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

JOSEPH P. O'NEILL

Interviewed by: Thomas Dunnigan
Initial interview date: May 19, 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Corruption

State Department - Foreign Service Institute (FSI) - Thai Language Training 1968-1969
Award

Chiang Mai, Thailand - Political/Consular/Administrative Officer 1969-1970
Duties

Phitsanulok, Thailand - Political/Public Affairs Officer 1970-1971
MAAG
Thai army

Manila, Philippines - Consular Officer 1971

Cebu, Philippines - Consular/Political Officer 1971-1973
Operations
Marcos family
Muslim-Christian relations
Marcos' loss of control
Marcos' internal coup
Imelda Marcos

Calcutta, India - Consular Officer 1974-1977
"Harcos-Fletcher" matter
Vietnam
Environment
Naxalites
Relations with Indians
Indian atomic research
Mother Theresa
The Bengalis
Soviets and Eastern Bloc
China

State Department - FSI - Portuguese Language Training 1977

Lisbon, Portugal - Consul General 1977-1980
Azores

Teheran, Iran - Temporary Duty (TDY) - Embassy Takeover by Mob 1979
Shah ousted
Ambassador Sullivan
Evacuation
Brzezinski role
Khomeini

Iran military
CIA
Embassy attacked
Washington refuses to permit full evacuation
Close shave
Civilian mob
Staff differences

Thailand - Regional Refugee Officer 1980-1982
Vietnamese refugees
U.S. relief organizations
Pol Pot
Cambodians
Refugee Bureau
"Economic immigrants"

National War College 1982-1983

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - DCM 1983-1986
Staff
David Koren
Mengistu
Reporting
Security
Russians
CIA
General Vernon Walters
Timothy Wells
Stasi
AID
Famine
Senator Ted Kennedy
Corruption
Visas to "nowhere"
Lou Goelz
Ethiopian Jews
Cubans in Ogaden

Djibouti - TDY 1986
AID
French ambassador
Environment
CENTCOM general

State Department - Inspection Corps 1987-1989
Problems

INTERVIEW

Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan speaking and the date is May 19, 1998. Today I will be talking with Joseph P. O'Neill, who spent many years in the field of foreign affairs and served in some of the more difficult posts in modern times. Joe, why don't we start off by you filling me in a bit on your background and your education, your military service and your work experience?

O'NEILL: I was born in New York City on March 16, 1935. My father was a laborer for Consolidated Ditchdigger and my mother was a domestic in a (and she was very proud of this) very high class Protestant household. She remembers that the first time she rode in a limousine was when she went to get married and the "master" gave her his limousine to get to the church. I graduated, after leaving Power Memorial High School, from George Washington, joined the Army, as all the poor Irish did at that time, where I spent three profitable years. I learned one thing in the Army. I learned I didn't know very much and I learned I had a lot to learn. After that, I went to work on Wall Street. I worked on Wall Street until I was about 24.

Q: What sort of work did you do on Wall Street?

O'NEILL: I took care of all the administrative or "back room facilities" for two brokerage houses. One was up on Oppenheimer Avenue. The other was Eastman Dillion Union Security. I would ride on the A train from uptown Manhattan to downtown

Broadway and read the whole first section of The New York Times cover to cover, minus the editorials. One day, sitting in the subway, I said, "I'm so interested in what's going on overseas, why don't I go and join the Department of State?" This was 1960. It was at this time that the United States was expanding overseas. They were hiring.

So, I joined the Foreign Service in January of 1961. For a few months, I worked in the New York Passport Agency. I was sent to Vientiane, Laos, where I spent from 1961 to 1963 in a staff position as a communications officer.

Q: Had you asked for Southeast Asia, any particular area?

O'NEILL: I had asked for only three assignments: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Q: So, that was an interest of yours.

O'NEILL: That was my great interest. So, I went there in '61. We had Winthrop (Win) Brown, a great ambassador, stiff and upright, pure as the driven snow, a man who was not very happy with this new young President from not a terribly good family out of Massachusetts. Went back to see the President and came back and was his devoted servant from that moment forward. Could not believe what a fantastic gentleman Mr. Kennedy was. It was a great time. At that time, we had the former Governor of New York, Averell Harriman, coming through Laos to do all the negotiations for the Geneva Accords. He came out to see to the Geneva Accords implementation.

Q: Laos was a principal point of interest to the Kennedy administration, much more than Vietnam at that time.

O'NEILL: Well, it was the battleground. When Kennedy came in, he had a problem. The Lao communists, for want of a better term, were primarily nationalists, but the whole complication of people, plus pressure from the Vietnamese, who always considered Laos and Cambodia within their sphere, kept the pot boiling. In fact, if the French had not come in in the late 1800s, all of that area would have been Vietnamese. People forget that Laos asked the French to become their protectors. The French had defeated the Cambodians and the Thais balanced the French and the British off against each other. But at that time, Laos was the focus. Being in the "back room" in the communications, I recall at one time either reading or hearing a senior officer at that time saying that Kennedy was absolutely mortified that he couldn't find a couple of divisions to put in Thailand to threaten the Lao and the Vietnamese about coming in and taking over that country.

Q: Were the Lao themselves afraid of the Vietnamese?

O'NEILL: Always. They always considered their neighbors as adversaries or as predatory animals.

Q: Did that include the Chinese, too?

O'NEILL: Chinese, Thais, the Vietnamese, everybody. Somebody described Laos as a zoo for, people, mostly foreign, who were different. Vientiane was a really sophisticated culture city, not for operas, but for the people who were there. There were Corsicans, of course, involved in the narcotic trade. There were Legionnaires who did not want to go home. There were Italians, Americans, French priests and "ladies" from all over the world - Korean, Italian, Burmese, and many others engaged in the oldest profession. Chinese engaged in normal trade along with Thais and Vietnamese in a certain amount of harmony. So, you had all these people living close together, many educated by the French. Even the senior communists were educated by the French. Many had gone to the Sorbonne.

Q: How was your French? Did you have to use it?

O'NEILL: At that time, the Department did not train any of its [clerical] staff in French. But knowing I was going, I had gone over to Berlitz and invested the magnificent sum of $300 and learned French. So, when I went out there, I was the only clerk who could speak French. Because I was a clerk, I could go to all those disreputable places where officers could not go and where you could be drinking beer and Colonel Kong Lee would be sitting next to you or Premier Nastaban and his ministers at the Vien La Tre or to The White Rose to pick up the enjoyment for the night. So, I saw these people. I was in my most unsophisticated way, as Bill Hamilton and Phil Cadman (Bill Hamilton was chief of the Political Section. Cadman was the DCM.), [you might say, "useful"] because I could tell people who was in town and who was doing what at a very low, corrupt level.

Q: Did your communicator assignment involve code work or mainly pouch work?

O'NEILL: I was responsible for all the pouches, moving all the classified materials throughout town. Plus, I did some of what we called at that time "poke and tape" because all the communications were done by one-time tape.

Q: So, you were it in many ways.

