm sure now it's huge by comparison. But it was small, and we just didn't have a lot of things. But he was very demanding in transportation and arrangements and so forth. I remember it was a very difficult visit.

But not the only difficult one that we had; a lot of our senators and congressmen are rather demanding overseas. If you're at a big post, it can be handled. But at a small post, it's more difficult; we don't have the resources, we don't have Scotch whiskey, necessarily.

Q: This was the beginning of the coldest period of the Cold War. The Korean War had started; NATO was being formed. Did you feel any winds coming out of Siberia? Did Communism and the Cold War intrude much then?

HOLMES: I don't think, at all. As I remember, we were totally bound up in relations between the United States and Israel. The big push was to help Israel achieve peace with its neighbor across the Jordan River. That was our focus. I don't recall the other things at all; they just didn't enter into the picture. It was a question of Israel vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors, and Israel needing development assistance, which we were giving in different ways, and wanting to help Israel develop as a new country.

Q: In the discussions that you would have, sitting around a small embassy, how about arms for Israel? Because in those days, what the Israelis were getting was mainly coming from the French, I suppose, wasn't it?

HOLMES: I don't recall that being in the picture. The war was over, in a sense, though one didn't know. After all, looking back now, we can say, well, there was no real threat. But the Israelis thought there was a real threat of renewed warfare with its neighbors. And there were incidents on the border from time to time, trucks being blown up occasionally, you know. So it was scary. They had just gone through a very difficult war of independence, with a lot of people killed, and it was touch-and-go for a while. They were fortunate enough to carve out a certain area. But I don't recall their needing more arms, or asking us for arms.

Q: So that wasn't an issue.

HOLMES: No, I think that came later on.

Q: Well, you left there in 1952. Did you have an idea of what you wanted to do, or were you still letting the Service decide?

HOLMES: Well, I applied for a year's university training. I thought that seemed like a good idea. Actually, that was in labor economics at the University of Wisconsin. I guess I was influenced by my involvement in the labor situation there, and with our labor attaché, who was a very outstanding man.

Q: The University of Wisconsin was really kind of the mother of our labor attaché movement.

HOLMES: Right, right, Perleman was his name.

Q: But many other people, like Sam Berger, came out of that particular environment.

HOLMES: I think, in a sense, I welcomed the break for a year. I'd worked very hard in Israel.

Q: I'm sure you had.

HOLMES: It was very, very hard work. At the end of two years, I was glad to think of maybe a year in a university. The opening developed, the possibility came, and so I took it. So we went to Wisconsin for a year, graduate work in labor economics, which was a very interesting year.

Q: In labor economics, what were you getting at that period of time, '52, '53ish? What was the thrust of labor economics? Whither labor? And how were people in the academic world seeing this?

HOLMES: Well, Wisconsin, of course, was, as you said, a center, really, of labor academics. There were a number of outstanding professors, among whom was Professor Witty, who had been in the Social Security Administration at one time. And I just enjoyed absorbing the whole question of social legislation, labor economics, that type of thing. It was an eye-opener; I didn't know much about this sort of thing. I'd had bits of it in college, but not extensively, as one got there. So it was a wonderful year, a year away from the stress and strains of cables, just absorbing these seminars. In the graduate school, one got to know the professors; there weren't huge classes, there were small classes. Some were bigger, but some were small. So it was great.

Q: After you left labor training, was there an effort to turn you into a labor attaché?

HOLMES: I was called a labor-reporting officer, as a result of that training, not really labor attaché.

Q: Yes, but it was still a labor officer.

HOLMES: Yes, and I was going to combine that with political reporting, as I had done in Israel. That was what had steered me in that direction, because in Israel in those days, politics and labor were all intertwined, the whole thing. That's, I think, why I got so interested in labor as a political and social force in a country, and that's why I studied that.

Then I was back in the Department.

Q: For about a year.

HOLMES: Oh, yes, a subject that was rather painful. Those were the days when McCarthy was riding high, McCarthy and his minions. He had a particular minion right in the State Department, Scott McLeod, who thought that I was probably a security risk, and prevented my being assigned overseas, as I wanted to be.

Q: What was the problem?

HOLMES: It's very complex, and I don't know if I want to go into it all here.

Q: Okay, well.

HOLMES: My wife's father was a minister and had been a Socialist, as part of his approach to Christianity, and had visited Russia at one time with a group. And because of that, I was suspended.

Q: Good God.

HOLMES: And I had to prove that I was not a threat to the U.S. government, or my wife. And that took about a year.

Q: Oh, my.

HOLMES: Well, you know, in those days, I was not alone.

Q: Oh, I know you weren't.

HOLMES: It was not a very happy period.

Q: To catch a little of this, you know, I don't want to pry.

HOLMES: And then, also, I had come out of labor training.

Q: Oh, yes, I was going to say. But just to catch a little bit, how did you feel, at the time, that the Department treated you? Here you were, under fire.

HOLMES: I felt that they gave me no support whatsoever, that they threw me to the wolves. They indicated that if I would like to leave, that was the time to leave the Service.

I spent a good bit of that time in New York looking for a job elsewhere, with private business, which I didn't really want to do. It was the lowest period of my whole career. The Department didn't give me any support. They just said, "You satisfy Mr. McLeod that you're okay, and then we'll think about..." I was suspended; I was thrown out for a while.

Q: How did the security people treat you?

HOLMES: Awful. Awful.

Q: What did they do?

HOLMES: Questioned me at length about my father-in-law, whom I barely knew. We had met. I told you how we were married; I'd never met him when I got married. I met her at Fletcher, she went to Europe, she came back, and we got married here. I'd never been to my wife's home. On home leave from Caracas, I met him for the first time. But, anyway, it was questioning, questioning, questioning about my father-in-law, whom I had met briefly. He was a minister of the gospel--admittedly a liberal minister of the gospel--and believed in helping people with cooperative movements, things nowadays which are so...

Q: Again, I'm trying to capture a bit. I don't want to dwell on something that's painful to you, but I still think it's important.

HOLMES: I was thrown to the wolves.

Q: What were these security people like?

HOLMES: No understanding whatsoever of such things. They were dumb flatfoots, under McLeod, but they were extremely powerful in the Department. I think the Department was scared to death of them and of McCarthy. McCarthy was making charges, of course, of Communists in the State Department, and homosexuals or things of that nature. The Department was permeated with fear in those days. I had been overseas in Israel, then I had been in Wisconsin, so I was out of the stream. Then I ended my one year at Wisconsin and suddenly was hit with this thing. I hadn't even been in Washington enough to know. I mean, I knew what was happening, from reading the paper, but I hadn't realized how permeated the Department was with this fear of McLeod and McCarthy. The secretary wouldn't stand up to him, either.

Q: I came into the Department just about that time, in 1955, and I recall walking through the corridors around the security thing and noticing that the preponderance of nameplates had X in the middle, which in those days was a pretty good measure that they meant Xavier, which meant they came from a Catholic family, which meant in those days that if they were in security they probably were Irish policemen, probably out of New York, who were a scary breed as far as intellectuals were concerned.

HOLMES: I didn't detect much intellectual content in all the questioning, but I did detect a swaggering dominance of the Department. I found that the Department was scared to death of these men and did nothing to stop it. That's the feeling I had, that we were caught up in some silly thing like this, which was utterly ridiculous. My wife's family was a well-known family. He visited Russia with a group of people, and then was very anti-Communist. But he did believe in interracial meetings. He believed in freedom of discussion in his church and so forth and so on. And then to tar me with this brush was horrible. And it was horrible that the Department was so supine and didn't offer me any support. So I was suspended for, I don't know, four months, five months.