O'NEILL: It was a fairly big code section. Arlene Monette was in charge and we had four of us on the State side of the communications office. The CIA had its side, so there were another four. We put out a lot of telegraphic traffic. Everything that happened in Laos, as you said a few moments ago, was important. Laos was considered by Kennedy at that time a place where he was going to put a line down. He just did not know how weak we were militarily. All he was able to bring in was, I believe, about two battalions of Marines, which he then sent up into the northeast of Thailand and they remained in

Udorn. I can't remember the other place, but it was along the border. He moved the Marines because the Thais were very, very upset. When the Marines came in, they were put in trucks and rolled through Bangkok.

Q: So people could see.

O'NEILL: Yes, they were put in trains and shipped up north. I went over to visit them because I knew one or two of the Marines who were from my old neighborhood. They were well-trained, able to do what they were going to do. But as one of the sergeants said to me, "If we have to go across the river, we'll inflict casualties because we're not coming back across." A sober assessment of the situation probably, very sober and very accurate. All they had at that time were M-16s. No, they didn't. They had M-1s.

Q: Still those World War II M-1s is all they had?

O'NEILL: They were carrying M-1s. They had 50 calibers [machine guns]. All the wreckage of the Korean War.

Q: I remember them well. Were you able to travel about Laos at all or were you confined in Vientiane?

O'NEILL: I got around a bit. One, because I was a bachelor and, two, I don't like to use the word "expendable," but I was useful. So, I got up to the "boondocks." I got up to the Plain de Jars and Luang Prabang. But I didn't get to any of the CIA bases. They were still "secret, off limits." They were being supplied out of northeastern Thailand.

Q: What were living conditions like in Vientiane at the time?

O'NEILL: Great. I know people will say, "Oh, they were terrible." But at some time (I can't remember when), all the dependents were moved out of Vientiane. It was sometime in '61 and they came back in '62. The wives stayed primarily in Bangkok, most of them. A few of them went back to the States. So, a two family household evolved. The gentlemen had their families in Vientiane and they had their families in Bangkok. There was plenty of food. There was plenty of booze. There were nightclubs, whorehouses, and of course, very, very interesting work because everybody came through there.

Q: What was the morale like?

O'NEILL: Winthrop Brown kept morale very, very high. He knew what was going on and, except in one case where one of the officers tried to have a relationship with one of the Marines, he had a laissez faire attitude. He himself was straight as an arrow and he knew that some of his officer weren't. One of his officers who later went on to be Consul General in Marseille was notorious for his liking for the ladies. There was nothing vicious about it. He just loved them, all colors, all sizes, all shapes. He enjoyed Marseille for years afterwards.

Q: Given the situation at that time in Laos, Joe, was there fear among the staff as to their own personal security? Where there any terrorist incidents?

O'NEILL: Once the ladies and the children had left, I think, the question of fear sort of evaporated. Of course, during one of the coups, they had blown the whole front part of the embassy away. There were shootings in town, occasionally. But most of the fighting was upcountry. Of course, officers who went upcountry understood that the danger was there. But there was no terrorism factor like there had been in other posts where I would serve in the future.

Q: Was there an anti-American feeling? How did the Lao feel about our staff?

O'NEILL: The Laotians were great. They really didn't care one way or another as long as they were left alone. They were sort of bystanders in a fight in their own country. So, they really didn't care. Nothing seemed to bother them at all.

Q: That was your first time in Vientiane. In 1963, you went to Vietnam. You went to Hue, in fact, which is halfway up Vietnam.

O'NEILL: Hue was important for a number of reasons. One, it was the family home of the Diem family or the Ngo family (I don't know how you want to call it during this interview). Let's call it "Ngo Diem Nhu's family." His brother was the Archbishop of Hue. Another brother was the governor of Hue. His other brother was his political advisor. Of course, then there was Madame Ngo Diem Nhu, who was probably the only man in the family. So, it was all...

Q: So, they were well-connected in Hue.

O'NEILL: Well-connected. They were a Mandarin family with one terrible cross. That was, they were Catholic. They were always considered outsiders. People forget that the Ngo Diem Nhu family had his older brother killed by the communists previous to his coming to power. Ho Chi Minh had offered both an apology, retribution, or recompense, and a position in his government but Diem would not take it. He had his own idea of who he was. He was a Mandarin. He came from a family. Ho Chi Minh was nothing in his eyes. This was the classic... He was more Mandarin Chinese in mentality than Mao Zedong. He was born, I think, about 300 years too late. I remember, when I asked to go to Hue-

Q: Oh, you asked? I wanted to get into that.

O'NEILL: Yes, I asked George Roberts, who had been the political officer in Vientiane, Laos, and then had returned to the Department to become a personnel officer. He knew me and I wrote him. I said I wanted to go there because I felt that there were going to be an exciting place. Old George, who later made ambassador, wrote back that I was really going to sort of an isolated, not terribly important post, and it was just going to be very quiet.

Q: We had a consulate there at the time.

O'NEILL: Yes. John Helble was the consul there, who was very, very unhappy with what was going on and who reported back to Washington about how things were. So, when I got there. Jerry Greiner was the chief of station. It was just the three of us. We covered everything from Quang Tri to Quang Ngai and what eventually became ICorps. I spent two years in Hue and then two years with AID working on Da Nang.

Q: You went there for State though?

O'NEILL: I've always been with State. I was given what was considered a tremendous promotion with this assignment. I joined the Foreign Service as a Foreign Service staff 13, (GS-4). I had made GS-5 the same year. I was going to take over a GS-7 position. Man, my career was just starting on an upswing. I went to Hue and became the budget officer, the administrative officer, communicator, and the officer who prepared certain political work, even though I was not an officer. I was still staff. I didn't become an officer until years later.

Q: Was there a military threat there at the time that you arrived?

O'NEILL: There was a MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] mission there. I remember, there was not a great threat there at that time. In fact, all the military officers would hang on and hang on in order to get a combat infantryman's badge. The only way that you can do that is to get involved in a firefight. So, they were always out on patrol. This was '63. In '64, it got a little more heavy. Then, of course, the Marines came in later. What happened was that the period of time, only the Viet Cong were involved there in that area. The NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, did not come down yet. They were not terribly involved.

I have two stories that I'll tell you about this. One, after John Helble left, there were a number of people who came in there. John Negroponte, who had come up from Saigon. He was out of Hue visiting the other provinces and I was left there, and the CIA guy was there, a new fellow. He came charging in. I did their traffic also. He said, "The NVA has come across the border." I said, "No way. Everybody says they're not coming. They're going to stay in Laos. They're going to use the Ho Chi Minh trail." "They're coming in. I got to report it. I'm in a terrible bind here. Negroponte is not here." So, I said, "Okay, I'll send it out. I'll send it out immediately. I'll send it only to Saigon."

Q: Then, Saigon will decide whether they want to send it to Washington?