Q: When you say suspended, they didn't pay you?

HOLMES: No pay. Suspended without pay. They hoped I would resign, and I'm damned if I would. I felt I had no reason to resign; I was not disloyal because I was interested in labor as a force in the world. This was hardly anything bad, in my view. So I didn't resign.

Finally, there was one brave officer who sort of took pity on... (I was not alone; there were a number of people who were suspended or thrown out. Some were thrown out right away, others were suspended.) who sort of put pressure on. And then Edward R. Murrow was helpful. He was anti-McCarthy.

Q: A newspaperman.

HOLMES: On TV, too.

Q: Yes, on TV in those days, early TV. Murrow's was the first public voice, really, to raise itself against McCarthy.

HOLMES: Yes. So finally all these ridiculous...they weren't really charges, all these innuendoes were removed, and I was told, okay, you can come back into the Department. Just like that. I wrote, of course, long pieces of paper describing my background and, what I knew of it through learning at that time, about my father-in-law. Also, another thing, he was born in Australia, so he was an immigrant. He had come over forty years ago as an immigrant, as a young man. He went to the Yale Theological Seminary, so he had pretty good credentials. I had to write his whole history, from day one, and all this sort of thing.

Anyway, finally, somebody in the inner working--you never knew who, it was like casework sort of, innuendoes and things--finally I was told, well, all these, just withdrawn, okay, go back in the Service. So I came back into the Service, and then I went to Jo'burg.

Q: When you were going to South Africa, to Johannesburg, where you served from '54 to '57...

HOLMES: Jo'burg was '54 to '55, one year before I was transferred. That was an actual transfer; that's thirty-five miles, so it was an actual transfer to Pretoria.

Q: To Pretoria. So, South Africa.

HOLMES: South Africa, three years.

Q: Was this just a post, or had you asked for it?

HOLMES: It was just a post.

Q: You hadn't decided, gee, I've always wanted to be an Africanist.

HOLMES: Oh, no, not at that point.

Q: There weren't Africanists.

HOLMES: No, no, no. See, there wasn't much independence in Africa in those days. This was '55. No, it was just a post, an assignment. And I was so glad to get out of Washington.

Q: My God, yes.

HOLMES: I just grabbed at it, you might say. Besides, in those days, it was different. You were told where you were going, you didn't bid and say no.

Q: Well, you had the April Fool Report, didn't you?

HOLMES: Oh, yes.

Q: This was a post-preference report due the first of April of every year, sort of a wish list.

HOLMES: I didn't know anything about South Africa, no. The whole Middle East was closed to me.

Q: Could you explain why.

HOLMES: Having served in Israel, I could not serve in an Arab country, in those days, because my value would be nullified when the Arab government discovered I had served in Israel. I was suspect. We had stamps on our passports. Israel didn't put stamps on passports later on, but I had stamps on my passports.

Q: We couldn't send Jewish officers to Arab posts, and we couldn't send officers who had served in Israel to Arab posts, either.

HOLMES: Right, so the Middle East was closed to me. Latin America I had had. Basically, I think my wish list was another part of the world. I always wanted Europe (I guess everybody wanted Europe), so I probably had put down Europe. Having served twice in Latin America, I really wanted to see another part of the world, hopefully... This came up, and I don't know if I was asked; I was told I was going to go.

Q: What were you doing when you went to Johannesburg?

HOLMES: I was doing sort of Econ/Labor reporting. I'd had labor training at the University of Wisconsin, and I was assigned as sort of the labor reporting officer in the Economic Section. That involved my staying in touch with labor unions in the Johannesburg area.

Q: In those days, was apartheid fully in place?

HOLMES: Oh, yes, yes, it was fully in place.

Q: How did we deal with it? Obviously, a large segment of the labor that was being done in Johannesburg and around there that you reported on was black African.

HOLMES: No. No, no. Trade unions were split, of course. There were white unions and black unions. The black unions were virtually illegal; they only existed sub rosa in those days. So the white trade unions were very white and were very much part of the apartheid system, essentially.

Q: Well, you were reporting on the labor situation, not just the union situation, and a lot of the labor was...

HOLMES: A lot of the labor is black.

Q: Yes, but how did we play that at that time?

HOLMES: Well, as I say, the labor unions were very small, very, very weak. Strikes by black labor were illegal. So there were almost nonexistent. They did exist, but in a very minor way. So most of the trade-union reporting, which I did get involved in, was with white trade unions. So black labor existed, but it was only... [static] of the total picture of the industrial situation, let's say.

Q: Was there concern at that time by the AFL/CIO, which was very important within our labor reporting there? Were they concerned about black... at that time?

HOLMES: Not very much. Not really. I think they may have said something along those lines, but in fact not very much. Their contacts were with the trade union federations; that means the white trade unions. There were several different, competing federations, as I recall, but they were all white. One was more liberal and was disposed toward helping

black members. But it was such an awkward situation, because strikes by black citizens were simply illegal.

Q: But whites could strike?

HOLMES: Whites could strike, yes. But there weren't many strikes. There was a neat sort of arrangement between the unions and the employers' associations: basically, white labor was allied with white employers to keep the blacks down. The whites were scared to death of having blacks being able to perform skilled labor. They were prevented from performing skilled labor, that was... They could only perform unskilled labor. And the whites wanted to keep it this way, basically. So it was a funny trade-union situation. I'm speaking in very broad terms. There were exceptions, obviously.

Q: But, also, you were a representative of the United States from '54 to '57, which was just really before the civil-rights movement got going in the United States. We weren't as sensitized to this at the time.

HOLMES: Exactly. Right, we were not very gung ho in favor of black rights. We had good relations with the South African government. We deplored some of the excesses that took place, the beatings and the killings of blacks, which were common, the arrests in the night and all that sort of thing. But we gave lip service, I would say, to human rights in those days, more than real interest.

I was only one year in Jo'burg, by the way.

Q: And then you moved where?

HOLMES: Then the ambassador moved me to Pretoria, and I became the number-two political officer; there were two of us.

Q: The ambassador at that time was Edward Wailes, was it?

HOLMES: Yes, it was Ambassador Wailes.

Q: Could you give a little idea of what his approach was to the South Africans and...

HOLMES: Well, what do you mean? As you pointed out, this was before the days of much sensitivity to human rights. In a general way, we were interested in human rights, but political reporting was, as I recall, pretty much on the political parties; that is, white parties, the Nationalist government versus the United Party opposition. And it was cultivating contacts within the major political parties. There was a Liberal Party, headed by Allen Peyton, but it was a very small group of white intellectuals, let's say. I did meet Allen Peyton, we did have contacts with the Liberal Party, but it was not an electoral threat to anybody. It grew in time, and times have changed.

Q: What were our interests... South Africa...

HOLMES: Well, it was just basically to maintain good relations. We were importing uranium from South Africa, and many other minerals. South Africa is extremely well endowed with precious minerals of all kinds, including platinum and uranium and other things that are very important to our industry, and we were importing lots of it. We had a space-tracking station in South Africa, and we had naval visitation rights in Simonstown, which was a major naval base outside Cape Town. So I think our approach to the situation was: Don't rock the boat. Keep good relations with this important country.

I don't mean that we totally ignored the black situation. I think, now and then, we issued statements that we wished they would do a little more for the blacks. And we did give scholarships, where we could, to black people. You know, an exchange program. We tried to make the exchange program affect all the racial elements: the Indians, the coloreds, the blacks, and the whites.

Q: Well, ... the independence... the African countries.

HOLMES: That's right.

Q: ...