O'NEILL: Yes. I sent it out and I slugged it from CIA for CIA. It was the first time I had ever done that. I sent it out "NIACT Immediate." By the way, I would code it up and then we had a Vietnamese fellow who sent it out by CW [commercial wire]. The incoming messages would be handled the same way. The cable was "headed" so that all would know what was coming was important. Don't delay processing. So, down it comes. Then

the panic sets in. Some types of phone calls could never get through between Hue and Saigon. This time, all the calls got through. The messages consisted of "What the hell is going on up there?" “I sent a cable. That is all I know.” “I can't talk anymore.” Mendenhall (chief of the Political Section in Saigon) called; he was upset. I told Negroponte what had happened when he returned from the field. He said, "There goes my career." I said, "Oh, no, I headed the cable from CIA for CIA.” He said, "Are you sure?" I opened up the safe and I showed him the outgoing tape. He never forgot it. The report was accurate. The NVA was coming across the border from Laos.

Q: [Negroponte's] career wasn't harmed by that?

O'NEILL: No. He's the only ambassador who has been vice consul, consul general, and ambassador (pro consul) in Honduras and later Manila.

Q: Did you ever get any visits up there from the ambassador or others?

O'NEILL: Yes, we had all the ambassadors up. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and Max Taylor came up. Kissinger came through also.

Q: So no congressmen?

O'NEILL: No congressmen. They never came up. After John Helble left on assignment, he was replaced by Sam Thomsen. Tony Lake, later NSC advisor to President Clinton, was assigned to Hue for some months. He, by the way, was a real political force, as was Halpern when they were in Saigon. People forget that “Rolling Thunder,” the big bombing missions into North Vietnam was in part run by Halpern, he of the Pentagon Papers fame. You see the conflicts that later occurred as both Halpern and Lake left the government over Viet Nam though they were “hawks” when they were in Vietnam. When we were in Hue, the leader of the opposition was Trich Tri Quang, who was the senior Buddhist monk in the country and who was running the opposition against, first against Ngo Dinh Ngo, and then against us while we were there. Trich Tri Quang used the consulate in Hue as a conduit to the United States government, first through Sam Thomsen and finally Tom Cochran. Tom Cochran was our last consul in Hanoi in the 1950s and later our last consul in Hue. I worked for Cochran again when he brought me back after Tet.

Q: He died about a year or two ago.

O'NEILL: He was our consul general in Da Nang. The problem in that area was the conflict between the Diem family, that was conservative Catholic, a minority family in a majority Buddhist country. Diem had no sensitivity toward the people with whom he had to live and work. The Diem family had a very bad idea of how to rule people. They ruled Vietnam as if they were in the 1600s in China. Other problems included Madam Ngo Dinh Nhu, the sister in law of the president, who was the de facto ruler of the country. She was tough and opinionated. I am reminded of [Russian Queen] Alexandra of Nicholas and Alexandra - narrow minded. The same character - women, which is not

going to sound politically correct - who were only interested in protecting their husbands, keeping them in power without regard to the long term interests of the husband or the country.

Q: In her case, her brother-in-law.

O'NEILL: Her brother-in-law. The Buddhists wanted to take back their country and I can understand this. Most of the Catholics in North Vietnam or a significant portion did not come from South Vietnam. They were refugees after '54 from the North. It just did not work. Nobody should also in any way think that Ho Chi Minh was an agrarian reformist. He was a nationalist communist dictator cruel to his own people in the north. One only has to look at what he did for North Vietnam vis a vis what Diem did for South Vietnam. North Vietnam was always, under the French and under the Chinese, the richest part of the country with all the natural wealth. The South had the food. The question later developed of how these two parts of the country could survive economically. I think, until about 1964, the State Department was the body that moved the foreign policy in Vietnam and then came General Westmoreland. Westmoreland was as narrow minded as any general I've ever read about. He makes McClelland, the Civil War general, look like a brilliant, opportunistic Stonewall Jackson. There was a great, great general there at that time by the name of General Walt, a United States Marine Corps general. He had started two programs. One was called "Kit Carson." This was a program whereby a Marine squad or a Marine platoon (but no bigger) was integrated with a Vietnamese squad or platoon. They would each feed a meal to the other every other day. Lunch would either be Vietnamese or American. Then the next day the opposite. They would live in the villages and they would stay there for six to nine months. It was good. It worked for about seven, eight, nine months until NVA finally crossed the DMZ. When the NVA came across, they were too big to handle [by the smaller] units. [Such small unit tactics were] good if they were going to fight guerillas. When the NVA came, Walt said, "Look, we can't defend the whole damned ICorps with what I've got, which is about two and a half Marine divisions. Let's do this. We will protect the DMZ down along Route 1 and from the coast in about 30-40 miles, 50 maximum, all the way down. We will then have a major road, the railroad, the sea, and the major cities, and the most fertile land and at least 75-80% of the population. We will hold this. We will protect this. We will fight in the other parts. We will then build Adrian's wall. When we see them sort of getting up together, we hit them with everything: the planes, the task force, etc." Our friend Westmoreland's idea was that we would have a war of attrition. We would kill them. The Viet Cong/NVA would not be able to take the pain, he thought. As we saw them, we would go out and kill them. They would not be able to run and hide.

I see two things wrong with this. One, we could not afford the casualties. You can see the results of this in the Powell Doctrine today, which is, you arrive on time, you don't cause any trouble, and then you leave on time. If something is accomplished, okay. If nothing is accomplished, so what. That is the result. Now, here you have this long fight. There is no way we could win because Ho Chi Minh and his army were willing to fight to the last Vietnamese in North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

Q: They were not going to fight to the last American.

O'NEILL: We lost this war politically in part. There were many other reasons, when Robert Kennedy ran for the Senate in New York and said, "John would never, never fight in Vietnam the way we are doing now... We should not be there anymore, etc." Again, another misconception. Remember the reason that our friend, President Kennedy, was in Texas was that he had to carry Texas in the coming election. The last political remark he made before he was shot was, "Lyndon, at least we'll have two states: Massachusetts and Texas." He was going to be accused in the next election of losing another Catholic country afer "losing" Catholic Cuba. It was thus necessary for him not to lose Vietnam. Recall that the Catholic hierarchy never supported Kennedy; they knew the family and his father. He could not have carried the Catholic clergy if he "lost" or abandoned "Catholic" Vietnam, even though Vietnam was not Catholic, but Buddhist.

Q: That would make '64 a very difficult fight for him. When the Marines landed near Da Nang there, did that-

O'NEILL: They landed at Phu Bai just south of Hue.

Q: Did that increase your work or not?

O'NEILL: Believe it or not, Tony Lake was one of the officers who went out to meet the Marines as they came flying in. At Phu Bai at that time we had a big listening station. We were listening to everything the Viet Cong [did]. We also had a big VOA station out there which was broadcasting all over Vietnam. So, the NVA were coming down. The Army people who were there couldn't hold it. We just had the Tonkin Gulf [incident]. Even if we had not gotten involved in the Tonkin Gulf, the Marines would have come in to protect these stations. So, they came in. The only problem we had was local problems with fights between the Army troops and the Marines in the bars in town. We got that settled out by giving them every other night in town. On Sunday, they couldn't go into town and they each had one day to themselves.

Q: Real diplomacy, Joseph!

O'NEILL: Yes. The other thing was, the Marines were very good. I went out to stay with them off and on. Negroponte and Sam Thomsen were busy with other things. There were only three of us. We had to take care of these people out there. I would go out. I speak New Yorkese and the Marines and the Army quite understood that. They never knew what my rank was, thank God. By that time, I think I had made FSS-8 (GS-6).