HOLMES: Back here, you mean. Right, our own civil-rights movement, which was just faintly beginning. So we reflected the American outlook. As I said, we tried, now and then, and we did give scholarships and leader grants, which I think, in the long run, have paid out, probably. Some of the leaders nowadays undoubtedly were among those early choices to get to the United States to get a college education or advanced degrees or whatever. So we didn't do nothing, but it was very moderate.

Q: Were you there when Henry Byroade became ambassador?

HOLMES: Yes, yes, I was.

Q: What was his form of operation?

HOLMES: He was quite different from Wailes. Wailes was a professional Foreign Service officer, a very adept, very smooth, very able man. Byroade was from a different background. He had been pulled out of Egypt because of his fight with Dulles over the Suez Canal situation, and this was, in a sense, exile for him, it was clear. But he plunged in and was very, very much of an activist guy who made lots of friends in various circles and so forth. Mind you, I was only there a fairly short time, about six months, when I was transferred.

Q: Where you came back...

HOLMES: I came back to the Department. I was in INR, in the Southern African section of INR.

Q: This was a pretty exciting time to be involved in African affairs, wasn't it, from '57 to '60?

HOLMES: It was a good time to be in INR, I must say, because there one had the advantage of having a little time to think about things as they were developing.

Also, I was chosen for the first African Seminar. This was a very interesting thing, that Africa was just beginning the whole movement toward independence all over the continent. And the Ford Foundation put up seed money, because the Department never had money for important and good things. The first African Seminar picked twenty young FSOs who agreed to specialize in African affairs. We had a chartered airplane, twenty of us, and we went to various African countries for three months, and studied in universities, and met, in those days, colonial government governors and colonial civil servants in the various places, to try to get a feel of the new Africa. We started in Ghana, then Liberia, then across the continent, and we included Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, then back up the west coast to Senegal, and then home, all in a three-month period. In each place, our consulate (we did have consulates in those days, which probably helped determine where we went, because we didn't have consulates in many other parts of Africa) arranged programs with the local university, or, if there was no university, with some similar study group that gave us an intensive program on the history and economics and geography of the country.

This is when we used to get those famous statements; I can remember the governor of Kenya saying, "Well, there won't be independence here for at least a hundred years. You young officers, I know you think there will be," as he entertained us at his wonderful palace, at his dinner party out of doors, with African dancers shaking around. But I can remember his statement. And this was typical of some of the states, although we did meet Tom Mboya, in Kenya, and had a private session with him, the government did allow this. We met Nyerere, who was brought up from Dar es Salaam to Nairobi and met with us for two days, and that was very exciting. We met alone, without any white government people around. These were still British colonial territories. But we did meet the people who were coming up and who did, of course, become the leaders very soon, within a five-year period.

Q: What was the impression that you were getting from... African Seminar about wither Africa?

HOLMES: Well, I think we found it extremely exciting and interesting. We felt we were in on the ground floor of what was clearly going to be a movement toward independence.

Oh, I should have mentioned that we also went to Lagos, Nigeria, which was very interesting. We met the man who became the first prime minister of independent Nigeria.

It was very, very exciting. We were meeting, we felt, the leaders of the new generation. We couldn't tell how soon it would come. We couldn't believe the governor of Kenya that it would be a hundred years, but no one could foresee, I don't think, the rapidity with which these countries, one after the other, became independent, usually with a minimum of rioting and fighting. There was some here and there, there was some nastiness. But it came very fast.

Q: ...

HOLMES: As a matter of fact, we did. Yes, I'd forgotten that. We did include a visit to...

Q: That was the one place...

HOLMES: Oh, yes that...

Q: Did you get any feel for that?

HOLMES: No, we didn't. That was very strict Belgian colonials... I don't think we met many blacks in those days. We met mostly white...

Q: There really weren't many blacks to meet, in a way.

HOLMES: I think they were in exile, those that... I think we did meet one or two, perhaps, but they were toadies. We could tell, that situation was very different from the situation in the British colonies, which were clearly evolving a political leadership group, as well as intellectual. I don't mean we met only politicians, we met journalists, we met some artists, we met other people who would be in the new Africa, the independent Africa. No, we were very disillusioned by Belgian Congo; it was rigid, it was extremely rigid.

Q: Do you recall what...

HOLMES: Well, let's see, it was while I was in INR; it was probably '58. I had been there about a year, and then people were selected from different parts of the Department. You had to have had some African experience. Fortunately, I had had the experience of South Africa, which counted as African. And the other young guys had been in Algeria or Monrovia. There weren't too many places in Africa in those days. But everyone had had at least one tour and agreed to serve in the African Bureau, let's say, for a while. Not the whole rest of our careers, necessarily, but it was understood that we had to take one or two African assignments. So it was a very exciting time.

Q: How were you accepted when you came back from the seminar? Were they saying, Oh, these guys are sort of bomb-throwers or something... the Department...

HOLMES: Well, certainly the African Bureau, which in those days was part of NEA, the Near East and African Bureau, but during that period broke away. Joe Palmer became the first assistant secretary for Africa, as I recall. So there was this recognition by the Department and by the U.S. government, by the president, that Africa was going to become more and more important, as witness the separate bureau. Then the roll of independence started within a year or so.

So, no, I think we all thought it was an exciting part of the world. And from then on, I stayed in Africa, as did a number of the other members of this seminar. And there were two more seminars after ours. Ours was the first, experimental. It worked so well, there was another one a couple of years later, and then I think there was a third one, financed by the Department. The first one was financed by Ford. It was fairly expensive, I suppose, since we had a plane at our disposal, which was rather good, it stayed with us the entire time.

Q: You really needed it.

HOLMES: Well, because we crisscrossed. There were no commercial flights, basically, you'd have to go into Europe and back down again. So we had our own DC-3, which was not the most luxurious plane, but it got us from...

Q: No, no, but it gets you from A to B.

HOLMES: And it was really fun. We felt we were on the cutting edge, basically.

Then, back in INR, it was very active, and what I really concentrated on when I came back was Rhodesia. This was the Rhodesian situation, the unilateral declaration of independence, that sort of thing. And then there were riots in Nyasaland, and Northern Rhodesia moved toward independence. I sort of was in that area of reporting.

Q: What was the thrust of the feeling at the time in INR with, particularly, Southern Rhodesia, which later became Zimbabwe, and Northern Rhodesia...

HOLMES: It became Zambia.

Q: What was the thrust of our thinking at the time about Southern Rhodesia? Where was it going?

HOLMES: Well, I think INR was ahead of the Department. In fact, I personally was involved in writing analyses of this, and I know I did predict independence for the three elements of the Rhodesian Federation, which was in existence in those days. It was quite a hopeful thing when it started, but it became...

Q: ... basically...

HOLMES: Those three, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, and Southern Rhodesia, were joined in a federation. Our official policy was to applaud and...

But my feeling, as I remember at the time, and INR's, was that this federation would not last. And I remember we got into trouble writing some papers in effect saying that it isn't going to last; it's going to break up. Independence will come first of all, we thought, to Northern Rhodesia, then to Nyasaland, which became Malawi, with Southern Rhodesia being last, because there was a much larger white element there and much more rigid control by settlers. The other two were more colonial, typical colonial situations. Southern Rhodesia was more like South Africa, in a sense.

But I can remember predicting the breakup of the federation, and being lambasted by the African Bureau, which didn't want to hear this. This was not in accord with the U.S. government policy, which was to support this wonderful federation.

Well, it was wonderful; when it first started, it had some good elements. But it was captured by right-wing Southern Rhodesian elements, frankly, who tended to control it, and it became more and more apartheid minded. They never called it apartheid, of course, and there was more freedom for blacks, but it was pretty rigid.

And I personally, and others with me in INR, tended to predict the breakup. I can remember getting rockets from our consulate general in Southern Rhodesia, in Salisbury, which didn't want to hear this and thought that the paper should never have been printed. The consul general was furious, frankly. I don't remember his name.

But INR had a good deal of independence, and that's the way we felt; I felt very strongly, and my colleagues did. Two or three of us had been on this seminar, we'd been to Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia, and we had strong feelings that Northern Rhodesia was really pushing for independence. We met Kenneth Kaunda while we were there, by the way, who became, of course, the first president and led the forces for independence, which did happen a few years later. So we were right.

But it was an exciting time, the whole African thing.

Q: I'm sure it was. Well, then you left in 1960 and went to Ethiopia.

HOLMES: Yes, to Addis.

Q: Where you served until '63.

HOLMES: Yes, that's right, a three-year tour.

Q: What were you doing in Addis Ababa?

HOLMES: I was chief of the Political Section in Addis. That was, of course, under Haile Selassie.

Q: Could you talk about what the political situation (if you want to call it that) was in Ethiopia in '60 to '63.

HOLMES: Yes, well, once again, it was a time of much ferment. We didn't get there on our tour, so it was all brand new to me. And, of course, it was one of the two African countries that had been independent for a long time, in which we had embassies for a long time, the other being Liberia. We had an embassy in Liberia, we had an embassy in Addis Ababa, and that's about it except for South Africa. In all these other places, if anything, we had a consulate. We didn't have embassies because there were no independent countries (I'm leaving out the northern littoral, the Mediterranean littoral). So I came into a well-established situation. The emperor was *the* emperor; he ran the country totally.

My particular job there, as a younger political officer, was to establish contacts with opposition elements, of which there were many, sub rosa, but particularly the students.

The emperor, in a way, was a very interesting person, a very astute man, or he wouldn't have stayed on the throne over fifty years.

Q: He started in 1930, and one way or the other...

HOLMES: There was an interlude, of course, when he was thrown out by the Italians, Mussolini. He took exile in England, and then he was reinstated after the war, and then kept on.

He was a mixture, as are so many people, perhaps. He was an authoritarian, in the old-fashioned sense; but he felt that the people were his children, in a sense. He personally held court; he personally handed out pieces of gold to people who needed help, in his audiences. We went to dinner at his palace, with flaming torches and solid-gold plate, with liveried people, one butler behind each chair, with the best French wines and so forth. That's one side of him, sort of the old-fashioned imperial ruler. He was an emperor, not a king, but an emperor. He felt this and he acted it.

On the other hand, he established the Haile Selassie I University. He financed that totally. Of course, there was no distinction, really, between private purse and government purse there; everything was his and everything was government, it was all intermixed. But he established this over the opposition of many of the nobility; the nobility didn't want this. Like any emperor, even he had political currents within the courtiers around the court. He established this and brought in a lot of young American professors. Inevitably, what came from this was that the young students became radicalized. That is, they wanted change. They were embarrassed by this rigid, 10th-century, 12th-century type of government, as they traveled for their higher degrees and so forth. And I will say, there were some very brilliant young scholars developed in this university, many of whom went to the States or

England or France for further degrees. They were embarrassed to realize that they were out of step with the rest of Africa. They became very much pan-Africanists, in a sense, in that they wanted Ethiopia to advance; they wanted a democratic government.

So it was a very interesting period. And the embassy tried hard, frankly, to get Haile Selassie to abdicate, to step down in favor of his son, the crown prince, who had been educated in England, who was a centrist moderate, let's say, who admired the British monarchy, who took as his model the British monarchy, so that he would have been not exactly a figurehead, but he would have been a constitutional monarch, with a prime minister and elections, real elections, to choose a government under his general suzerainty.

I think we could have prevented the revolution which came, but we were unsuccessful. The emperor, at times, would seem to almost agree with us: Yes, I've been on the throne fifty years. I can spend my declining years in England or Geneva or wherever, it doesn't matter where, or even in Ethiopia, and gracefully step aside. And his son, I think, could have held the situation, with the change.

The emperor didn't change. Just what we predicted. I can remember writing these dispatches, in those days, long dispatches, with analogies, that this was going to lead to... fairly soon. We couldn't tell when or exactly how. It happened just exactly... the young students, the young military officers, the majors downward. Above major, you got into the royalty, into the courtier system, the colonels and so forth. But below that, you had these young officers, many of whom were trained in the United States, or at least had post-graduate training in military at our various institutions, West Point or wherever, and came back. They were in league with the students, you might say.

Q: ...

HOLMES: What happened exactly, well, we couldn't figure it. Communism, exactly, but it was worse than we expected.

Q: ... How did we view Eritrea in those days?

HOLMES: Well, it had been taken over by the emperor, and I was there when it happened, actually. He simply, by decree... Well, first of all, he undermined it through powers of the purse, let's say. He was a very astute, able, ... politician, I would say, ... and, although you might not agree with his methods, which were sometimes very rough on those who opposed him (that is, the gallows or bullets to get rid of them, which was the old-fashioned way, after all, he was still a man of...), he simply took over Eritrea. And we all thought that would lead to trouble. During the period that I was there, there was a lot of ferment in Eritrea, a lot of ferment, but one assumed that, at least as long as he lasted, he could hold it, hold it by brute force. The army, the army.

Q: Well, we were sort held... to Cagnew Station, weren't we, in everything we did?

HOLMES: Well, of course, Cagnew was a terribly important thing. On the other hand, we could see that the explosion was coming, that's all, and that's why we urged him to step down. So as to save Cagnew, in a way, but by changing the type of government. That is, a constitutional monarchy is what we foresaw, which would be stable and still adapt to the demands of the youth.

It was more or less a split on age, the youth in army and in civilians and in professions or wherever versus the older people who were tied up with the government; they were the landholders. You had the three pillars of the society: you had the crown and the nobility; you had the landholders, huge estates; and you had the clergy. The emperor was the head of the church, the Ethiopian Coptic Church. So these were the three pillars. But outside of that, he had this ferment, the young people, the younger elements. So it was a fascinating period.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the nobility and the church...

HOLMES: Yes, yes. Mostly that would be done by the ambassador or the number-two man, the DCM. I was at the political level, sort of more reporting on, in a sense, the opposition.

Q: The ambassador was...

HOLMES: Arthur Richards.

Q: How did you find him? How...

HOLMES: Well, he was a professional Foreign Service officer, and he did the proper job, he maintained contact with the government. He was not keen on pushing the emperor toward reform, at all. His successor was Ed Korry, who was a very different sort of person. He was a journalist, a non-career man. First of all, he spoke excellent French. Richards did not speak French, so that was awkward. The emperor spoke Amharic or French, with very little English. Korry could speak French, and so could speak more easily with the emperor, and was much more willing to push the emperor for reform, for his own good and for the good of the country. There was this sort of thing, and I think Korry certainly recognized the need for reform, perhaps more than Ambassador Richards did. Ambassador Richards carried on, I guess, a certain tradition of maintaining contact with the government, which was the emperor.

The emperor was everything. The ministers came and went at the emperor's pleasure. They would be exiled overnight, and then they might come back in six months, or disappear, or...

Q: If you wanted information or something, were you able to go to the Foreign Ministry?

HOLMES: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You'd get the official line, of course, from the Foreign Ministry. But there were young officials that one could cultivate. Many of them were wholeheartedly with the opposition, although they had positions. They were younger. And it's almost entirely age, almost; there were exceptions to that, but...