Q: You were a diplomat to them.

O'NEILL: I was the diplomat. I was the fellow they should pass very politely at the restaurant.

Q: How was morale at the post when you were there?

O'NEILL: We were so busy. By that time, by the way, they had a really excellent USIS [United States Information Service] guy in there, Bill Stubbs, who spoke Cambodian and French. We also had some German doctors up there. They were all killed during Tet. Bill is retired now. There was a police advisor who wasn't terribly good. He felt that the way to stop this whole thing was to give all the police officers shotguns and let them kill every NVA they saw, which didn't last very long. Morale was fine. All of us were bachelors or "temporary bachelors."

Q: I was going to ask whether or not there were dependents there.

O'NEILL: No dependents. So, not all of them, but I would say a significant majority of the officers had household arrangements. We had a daily telegram. You had the consulate and my house next to it. So, everyone would write their portion of the cable for whoever was the officer in charge, whether it was Sam Thomsen, Negroponte, or Lake. They would type it out and put it together. They would go over and sit in my house, which was in the consulate compound. I would sit down and would "poke it out." It was on an old fashioned, old, manual typewriter with a "crypto tape" I typed pretty close to 50 words a minute. The rest of it would take about an hour. Then we'd wake up the Vietnamese CW operator, who lived in the compound with his six or eight children (He now has a restaurant here in Arlington.) and was in the French colonial army for a number of years. He would "pound it out." Then we would all get up at eight or nine o'clock the next morning and start all the many things that had to be done. There would be the administrative things or maybe seeing the demonstrations out around town. Some of us would be going out to make trips out to Quang Nai or down to Da Nang or whatever. Remember, we did everything by road. There were no helicopters. There were no short trips. So, you would leave and it would be four days, maybe five, depending on convoys and the rest. We would go to Da Nang through the Hai Van Pass, a long, dangerous, and torturous ride. We would stay in Da Nang and operate from there. It was time consuming and there were many days, weeks, months if I think about the whole two years, when the senior officer in charge of the consulate in Hue was a Foreign Service staff 8 (GS-6).

Q: Did you travel in jeeps?

O'NEILL: Jeeps. No armored jeep, but we carried sidearms. I carried a Swedish K and a 357 Magnum, which I would lay on the seat beside me. Very often we traveled with interpreters. John Helble, one of the great officers in the Foreign Service, would take a driver with him. I generally drove myself. I don't recall taking a driver with me. Sometimes I would go with another American. In fact, I think I was the last American to drive from Hue up to Lao Bao. Lao Bao was right on the border with Laos. That was in '64.

Q: In 1965, you were moved to the CORDS [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support] program at Da Nang. Tell us a little bit about the CORDS program. What was that intended to do?

O'NEILL: There was an Army colonel in charge, Sam Wilson. CORDS was the hope that we would help the Vietnamese administer their government in an efficient and democratic way. From the State side, we got, I think, in general, some excellent officers. [From] AID, we had a mishmash of ex-Army officers, contractors, and I do not know what. We had fishery advisors, education advisors, sanitation advisors on everything and many of the advisors did not know their jobs. Sometime in this period, I got to know the French consul general in Da Nang, Monsieur LeBouef. He said something which I have never forgotten. He said, "You have more administrators in my consular district (which was the equivalent of ICorps) than we had in all of Indochina prior to 1954." He was correct; we would have an American sitting with almost every Vietnamese official above the rank of deputy district officer. It was foolish. I ascribe this primarily to Westmoreland, who had by that time taken over both the military and the political side of the war. He did not understand either the U.S. military on the ground or the Vietnamese. It was badly done in every way. During this time, 1965-1967, I was the advisor [to] the mayor of Da Nang, but I did other things. It was difficult to control all the advisors who reported to Saigon.

Q: Had you asked for this assignment or was this just-

O'NEILL: I'm not quite sure exactly how that happened. I know that a number of senior officers knew me and they had offered to bring me on to AID as an officer. I said, "No." But then they had started to ask State people to be detailed [to AID]. So, they asked me to stay on detailed to AID. I think there was a mistake made there. I think the AID people thought I was an officer because I was the only staff who ever was an AID advisor. There were refugees coming into Da Nang. I helped with some of this. But again, there was rampant corruption. Some of it, we should just have left alone, but we focused on it. We let a Buddhist group come in. We would give them cement and roofing. We couldn't account for all of it in an audit, but we would see a beautiful pagoda going up. Catholics would come in and they would do the same thing. There would be churches built. There might not be a water well built, but there would be a rectory for the priest, a room for the monk, or there would even be a whorehouse built. We would worry about that stuff, but at the same time at the port, tons of material was disappearing. Somebody said (and I'm sure it's accurate) that if we had used all the cement that had been purchased and sent to Vietnam, we could have paved the whole country. There were ships sitting out there at Da Nang waiting to offload for three or four weeks, some for months. They were short loaded. They were selling cement from off the ship. It was awful.

We did, I think, a couple of things wrong. One, we sent out a conscript army to Vietnam. You cannot fight a guerilla war with a conscript army. Two, most of the Army (There were exceptions, were ticket punchers. They knew exactly to the minute when they arrived and when they were going home. Most of the Army never saw combat, never heard a shot fired in anger, and were very pleased not to. Counter that with units like the Airborne divisions or the Marines. The Marines spent 13 months there. There were terrible casualties among the Marines; they kept most of their people in the field.

Q: That's their tradition.

O'NEILL: That's their tradition.

Q: They're all fighters.

O'NEILL: Even those who were in the back, who were in the rear, always wanted to get some front line time. You have to again note that toward the end of this, many of the Marines were not volunteers. They were drafted. Still, they were able to imbue in them this difference. That war did not have to come out the way it was. Much of the problems, of course, were in the States over Watergate and the rest and politics within the political parties. There were ways to mitigate the sufferings out there. The important thing about this whole Vietnamese war, whether we should have been there or not, people did vote with their feet. Whenever there was a fight coming up, I had never, ever seen people flee away from us to [the Viet Cong] before a fight. I never saw them running the other way from us. We would be coming up (and I spent a lot of time with the Marines and others) and I never saw them heading out toward Viet Cong country.

Q: That's a good indication of where their sentiments were. Were you there when the Marines' air base was attacked and so forth at Da Nang? There were some very vicious Viet Cong attacks I gather.

O'NEILL: That was the Tet offensive. Is that the one you're talking about?

Q: No, this was in '65 when they shot up a lot of helicopters and destroyed...

O'NEILL: They snuck in, yes. But again, that was overconfidence by the Marines and sloppiness. It happens all the time. It happened in Beirut. They sometimes forget to do the necessary like Roman Centurions. They were all going out to fight some stupid bunch of slaves (Spartacus) and they forget to put up night defenses. They get sloppy. It happens all the time. It's very difficult.

Q: It's human but it happens in the military, too, doesn't it? Was our consulate in Hue attacked while you were there or not?