Q: Were you able to have free discussions, at your home or something like that, with these students...

HOLMES: Yes. They were quite... But during my three years there, it became noticeably freer, that they were seeking out more and more. It was quite a change. The emperor had a very highly efficient secret service, and knew, I'm sure, that a lot of this was going on. And people from time to time, if they overstepped the boundary, might disappear or be arrested, which was fairly common. Sometimes they'd be held for two weeks, or six weeks, and then back into their jobs again. First of all, they would have to go before the emperor personally, to be chastised by him. If he felt their attitude was proper, then he would let them go back into their position as director general of the XYZ Agriculture Department or whatever. It was a personalized type of old-fashioned system. That's all I can say, it was old fashioned.

He was an outstandingly able guy, but he..., I think, couldn't quite appreciate the modern world and the demand for... constitutional government. They wanted real elections; they wanted to be able to vote; they wanted a parliament. There was a fake parliament, there were fake elections, but they wanted the real thing. And I don't think he quite understood the... well, obviously, he didn't, as we see what happened to him. He was brutally killed.

Q: What about our military there, our attachés and all this? How did you feel? Were they a strong force for don't rock the boat type of thing?

HOLMES: Well, for Africa, we had a very large military-assistance program. This, in a sense, was quid pro quo for Cagnew Station; it was ransom. It was never called that, of course, but it was clear that... And there was a lot of training. So our military people were very much involved. We had an MAP, a Military Assistance Program, large, over a hundred people, which is large for that... And we did a lot of training, a lot of equipment, trained the air force, brought in F-16s or whatever. F-14s or something.

Q: I think they were F-86s.

HOLMES: Well, I'm not a military person. There were always arguments, and the emperor always wanted more. And our main approach was trying to keep it within some reasonable bounds. The annual battle was the military-assistance budget, which was very, very important. And we always had to balance what we could get by with and keep Cagnew. The emperor, of course, would keep coming over and meeting with presidents. Presidents loved to receive the emperor; it was sort of fun, I think, and the emperor loved to get into the White House. Both sides felt it was sort of fun, I think, so he almost had an annual visit.

Q: Yes...

HOLMES: I guess, although we're a republic, I think we like kings.

Q: Yes, we do.

HOLMES: So he had entrée to the White House. And then, of course, once he came, there was always how to whittle down the demands for another twenty million dollars for God knows what, more tanks and more of this and that.

Q: Were we at all concerned at that time, the Political Section looking at this, about what the effect might be of...

HOLMES: Oh, sure, that was very much in our cognizance, that situation, and we devoted an awful lot of energy to trying to keep the border quiet, both our embassy in Mogadishu and... We worked together, in a way, on these things. We tried to have a restraining influence. And I think we... Incidents were constant, and some fighting every now and then was a little more than incidents, but on the whole, that situation didn't blow up, at least, which took a lot of work on both sides to damp it down.

Q: You left there in 1963 and went right to another African country.

HOLMES: That's right, direct transfer to Blantyre.

Q: In Malawi.

HOLMES: Well, it was then Nyasaland.

Q: It was still part of the federation, where...

HOLMES: Still part of the federation, which I have mentioned before.

Q: Where you had already predicted its fall. Did anybody say, well, here we are, still, or something like that?

HOLMES: Well, not really. I got to Blantyre, and the British governor was still there; it was still a colony (technically a protectorate, but it's about the same, really). But it was very, very clear that independence was coming. And it came within six months or so after my arrival.

Q: What were you doing there?

HOLMES: Well, I was a consul. You see, this was under the old structure. I was technically assigned to Salisbury, because this was rapidly changing. The British didn't

like the idea of our having separate consulates in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland because that would indicate we thought the place was going to become independent. They wanted us to be in Salisbury, which was the capital of the federation. So technically I was assigned to Salisbury, but on detached duty to Blantyre. It was a fig leaf. By then, the fig leaf was very thin, although technically I was assigned to Salisbury (detailed to Blantyre).

But that didn't last long, because, as I say, when I arrived it was very clear, within a very short time, although the date hadn't been set, but it was clear that there was going to be independence. There had been serious riots in Blantyre. The British troops had fired and forty-five people were killed... [static] but once they... the whole federal structure of government, the civil service and so forth, ended.

Q: What were you doing, preparing for an embassy?

HOLMES: Yes, preparing for an embassy. But while I was there, I was consul in charge, it was called, at the consulate.

Q: Did you find yourself... advisor...

HOLMES: We had good relations with Dr. Banda. We had good relations with the British. But... I was preparing for an embassy, basically. At some point it was raised to a consulate general... queen, which had never been... And then, within, I think, ... or ten months or some date after independence came... Prince Philip came down... the British flag came down at midnight... up... and I became...

Q: ...

HOLMES: Not really... moral support. There was... I think he wanted moral support. He didn't ask for it... well, of course, he was... he was not in a position to ask... I met with him frequently, he came to my house on occasion... other times I'd talk to him on the phone... He wanted moral support.

Q: ... United States...

HOLMES: No, he never... He, of course, trained in the United States... lived in... many years. He was very... In a sense, he was called back as a figurehead by the young... But he took over; he was not a figurehead. He was a very strong... Now... There was an attempted revolt by the young Turks, and he put it down forcefully. He was not... shortly after... while I was still there, it happened.

Q: ...

HOLMES: No, I don't recall... He felt that we were in favor of what he was doing... moral support. We had to walk a little bit of a tightrope. After all, the British are our... allies...

too strongly. I had very good relations with the governor... around the country... preparing... transition took place, although... He was...

Q: ...

HOLMES: ... Oh, well, that was one of those curious situations. Blantyre is and was a major city... commercial. It's still small; the whole place is small, everything's small. But Zomba was up in the highlands, and that was the British colonial capital, and that was about one hour's drive from Blantyre. Actually, I lived in Blantyre, but went to Zomba for talks with the governor. The governor lived there, as did the British administration. But Dr. Banda lived in Blantyre. So, I don't know what to say. As I say, I was assigned to Salisbury... to Blantyre, although the capital was in Zomba...

Q: ...

HOLMES: Sixty-five.

Q: You went back with the Africa Bureau. What were you doing?

HOLMES: First of all, I spent a year in the Operations Center, which is the place in the Department that never sleeps, that receives cables round the clock, particularly after hours, and decides what is urgent enough to merit calling somebody. We have the authority to call the secretary at home, which we have used on some occasions. Those were the days of the Vietnam situation, so there was an awful lot of traffic from Vietnam, with the secretary, of course, being terribly interested in it, as was President Johnson. So it was a very interesting time, because it was constant troubles or interesting developments in Vietnam. So I served one year in the Ops. Center, which is normal.

Q: It sort of burns you out.

HOLMES: Well, you work at odd hours, round the clock, and you take shifts, the midnight shift and so forth; you keep moving around in your time.

So then, from there, I moved back to the African Bureau and became country director for... Not at first. First, I was, I guess, country officer for Rhodesia and Malawi, something like that. This was a time of shuffling around in the Bureau, and then I did become country director for what was called Southeast Africa, which was Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and the Rhodesias, that area.

Q: You were there 1966 to '71. What was the...

HOLMES: Well, that was a typical job of a country director handling all...

Q: Were you there during the... UDI?

HOLMES: Yes, UDI, right. And we didn't recognize... The British never recognized it.

Q: Could you explain how we used the situation... Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, how this developed and what our attitude was...

HOLMES: Well, with the breakup of the federation, which started when I was in Blantyre, that was the first element of the three breakaways, once that happened, Northern Rhodesia followed very soon thereafter. So the federation broke into its three constituent elements, with the northern two, of course, controlled by African governments, but Rhodesia being controlled by white settler elements. There was an election in Rhodesia, and the more liberal party, headed by Todd, was thrown out and a much more rightist group took over.

Q: Ian Smith.

HOLMES: Ian Smith and the Rhodesian Front. They chafed under British control. I mean, they said, after all, the other two elements in the federation are independent, we want our independence, basically, we don't want to be a colony any longer. Britain moved slowly, I would say, and they just simply declared their independence at some point. The British, I don't think, ... would ever do that, but they did it. And then the British clamped down and refused to recognize their independence. We and most of the world followed suit and did not recognize them.

Q: What did we do then? Did we still keep our consulate general?

HOLMES: We had a consulate general there, headed by Paul O'Neal, a good friend of mine, who finally closed it down after about a year. There was a question of whether we should or not, and the British allowed us to keep it for a long while as sort of a listening post, one way of maintaining contact.

I think the British felt at first that this would be over with fairly soon, that these people would come to their senses and drop their independence. But it didn't work that way; they were very resolute, the Southern Rhodesians. There were sanctions applied to them by the United Nations, mandatory sanctions. I think it was the first time of mandatory sanctions, which we subscribed to. But, after all, they bordered South Africa, and the border was clearly open--oil came through, everything came through. So sanctions didn't affect them too much. It had a disruptive effect, particularly on their exports, but even then, they managed. It lasted for quite a few years, I can't tell you how long.

But all the time that I was working on that, that was *the* big thing, our relations, the whole UDI situation. What were we going to do? What was going to happen? ... the old throne or not? Would the British succeed? And also this developed into a political thing back here, with certain right-wing elements in our Congress saying we should recognize this good Christian gentleman, Ian Smith, who no doubt put the blacks down, and why are we bringing these good people down? There were delegations that came out and met over here. So there was constant turmoil during that whole period, over the whole question of

trying to maintain sanctions, which we did maintain, pretty much, until the end, I think, although the pressures were growing to drop sanctions, in Congress.

Q: When the Nixon administration came in and Henry Kissinger was sort of running the show, did you feel that there was a change in our attitude?

HOLMES: Yes. Kissinger, of course, was a much more active secretary. He personally got involved in trying to solve this situation, and also pressured the British just to end it somehow, to end it... recognize... But that didn't happen... Well, you know, there were endless meetings. There was a meeting aboard the *Tiger*, the British battleship, and they almost reached agreement, and then it fell through. But finally, the British earlier... There was a formula, there was a formula, a face-saving formula, which was arranged... I can't remember, I had gone by then. Of course, I read about it. Somehow it was... It ended on pretty well British terms.

Q: As far as Africa went, this was sort of the main show in Africa, wasn't it?

HOLMES: Well, the other African countries were very, very much against Ian Smith, of course. They felt it should be a really independent country, with free elections, which would mean a black government, as has happened since. So they were very much pressuring us to keep the sanctions going and to close our consulates to him, which we eventually did. They wanted us to close the consulates because they felt that that was a link to the hated Ian Smith regime.

Yes, we were under enormous pressure from black Africa. They had meetings, and the Organization of African Unity would always condemn, of course, Ian Smith. They felt the British should just send in troops and end this thing. But the British were not about to send troops. It was clear that they were not about to send troops to put down their own kith and kin, you might say. These settler families were well connected in England, particularly the Conservative Party. So, although they maintained this sanctions program pretty carefully, they never were about to put in troops, as the black countries thought they should.

So we were in the middle of this, in a sense. Although it was not our problem, what we did carried a lot of weight. So it was an interesting time, I would say.

Q: How about events in Kenya and Tanzania? Did you cover those, too?

HOLMES: Yes, but there were no tremendous problems there. Our attention was pretty well focused on the Rhodesian problem, because when it gets into Congress, as you know, then you get congressional letters, then you have to justify things and explain things.

Besides which, American companies were not keen on this, particularly some of our mining companies who had mining interests in Rhodesia. Their big thing was chromium.

A big battle over chromium. We had to have chromium for our military uses, for our defense establishment. Everything would collapse if they couldn't bring up the chromium from their mines there. But the embargo cut that off, and so they were pulling and hauling.

It was very much a domestic political issue. So the Desk, obviously, got involved in all sorts of papers and explanations, talking. It took an awful lot of our time.

Q: You left in '71?

HOLMES: Yes, '71.

Q: What did you do then?

HOLMES: I went back to South Africa as consul general in Durban.

Q: You were there from '71 to '75.

HOLMES: Yes, a four-year period in Durban as consul general. It was extremely interesting, because, of course, I had served in South Africa before, to see the changes. There were a lot of changes, although not the changes that have come more recently. Apartheid was even more rigid, in one sense, but there was clearly more opposition to apartheid within the black community. There were stirrings of all kinds within the ANC (African National Congress), underground elements, students.

Durban is in the heart of Zululand. The Zulu tribe is the largest African tribe in South Africa, headed by Buthelezi, who's still in the news. And one of my important charges there was to establish contact with Buthelezi, who lived a two- or three-hours' drive away from Durban. My predecessor had established good contacts with him, and I was enjoined to keep on with this contact, as one way of seeing what the largest tribe in Africa, at least, what they were thinking. Buthelezi was technically head of the ... couldn't stay in a white hotel, still, in those days. It's hard to believe how things have changed there. He would stay with me in the consulate residence frequently.

Q: ... important figure. How did you evaluate Buthelezi...?

HOLMES: Well, he was a very astute politician, a very able leader of his people, of the Zulu nation. As I said, we would go up there frequently. He had a parliament that met, and we'd go to the opening of parliament. It was very much on the British model. I would say he's pro-British, basically, or at least the British way of governing, let's say. Well, it was ... that is, the whole situation in South Africa, although it hadn't reached the point of this enormous change that we see nowadays, was still pretty grim for blacks.

That is, I knew Steve Biko personally. He was a student in Natal at the black medical college. The only black medical college in those days, in all of South Africa, was in Durban. Durban was sort of, in a sense, a liberal element. It's the only province that's

dominated by English-speaking people, so it has a certain tradition of British liberalism. And so it has various elements, the University of Natal is really a liberal sort of place. And you had this black medical college. And Steve Biko, of some fame now, who was murdered by the police there eventually, I knew him, he came to my home. I would see him and other students. And one had to be somewhat discreet because the South African intelligence services are very good. I know my phone was tapped and my mail was opened, that's almost routine. But one could meet these people.

Q: Was it implicit that you were to make contact with...

HOLMES: All elements. I think, I think, yes. By then, our policy had changed considerably from my first time there... essentially... all elements of the population... At first, white officials refused to come to our parties. But that was changing. Every party I gave was multi-racial; I just didn't give purely white... perhaps... dinner, possibly. But essentially all of my official parties were mixed, deliberately. I think, for the first year, the white officials did not come, but I think, by the second year, they did come. So there was some change going on.

This was a symbolic thing, but you know. There was an order that no white official would shake hands with a non-white; there was a written order at one point in South Africa. That changed.

During my four years there, I saw a lot of change on a personal level; that is, people would come and would talk with black people. Some whites would tell me, "This is the first time I've ever talked to a black person, except my household domestic staff. And, oh, so and so is certainly an interesting man," whether he was a journalist or a doctor. There was a growing black professional class, mostly who had been trained overseas and came back. So things were changing in that sense, although apartheid was still extremely rigid.