O'NEILL: No. Again, the USIS building was burned down. I was there when it happened. I remember alerting people by CW what was happening. I think we sent that one in the clear. I can't recall. Bill Stubbs was over at the USIS building getting his people out. The burning was done by university students who wanted the Americans out. Many of them wound up being murdered in the Tet offensive. They saw their saviors coming and didn't know that they were going to wind up in the grave. Anyway, he was over there getting his people out. Tony Lake ran from the consulate about 600 yards up to the USIS building to make sure that Bill Stubbs and his staff got out. Then, finally, they came in one by one to the consulate. We sat there in the consulate listening for this tremendous (by our standards; it was only a few thousand) mob move down to the consulate.

Q: Were there no police, no military?

O'NEILL: The Vietnamese authorities did not interfere at all. So, we sent home our staff, one of them Tuy Cam, a beautiful young lady who later married Jim Bullington (later ambassador), who came after me; Joe Nguyen, one of our great Foreign Service nationals, whom we found out a few years ago was a member of the Vietnamese intelligence organization. We sent them all home. We sat there. The question was, what were we going to do if they came into the building? We had all our weapons sort of sitting around. We hadn't decided what we were going to do.

Q: We had no Marine guards?

O'NEILL: No Marine guards. There was us. That's another thing, I think, that people forget about the Foreign Service, especially at that time. All of us, Frank Wisner, John Negroponte, Tony Lake, John Helble, all of us traveled throughout southern Vietnam without guards. Some of us were captured. All of us were shot at. Steve Ledogar was under mortar attack a number of times. Gil Sheinbaum, who was down in Hoi An, was shot at a number of times. I was shot at. We were very lucky not to have been killed. I now think about Negroponte, Sheinbaum, Wisner, and Lake. They're all my age or a few years younger. One would not even imagine these guys driving through guerilla held areas. If I had to count up how many times I've driven through areas which were considered hostile, I would need more than my fingers and my toes. But we did. Foreign Service officers did. They did it then. Regrettably, we don't do it as much as we used to.

Q: So, [the mob] never came to the consulate?

O'NEILL: They came and they streamed in front of the consulate. But they did not come in. I still don't know why they didn't come in, but they didn't.

Q: When you were communicating out of Hue, were you able to communicate with Washington or only with Saigon?

O'NEILL: The instructions were that we sent everything to Saigon. Saigon would pass it on. I think, in a way, it was this way so that Saigon would have control over what went out. We had really tremendous officers in Hue. We first had John Helble, who told us in '62 and '63 how deep and difficult going into Vietnam would be. At that time, we were able to go straight into Washington. But at a certain time he was told not to communicate with Washington directly. After that when the other officers came to Hue, we sent everything down to Saigon. I think some of the cables were not passed in whole to Washington. I think they were excised or they were made parts of other cables. At least, I think, the flavor and the passion of the officers' writing was best.

Q: There was fighting in Da Nang in those years between the South Vietnamese and anti-government forces. Could you say a little about that?

O'NEILL: In ICorps, we had a very good general, Nguyen Chanh Thi. He had been a

sergeant in the French colonial army and had risen through the ranks. He was not well educated and not from a "good family." Very honest, decent - he made a fine Vietnamese first division, the best in the army. Then he was moved down to Da Nang to take charge of ICorps. Everybody was very, very pleased with this. I think he was moved down to ICorps at our insistence because he was so good. Other generals were fighting for power in Saigon. They were not terribly interested in who won the war. It reminds me of Chiang Kai-shek, "I'd rather kill Mao Zedong than Japanese." This is what was happening. He cut most of the corruption in Da Nang. We had the port at Da Nang, which was always corrupt, but he cut the corruption. He started to become very popular among the people. So, there was a big fight over this. Richard Holbrooke, later assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific and ambassador to Germany, was one of the officers in Saigon at that time. I remember having a conversation with him. In Saigon, the politics was that General Thi had to go because we had bigger fish to fry. We would replace him with a better general. Highly unlikely. Highly unlikely. We did, by the way, replace him with a good general who eventually died in a helicopter. I said, "You know the reason that this general has got to go. One, he's not married. He doesn't have a family. He has no future in this country." Holbrooke said, "You don't understand." Maybe I didn't understand. We were caught by the people who were our allies and did not, as the French or the British would have done, send them away. The French would have sent them off to some whorehouse in Paris. The British would have sent them off to Asmara or the Seychelles for a pleasant exile. But we did things stupidly. It goes on. We want people to behave in our image. People in the rest of the world act for their own interests. It just doesn't work.

Q: Was any of the fighting between the South Vietnamese based on religious considerations, Christian versus Buddhist, or not?

O'NEILL: Not at that time. I must admit that (again, politically incorrect) many of the more competent officers were Catholic. Was this for a historical reason, i.e. that the French had trained them and then that Diem promoted them? No, it was strictly over power. There were, of course, the tinges of religion, but that was only as a mask for the people. Only power.

Q: You had an exciting time in Vietnam. Then in 1968, you went back for language training in the Thai language. Did you ask for that?

O'NEILL: I was still staff. As one of my officers wrote in my efficiency report, I was really much too big for my britches. They owed me because by that time the President had personally presented me with the Department's Superior Honor Award at a White House ceremony with the band playing and all the rest.

Q: Well, that's very interesting. Was that President Johnson?

O'NEILL: Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Q: Congratulations.

O'NEILL: Thank you. Brought the whole family down. It took place in the White House Rose Room, etc.

Q: What was that for in particular?

O'NEILL: That was for four years of not getting myself killed. At that time, the Superior Honor Award was the highest award given by the Department of State. I was still willing to serve in Vietnam; I did not want to leave the area. The Department felt that I had spent too long in Vietnam, almost four years, and had too many personal reasons to remain there. I said that I would be happy to do something else and suggested that I learn Thai. This threw the Department into a tizzy because they knew that I was not an officer and a staff had not to that time taken a hard language.

Q: They put you in language training as a staff?

O'NEILL: Right. I did about five months. I was sent up to Chiang Mai.

Q: Where did you get your training, in Washington?

O'NEILL: Yes, at the Foreign Service Institute over in the old FSI building in Rosslyn. Then, I went up to Chiang Mai, spent two years there, did a lot of political reporting for the consulate.

Q: Were you still staff?

O'NEILL: I was still staff. I did all the consular, all the administrative, plus some of the political reporting. We had a political officer up there, but I would do some of it.

Q: Who was your consul general?

O'NEILL: Wever Gim. A guy named Don Elson was the number two, and me, and then there was a big CIA station there. They were supporting the Thai border guards, which was under the patronage of the King's mother. They were involved in all sorts of things: trying to keep an eye on the opium traffic and the communist insurgency. Again, speaking Thai and being a bachelor still, I did a lot of traveling. So, I would go and see all the American citizens around, and [otherwise] became useful.

Q: American citizens in north Thailand were mainly missionaries?

O'NEILL: Missionaries. Very few businesspeople. There was a university up there. Then there were Thai communists in our consular area. At the end of the two years, Ambassador Unger, who knew me from Laos because he replaced Win Brown in Laos, after being DCM in Bangkok, [as] ambassador, had now returned to Bangkok as ambassador.