Even that changed slightly. I remember Buthelezi, by the end of my time there, could stay in a so-called white hotel. Before, he could not. He had to stay in a wretched little black hotel, which was really a filthy little place that he wouldn't stay in. And so he enjoyed staying in my house because he could find it amenable to him. But that did change; he could stay in the best hotel in town--not all hotels, but certain ones. So there were changes on the social level.

Q: Did you find that the Afrikaans society would close you out?

HOLMES: No, I had, how should I say, appropriate contacts with the establishment. The so-called administrator of Natal Province was an Afrikaner, whom I would meet officially. The head of the police, the head of the army were all Afrikaners, because these are appointed by the national government. No, I had correct relations with them, not exactly warm relations. Most of my contacts tended to be with others, non-official, you might say. In the university and the press and the church there were a lot of outstanding people. Now some of these people in these other elements were Afrikaners.

One of the most outstanding men I knew there, bravest men, was an Afrikaner professor at the university, a professor of law, who would defend blacks who were scooped up by the police and charged with all sorts of heinous crimes. He would go to bat for them. He was a brilliant orator, and I would sometimes attend the trials that were held in the provincial capital, Pietermaritzburg, about an hour's drive from Durban, just to hear him speak and needle the... But he was so brilliant and so well versed in the law, he succeeded very frequently in defending these people and getting them released.

So it's not all English-speaking, by any means. Many were, but they were not government people; they were non-government, but important people, journalists, let's say. The newspapers there were very open, English-language press, with some valiant editors and reporters. South Africa is a combination of things, rigid in many ways, but they did have freedom of the press more or less all the time.

So the background for recent developments was happening then. But I don't think any of us foresaw the enormous changes that the present president has brought about in South Africa.

Q: When you left in '75, how did you feel about whither South Africa?

HOLMES: I felt very discouraged. I really did. I had seen a lot of my friends arrested. Steve Biko had been. He hadn't been killed yet; he was under detention. But I had many other friends, who were brilliant young men and women (mostly men, it just happened, because of the situation) who had been educated overseas, who were terribly discouraged because the government was rigid. If they went too far, they could be arrested, they could be banned. I had a number of people who were friends of mine who were banned, which means sort of house arrest, they can't see anybody. They're not in jail exactly, they're living in their home. But this threat hung over them. These were extrajudicial things: there was no appeal, it didn't go to court, it was the order of a minister. And once you had a banning order, you were banned for a year or two years or three years. And it could be renewed; some people were banned year after year after year.

So there was great discouragement. I was discouraged when I left. I feared it would lead to a blowup of some kind, a huge blowup of black against white, a vicious, bloody sort of thing. I just couldn't imagine that the government would change as much as it has done. I think it caught a lot of people by surprise. I don't think I was particularly obtuse at this. Everything I saw was this repression, with the secret service very powerful. Informers. If you'd get two or three blacks around, they wouldn't even open up because they didn't know but what the other one was an informer. There were informer networks. It's easy to see why, because with blacks who were oppressed, to get a job or some money was very appealing.

No, it was discouraging when I left. I couldn't have imagined the changes that in fact have occurred.

Q: You left there in '75 and went to USIA.

HOLMES: Yes, that was fun.

Q: For about two years, '75 to '77.

HOLMES: Yes, this was part of the interagency swapping of people that the State Department every now and then gets excited about and does for a while. So I became deputy director for Africa of the USIA, not Northern Africa, but all of South Saharan Africa. That was great fun; I thoroughly enjoyed that. I visited almost every country in Africa. USIA typically has more travel funds than the State Department has, and not only did I not have to fight to get funds for trips, I was urged to go, by the director, who wanted me to go, wanted me to see the posts in person and visit them and see what their problems were. So I visited almost every country in Africa, not to inspect, but to meet with our USIA people, see our libraries, see what programs we had and what the problems were, what more we could do to support them back here. It was a really fun two years, to be with another agency. It is very closely aligned with State, obviously, because we constantly go back and forth with State. But I loved the fact that they had all these travel funds, and I traveled a lot.

Q: What was your impression of the USIA operations at that time?

HOLMES: Excellent, really excellent, given the funds and so forth. But I felt that everywhere, even in some of these small little capitals, ..., little places, ... and whatnot, there was the American library, and it was a real symbol of the United States.

Q: This was the main thrust, wasn't it, to...

HOLMES: Well, somehow the library was the visible source, yes. But beyond that, of course, we had the leader grant program, carried on largely by USIA, with the embassy, obviously, and we had assistance to newspapers; that is, material, background material, as needed by fledgling governments who wanted assistance and information and so on, the whole thing. But the library was the symbol, because that was open to the public, and there it was on the main street, usually, of these small places. Sometimes, they were very small libraries; other times, they were larger. But in the library, that was the focus. Then they had movie shows, they had lectures, with the leader grant program of American scholars coming out, sometimes, to these places.

Q: What were we trying to do? Were we trying to tell the story of the United States, or were we, in actual fact, more trying to foster democracy?

HOLMES: Both. Both. I think the two are inescapably intertwined. I mean, we are a democratic country, and I think we preach the democratic gospel. Some people say it's propaganda. To some degree it probably is. But the Voice of America is always very important, likewise, in getting the word about what's happening in the world. These small

countries lack access to the outside world, so they're hungry for contact, you might say. And this we tried to furnish.

Q: Did you find there was a problem in the francophone countries with our operation? Did the French sort of resent..., or at this point was there...

HOLMES: There had been in the past, much more than, I think, nowadays. They know what our operation is. I don't think the French find it... We don't attack the French, after all. There's some residue of that, perhaps, here and there, but I don't think it's a serious problem.

Q: It wasn't a major overtone.

HOLMES: No, no, I don't think so, because after all, these countries are independent, even though they're francophone and their leaders are trained in France and so forth, so we aren't going to subvert them. They ask for many of the things that we can furnish: scholarships, books, programs. I think they're pleased. And, as I say, we're not trying to subvert the French influence in any way; we're not trying to undermine it.

I think that in the early days of African independence, all the colonial powers felt that the United States, Jack Kennedy particularly, was out there fighting against them-- whether it was Belgium, Portugal, England, France, or Spain--because we preached the message, after the war, of independence, sure we did.

But I didn't feel that during this period, no.

Q: Your last post was Ghana, where you served from '77 to '80. How did you get that, and what were you doing?

HOLMES: Well, as usual for DCM positions, I happened to know the ambassador. I had served with him in South Africa; he had been in Cape Town as political officer, way back.

Q: Who was this?

HOLMES: Bob Smith, a wonderful, capable, outstanding officer, I thought. When I was back here and my two-year tour was coming to an end, I was looking for what was going to be next, and I got this marvelous cable from him, saying would you like to come here as DCM? His DCM was leaving and there was an opening. And I said yes, not that I knew Ghana very much. I had been there on that African Seminar, and I had visited there a number of times in my USIA job. As a matter of fact, I had seen Bob Smith there, as part of my visitation. So I went as DCM there.

And it was very interesting. I remember my arrival, Bob met me at the airport and said, "So glad you're here. I'm leaving in five days for delayed home leave. At last, I'm going to get my home leave!"

So I was chargé for two months, when I barely knew the names of the people in the various divisions of the embassy. But I got through it. It's not the best way to become chargé and run an embassy, which was very active, with a military attaché, with a large AID program, with the other agencies there and so forth.

Q: What was the political situation in this period, '77 to '80?

HOLMES: There was an unstable situation. When Bob was transferred to become ambassador to Liberia in '79, I was chargé once again. Then there was a revolution and President Hilla Limann came in. It was a military coup; rather severe fighting all around the embassy and around the various homes and so forth. We came awfully close to evacuation, very, very close, but we didn't do it. But that was an exciting period, wondering whether we should evacuate Americans because of safety concerns.

Q: What were American interests in Ghana when you came?

HOLMES: Well, I guess, no specific strategic interests. It was part of the general thing of maintaining good relations with Ghana, which has been a traditionally important country in West Africa, I guess because Nkrumah was one of the very first leaders when Ghana became independent, and he was a symbol of African independence, in a way, and he was involved with independence movements all over Africa. Ghana traditionally has had a large, well-educated community. Under British days, it happened that way, that there were a large number of Ghanaians who had university educations overseas, who now serve in the United Nations, for instance. There are a lot of Ghanaians who serve as economists and whatnot.

But not specific strategic interests, not like Cagnew Station in Ethiopia and that sort of thing. But it was helping them, and we had an AID program. It was sort of the typical things of relationships with this sort of important country. We had a lot of visitors from the States come to Ghana. So I would say, just sort of normal relationships, helping where we could. Their economic situation was not the best.

Q: Before the revolution, how did you find dealing with the Ghanaian government?

HOLMES: Ghanaians, as a people, are wonderful. They're open, they're friendly, they're pro- American. An awful lot of them have been to the States, or if they haven't been, they have relatives who are here, or have been, or hope to come. There's an enormous looking toward the United States. Although it's a former British colony, of course, and there's still British influence there, particularly the older people, the younger people look toward the States. It's the mecca. They're really wonderful people--open, friendly. So it was great.

My wife took a great interest in African dancing, and as a result of that, we used to go sometimes into the interior to small villages where they were having festivals. We'd be the only white people there, and there'd be large numbers of African people who had assembled for festivals. And they would treat us so well, just wonderfully; they couldn't do enough for us. They were delighted that we had come. As I said, my wife was studying African dance, under a teacher and so forth. She arranged these things, mostly, because dancing is part of their festivals, always. They're wonderful dancers, and they're wonderful musicians. They have very, very intricate music, particularly percussion, drumming. We got involved in that sort of thing, but my wife said she never felt ill at ease in Ghana, as sometimes she had felt in some other countries, at different periods. If she got stuck, there would always be somebody who would appear, to help her to get the car started, or fix a flat tire. She would go with some of her Ghanaian friends. She was very active in the Ghanaian-American women's group, sort of got that going. So she would get invited to these places. Sometimes I went with her, and if I couldn't, she would go with her Ghanaian friends and just loved it. She just loved Ghana.

Q: Would you talk about what happened during the revolution? Embassies in crises are always an important thing. How did this coup, or revolt, come about, and what were we doing?

HOLMES: I would say, with all its wonderful attributes, Ghana has an awful lot of corruption, which is not unique to Ghana, certainly, this is endemic in many parts of the world. But the corruption got really pretty bad. Then, in 1979, the government of the generals was overthrown by young officers and noncommissioned officers, led and inspired by an air force flight lieutenant, Jerry Rawlings, who wanted to put basically an end to the corruption. That was, I think, his main thrust. And to do that, he simply took over, in a typical military coup. There was some fighting in Accra. What can I say? He was successful. And we very soon established contact with him.

But this did delay the arrival of our new ambassador, Thomas Smith, who had been named. He [Lt. Rawlings or President Limann?] didn't want to think about such things as giving the agrément to a new ambassador. He was very busy with lots of other things, and so he said, "I'll get to that, I'll get to that," when we talked to him. But there was a long delay as he tried to take over the reins of government, to try to bring in reforms. Then there were trials of some of the previous people, and seizures of ill-gotten assets, including houses and so forth. So that it was a period of turmoil, and he just didn't want to have a new ambassador, at that point, arrive.

Q: Were we concerned, after a change in government... I can't remember, had the Liberian overthrow happened before this?

HOLMES: No, it hadn't. No.

Q: Were you, either under instructions or on your own, saying, I hope it's not going to be a bloodbath that won't do any good?

HOLMES: Yes, I think we took it very much in stride, the change. I think we recognized the new regime, a de facto recognition, fairly soon. I was permitted to deal with him as the power, the de facto head of government, which he was. We did counsel restraint, as we always do. I don't think there were any executions at all. [Generals Acheampong and Akuffo were executed.] I think there were some jailings, which is not so bad in Africa, because the full term is rarely ever served. I think we did counsel restraint, as we, I think, always do in cases like this. We're not in favor of executions, although there were gross transgressions, let's say, of fiscal sanity. There were people put in jail, and there was some grabbing of houses, ill-gotten gains. I don't think we got involved in that at all.

Q: When the coup happened and the firing went on, what happened to you all?

HOLMES: No Americans got killed, but there were some escapades where Americans were in the way of things. So we urged Americans to stay at home, the usual thing. We assembled a few who were in places that looked rather dangerous. But there was fighting in the streets, different elements of the armed forces. It wasn't a smooth, easy takeover. It got dicey at some points, because the water went off, the electricity went off, that sort of thing. We considered evacuation, but we didn't have to.

Q: Was Washington counseling anything at that point?

HOLMES: Well, they leave it more or less to the personnel on the ground, with the country team meeting constantly on what...

Q: Was this before the Tehran business?

HOLMES: Golly, I...

Q: Because that was towards the end of '79. I think, after that, Washington was not letting anything happen.

HOLMES: I think, before.

Q: I would assume it would have been before.

HOLMES: We never felt in danger from the government in any way, unlike the Tehran situation. We never felt any of that sort of thing. The danger was from soldiers, some of whom were not necessarily in total control of their officers, some of whom were drunk, let's face it, and firing around. And they did go after the Lebanese community rather severely. One embassy wife, they did invade the house. This was the wife of an officer, who was in the embassy at the time, working. And some drunken soldiers came into the house and, you know, it was terrifying. Our Marines had to go there and rescue her and get her out of the house, which they did all safely. But it was a nasty incident. Now that

was not the government's fault at all. This was a couple of drunken soldiers, frankly, who had guns. But you never know what they're going to do.

Q: No, you don't.

HOLMES: And they were looking for Lebanese. The Lebanese tended to live in areas where Americans lived, in some nice houses and so forth. And they couldn't always tell the difference, necessarily, between a Lebanese and perhaps an American.

Q: What would they do to the Lebanese?

HOLMES: Well, they were pretty brutal with them, in some cases. They tended to be the shopkeepers, and there were resentments, and they were trying to get them to leave, you might say. This didn't last long, and it passed away. But they got some and demanded some ransom, let's say, or fines and so forth. It was difficult. The Lebanese ambassador was very, very obviously worried about this situation. There were quite a few Lebanese living there, for many years, you know, they are shopkeepers and merchants. So that got a little bit dicey.

Q: You left there when?

HOLMES: I left in 1980. That's when I retired. I had thirty-five years in the Foreign Service. Frankly, they talked about another foreign post, but my wife just finally said, "We have a house in Washington. We have three kids. I don't see them anymore." We used to have the kids with us all the way. We haven't talked about that, but all the way through Africa, our kids stayed with us, until the time when I was back here in INR for that five-year period. We got them through high school at that point, and then they went on to college. But then they were not with us anymore. And she said, "Basically, I think I've had enough. I want to be in Washington."

This was a dichotomy. I could have had a job in Washington, but I just didn't want to work in Washington. I'd lost interest, after thirty-five years, in working in Washington again. So I said, "I don't want that, I want overseas." And she said, "I don't want overseas, I want Washington." So we compromised--I retired. I retired at post, and that was it.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much, Ed, this was great.

HOLMES: Okay.

End of interview