As my tour was finishing up, they couldn't find anyone to be public affairs officer in

Phitsanolok [Province]. The guerilla war was starting to blow up there. They had a CIA base stuck away in the hills. The ambassador was not overly pleased with the lack of control he had over that area. I was looking for a job. I spoke Thai. I think I got another promotion as a staff officer. I think I was an FSS-7 by that time (GS-8). So, again, fortuitous circumstance, I went down to Phitsanolok as the branch public affairs officer responsible for six provinces, but did primarily political reporting. I did a lot of USIS reporting and USIS work, but the main thing was to be a liaison with the Thai Army Third Division. They had a MAAG. The officers were there for a year or a year and a half. They had their families. They were not efficient, motivated, or good.

Q: These were American forces you're talking about?

O'NEILL: Yes. That there was a small team. Then they had a Air Force station there that did refueling. That was right in the center of the county. So, there were probably 150 military floating around the area in various states of undiscipline. An occasional CIA guy would come through. The ambassador, I think, was uneasy.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

O'NEILL: Leonard Unger.

Q: He was in Bangkok?

O'NEILL: By that time, yes. So, I think that was one of the reasons he wanted somebody down there to replace Dick Usher, who was leaving. So, I came in. I did a lot of reporting. Then again, it was very fortunate, nobody knew I was staff except the ambassador. I was just a State officer who was sent down there. The people didn't know whether I was a State officer, CIA, or the ambassador's hatchet man, whatever, but I spoke Thai and got around.

Q: Who wrote our efficiency report?

O'NEILL: Ben Courtney wrote the efficiency report.

Q: And he was...

O'NEILL: A USIS officer. But Ben knew what I was doing up there. I was very, very good for them. So, I traveled those six provinces. I liaisoned with the Third Army.

Q: What was your impression of the Thai army?

O'NEILL: The Thai army had not fought in 20 or 30 years. It was involved in politics. It really wasn't a terribly good army. But it was also not a brutal army. It did not "bang on" its own people. Thailand has been blessed these many, many years with a great king whose idea of putting down insurgency, was to build roads and water wells in the area. He would bring water and schools. He himself would go. Nobody touches the King,

nobody. So, when these people had roads to bring out their food, water in which to grow their food, and a possibility of school for their children, what could the communists offer? The army offered some type of security. Once a person gets a small little truck where he can put his family up front and his goods in the back, the communists can't beat it. I think, over a period of time, the Thai army became better. It will never be a great army because it doesn't have anyone to fight. When it has to fight, it does so reluctantly. The common soldier is a peasant soldier. He's in for a short period of time and he's out. That's the end. Most of the generals are more interested in their portion of whatever it is that they get out as corruption, etc.

Q: Unless you have time for me to something further to add about that tour in Thailand, let's move on to 1971 when you moved to the Philippines.

O'NEILL: What happened was, I got sick toward the end of my tour in Thailand. I had a mild case of something exotic. I also had trouble with my eyes, all for the first time. So, I had a rather long time at home. I really never wanted to go to the Philippines. I thought the Philippines was a sideshow. Also, I was being sent out as a consular officer. Again, one of those hybrids, as a consular officer first and not yet an officer. So, when I went out to Manila for a short period of time. When the position in Cebu could not be filled immediately, I was asked if I would go down to do the consular work. Again, my reputation of having had done political reporting, etc. was still fairly well known. So, I was sent down to work for Dan Sullivan. Dan really was more an inside man. His wife, Margaret, was there and the children. He knew a lot of people in Leyte, which was further north. My predecessor had done some reporting, but was not overly industrious or interested. So, I put together the consular section, which was in some sort of disarray. It wasn't a terribly difficult thing to do. I had to learn the situation very quickly. Then Dan asked me to go out and see some American citizens who were in jail in the south on criminal charges. When I went down there, as a matter of course, I went-

Q: In the south, you mean down in Mindanao?

O'NEILL: Mindanao and down into Davao and the other areas. When I went visiting, I normally, as in any other post, went and did my business: I saw the Governor, I saw this man and that official. I came back and I wrote up my consular work and separately I wrote my political [observations]. Cebu was so outside the mainstream of the regular Foreign Service that we had no classified communications. We had a one time pad. So, we would have a once a week courier. All our reporting was done by memcons or airgrams. I preferred the memcon because it gave me a lot more ability to say what I wanted to and it got [to] people who made policy. After about four or five months, we start getting notes back from Washington saying, "Hey, these are good things, but why does it take so long?" Bill Hamilton was DCM in Manila, the same Bill Hamilton from Laos. He said, "I want to see everything that comes out of there because I want to make sure it goes with what we say." We then, with the acquiescence of Washington, sent Washington a copy of our reporting direct to the desk. Then the desk started to complain to Manila about the delay in receiving Cebu's reports. So, Manila was caught in the middle. After that, they just simply ignored us and let us do our work.

Hank Byroade was the ambassador in Manila. He and Imelda Marcos had a platonic love affair. It was platonic and it was a love affair. It was very difficult for anyone to get anything through to him about how bad Marcos was running the country. Dan Sullivan was an FSO-2 and was close to being selected out. I think I was an FSS-6. We were really in bad position with the people in Manila.

While this was all going on, I had started to build up a tremendous number of contacts.

Q: Did the people in Manila come to visit you?

O'NEILL: Seldom if ever. [When they did], they would come down on the Air attaché plane. They would spend a couple of hours and go right back. I don't think they ever spent more than two days in the whole south.

[Nevertheless, we were getting a goood picture] of what's going on. Our sources start telling us all sorts of things. We start finding out details of what was going on. Who is doing what to whom, where the money is, what sort of corruption there was. We were in really, really deep trouble [with the embassy until] the Foreign Service inspectors come through. This was especially true when we started to secure really excellent information on the Marcos family. [Our reporting saved Sullivan]. The inspectors said everything we were doing was wonderful. Dan finally made [FSO grade]one.

Let me add just one other thing that I sort of forgot. I think one of the reasons that I was such a viable candidate for Cebu was that I had met a lovely Filipina. The embassy and the Department at that time, for a variety of reasons, were not all in favor of (Mind you, this was 25 years ago) interracial or even international marriages. The fact, I think, that I was 36 or 37 at that time made no difference. I was still staff. They gave us a very bad time. I guess they thought that if I was down south, that would be fine. At that point, I did apply and asked for permission to marry. Remember the old deal where you had to send them your resignation and then you had to wait for 120 days? Well, we arranged to be married on about the 125th day. It gets close to, I think, about the 100th day. Dan Sullivan signed off on a cable which said, "The vice consul would like to know whether he is going to be allowed to marry because if he's not, he has to tell the cardinal who is going to marry him that he will not be marrying the vice consul of the United States, but just a United States citizen if he does not have permission to marry." Seventy-two hours later, the permission arrives.

Q: Congratulations.

O'NEILL: You saw one of the results of that marriage. (Tiffany Hope, age 12, was introduced upon the arrival of Mr. Dunnigan.)

Q: Yes, I did. Tell us a little bit about the fighting in the south between the Muslims and Christians. That was going on at this time, as I recall.

O'NEILL: Oh, yes. I got down to Zamboanga and the Basilian Islands. I was [reporting on] everything. It is well to recall that the south had always been Muslim, had been even in Spanish times. In recent times, after the Americans came and especially after WWII when the land in the north, especially in the Ilocos area, had become so poor there was a general migration of Filipinos into the Mindanao area and further south. That caused all sorts of problems. The immigrants were Catholic. They began to take away land that belonged to Muslims, which brings me to another story.

I had gone down to see the [province] of Illano del Sul, which had a Muslim lady governor. She was governor only because her husband could not run for reelection; his wife ran in his place. He told me the same story that others had reported that the Catholics were bad. He explained how little money he and the other Muslims had had. But, he had recently received money from his friend Muammar Qadhafi in Libya and also some arms. If the Christians (and he knew I was a Catholic) were going to steal, rape, and murder, he wanted the Americans to know that they weren't going to lay down and die. This is 1972 and Muammar was already supporting all sorts of Muslim factions in the south, not terribly generously, but when you have nothing and someone sends $20,000 and 200 rifles... When I heard this, I knew that this would raise alarm signals in Manila with Ambassador Byroade and Bill Hamilton. I spoke with some very knowledgeable sources in the area to confirm the information. I also spoke with the governor of Bukidnan, who I knew very well and [who] was to be my best man at my wedding. [He] provided further information. The embassy and the Agency [Central Intelligence Agency] were unaware of these events. When I returned, I wrote the report and showed it to Dan Sullivan. We sent it along with some fear since it demonstrated Marcos' lack of control in the south and the way things were more quickly going out of control.

Q: Did you have an Agency representative in Cebu?

O'NEILL: No. I wrote it all up and sent it up on the next pouch with a copy to Washington. They were really pissed in Manila.

Q: It hit the fan, in other words.

O'NEILL: It hit the fan. They wanted to know how I was so involved. The inspector saved us. If the inspectors had not come down and seen how careful we were about this, we would have been in deep trouble.

[We had another reporting coup] when Marcos took over, pulled his internal coup, and destroyed democracy for years. At that time, we fortunately had an American naval vessel sitting in the harbor which was there on R&R [rest and relaxation]. The communicator, boy, did he work for the next three or four days. We asked CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, Pacific] if they could [let] the ships stay in port for additional hours so we could report reaction in the consular district [to Marcos' coup]. Manila would not allow the ship to remain because it would appear that we were involved in [Philippine] internal affairs, or whatever. Dan Sullivan did some tremendous cables because he knew all the military in Cebu. They just opened up to him. Dan Sullivan had

the best information about what was going on in the coup and how the military in Cebu were reacting, as well as in Manila, notwithstanding at the time the close relation between Byroade and the Marcos family. The embassy was caught with their pants down there, absolutely caught.

Q: What was the feeling in your area about the Marcoses? He declared martial law during this period.

O'NEILL: That's right. First of all, everybody in that area knew Imelda. They knew she was poor. The first pair of shoes she ever got she got from the Redemptorist Fathers. She didn't wear underclothes because she didn't have them until she was close to her teens. They knew she was the mistress of the former Speaker of the House before she was Marcos' mistress and then married him. In character, she was not much different than Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu or Lady Thatcher, except both come from a better class family. But Imelda's people were living on the generosity of others. She never forgot that. She didn't forget it in her clothes or shoes, in the way she acted. She never forgot anybody who ever brought it up.

Q: I see. It was something you didn't bring up.

O'NEILL: You didn't bring it up. They knew Marcos. Marcos was always a lightweight. The medals he got were political medals. Imelda, like Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, ran that country. She had no guidance on the way up, nobody who said, "You don't have to dress like a whore for everybody to look at you; a little bit of restraint is best." I'll give you one great story about her. She called in some very wealthy businessmen and said that she wanted to build a cultural center. She said, "Let me have some money." So, they gave her a blank check and said, "Do what you want with it." So, she had her people call up to find out what was in their account and wrote it to the penny. They were very, very upset. She would take scheduled Philippine Airlines planes and take the plane someplace else. Again, in a way, she reminds me of Alexandra of Nicholas and Alexandra, narrow minded, kept her husband in power because when the husband goes, she's gone. The children weren't terribly good, as one can imagine. The people in the south did not like her. They despised her. They looked down their nose at her, but they couldn't do anything. The Muslims were on the outskirts. They were just protecting themselves. The Muslims, regardless of all the propaganda, never were that serious a threat to the government in Manila because, even though they were Muslims, they were still Filipinos.

They have the same vices and the same internal family flaws. There is a Tagalog phrase called "Utang na lob." It means "A debt of obligation." If somebody is your godfather, he is as responsible for you as if he was your father and maybe more. The corruption was endemic. It is regrettable, but the major export of the Philippines has always been human beings.

Q: How well I remember from my days there.

O'NEILL: I went through all the Middle East as an inspector and the Filipinos are the

nurses, maidservants, and the mistresses; the men are chauffeurs.

Q: Was there any anti-American feeling in Cebu at the time? Was the consulate ever demonstrated against, attacked, or not?

O'NEILL: No. Cebu belonged to the Toledo family. When I came down from Manila, they didn't know what to make of me. They thought, one, I was a CIA agent; two, I had been sent down "special." But I wasn't sent down special, but rather to replace somebody who was leaving, who was not well liked or well respected. I was older. That made a difference. I guess I acted a bit more conservatively. I didn't go around without a coat and tie. I had calling cards. The small things that make the difference.

Q: And the Filipinos notice immediately.

O'NEILL: Notice immediately, yes. The Filipinos are culturally and religiously influenced by the Spanish with a superficial American facade. If you recall, the Miranda Plaza bombing, when a number of politicians were killed, was reportedly done (and this was probably true) by the Marcos family. The Osmanias opponents felt that they had no one that they could speak with at the embassy, so they came south to Cebu, their home base. They spoke with Dan Sullivan, the consul, but more to me because they thought I was CIA. Sullivan knew all this and we reported it to Manila. Manila was unhappy with the reports because of the close Marcos-embassy relations. They sent down the consul general, Larry Lawrence, to speak with us and tell us the view from Embassy Manila. He carried back a diplomatic pouch with our reports, which told the embassy exactly what was going on. Lawrence was outraged because he was supposed to see that our reports mirrored the embassy's reports. Lawrence as the consul general also had close political/personal relations with the Marcos family as only the consul general in Manila can. The people in the south were initially in favor of the coup, but the continuation of the draft, but on a grander scale, [was something] they didn't want.

Q: That was quite an interesting two years in Manila. Then in 1973, you went back to the Department and stayed there for a year. What did you do during that period?

O'NEILL: I came back to the Department. It wasn't quite a year. It was less than a year. I came back because I married Josephine. I had asked if I could stay on in Cebu for the birth of our first child, as Josephine was pregnant just as we were leaving. They said, of course, "No." I married in April. We left in August/September. I worked in the visa office. I was there for a two year tour until somebody came by and said, "We're looking for somebody to go out to Calcutta." They looked at me and I said, "Hey, you guys forget, I'm married now. I have an adopted girl, my wife's half sister. I have a new baby not yet three months old. This was June. You're going to send me out to that cesspool?" I came back home and I talked to Josephine. Josephine said, "What's going to happen?" I had just made officer. I forgot that.

Q: Tell me about that.

O'NEILL: I had just made officer. She said, "You go out there and you'll be consul in Calcutta. It can't be too bad." There was a Mustang Program they had opened up. Perkins, who was later director general and is now ambassador in Australia (He's on his way home if he's not home already) was head of the panel. They looked at my file and I said, "I want to be an officer." They said, "You don't have a university degree. All you have is your work experience." By that time, I guess I had 11 years in the Service. I said, "Look, you've got a Mustang Program." They said, "We really want people who can speak a language." I said, "I speak Thai and I speak French." "But you don't have any college." They banged on me about the lack of a university degree, which, by the way, I would like to say for anybody who reads this thing, I think that I would have been an awful lot more useful to the Department and useful to my family if I had a degree. I would have made ambassador if I had a university degree. I don't have it; I'm not going to do it. There are other reasons I didn't make ambassador. [Anyway], they let me come in, I think, as a Foreign Service officer six. When I married Josephine, it was '73. I made officer in '72.

So, we decided to go out to Calcutta. When we said, "Josephine and I are going to Calcutta, 99% of the Department was happy for us. One percent (most of the people I was working for in the Visa Section) wasn't because I didn't finish the full two year tour." I was almost 40 years old. I knew how to do things. I didn't have to go and bother people. I went out to Calcutta.

Q: What did you go out as?

O'NEILL: I went out as a consular officer. At that time, we had a terrible problem in Calcutta. It was called the "Harcos-Fletcher" matter. Two guys trying to smuggle narcotics in Calcutta had been caught on the King George naval dock. They had not been arrested for smuggling, but had been arrested for trespassing on military property, spying, and held under the Official Secrets Act. The case received so much domestic political pressure that Henry Kissinger had to take it up personally with Indira Gandhi.

This case, I'd like to say, went on for almost two years. I had to visit them in the jail every day. While they were in jail, they went on a hunger strike. They had to be force fed, which I had to watch. The jails in Calcutta were terrible. Finally, we arranged for them to be under house arrest, which they had to pay for. My wife had to go out and buy all their food and bring it in. I had to attend High Court hearings and actually answer questions before My Lord, Justice Talukdar. I forget all the paraphernalia that I had to say, that I was only here to provide comfort to two American citizens, not in any way to observe the proceedings, which I was absolutely positive were being conducted as if it were before the Supreme Court in Washington. Boy, I really put the grease on that one. I spent two years at Court and three years in Calcutta.

The consul general who was just leaving was a nice guy. The deputy consul general in Calcutta was not terribly industrious. I became the de facto number two. I was taking care of the Consular Section and the Harcos-Fletcher matter, which had Secretary of State's interest and Embassy Delhi's interest because everybody was afraid they would die in Indian custody. There was a time when they were really possibly going to die. We finally

had them put under house arrest. That was what lead to Josephine being the purveyor of all their foods and other necessities.

Then I started to travel on normal consular business. I went to Bihar, to Orissa, all over our consular district. Each place I went, I would sit down as I did in Cebu and I would write long bios on everybody I met. There was a bio form at that time. As time went on, down toward the end of our two years, they asked us to extend, and we did for a third year. So, we did three years in Calcutta. I received a Meritorious Honor Award out of that. But I found the Indians, if you approached them on an intellectual basis, and told them you weren't interested in propaganda, and you talked to them about what was going on that affected them and their relationship with us, you could get a decent dialogue - not a dialogue where you would [have a meeting of the minds] because we still had the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was going on. And they were very proud that the Vietnamese were beating us. Occasionally, when they would annoy me, I would say, "And I know how well you did against the Chinese." The Chinese had recently beaten them in a border fight. That would really get them. Sometimes I would say, "You know, Calcutta was very important in this fight against the Chinese because the Chinese had sent down scouts who got as far as Calcutta and went back and said, 'If we take Calcutta, we'll lose.'" After a while, they left me alone as it regards Vietnam.

I just want to go back for one thing: Vietnam and the Tet offensive. When the Tet offensive happened, I was in Chiang Mai, but they called me back because we had a number of officers in Hue. Some of our officers in Quang Tri had been under the gun for weeks and weeks, been shelled and the rest. That was Steve Ledogar and Dick Brown. They had to leave. There were others. So, I went back. They were still bringing Marines into Hue when I went in with them. A number of people, German doctors, innocent civilians, had been killed for no reason. I'm not talking about priests. I'm just talking about normal people who had been killed.

Q: They ran amuck.

O'NEILL: I don't know what they were doing. They seemed to have lost discipline. Of course, to retake the old city of Hue, which the Marines went in and took terrible casualties, but the other point is that the Vietnamese marines who went in with our Marines (not immediately, but following up) took great casualties. Of course, I think, psychologically, the United States lost the war when Robert Kennedy started saying that "Our boys are dying and no Vietnamese are dying" and then Cronkite went out and said, "There's a possibility we can't win this." We lost it.

But then they were back to Calcutta, the consul general and I did all the reporting. I did a lot more than he did. He did the analytical stuff. I did the grunt work primarily because as a consular officer, you get around to see everybody and nobody says to the American consul, "You can't come in." They'll say that to the economic officer or the political officer, maybe even say that to the consul general, but somebody in that family is going to need a visa.

Q: How well do we understand that.

O'NEILL: I understand it and used it.

Q: Did the ambassador visit Calcutta very often?

O'NEILL: Yes. Fortunately, by that time, Galbraith (His son is now ambassador in the Balkans) used to come up on a regular basis, primarily to go to Orissa to go swimming. The other ambassadors came up to see us occasionally and the DCM came up to see us, too.

Q: You had a huge consular district.

O'NEILL: Yes. We couldn't visit most of it because the Indians wouldn't let us. The Department for some ungodly reason was very interested in knowing what was happening among the tribes up on the Burmese border.

Q: In the northeast there?

O'NEILL: Yes, up around Assam and Nagoland. I have no idea why. There were human rights violations out there. I had met a number of Italian priests who were up that way, and Irish Christian Brothers. My uncle was an Irish Christian Brother. So, I had a good entree to that level. The archbishop of Calcutta was made a cardinal while I was there and was a friend of the family and had been to the house, and had Josephine's cooking, as everybody else did in that town. It was just intellectually a very stimulating post. For the first time, we had a democratic communist takeover.

Q: I think Bengal was communist controlled.

O'NEILL: Yes. Well, it became communist controlled and never has left communist control. Jyoti Basu. But he was a communist who played golf. He was a communist who liked his Scotch and water. He was a man who loved the finer things in life.

Q: Did you have any personal security problems there in Calcutta?

O'NEILL: The Naxalites were still wandering around the area. The consul general had a bodyguard.

Q: Explain them a bit.

O'NEILL: Naxalites were really anarchists, very, very outside the realm of the communist, Marxist party. They were really beyond the pale. They really believed in killing their enemies. They had killed a lot of people. They were being fought by the West Bengal armed police, which were paramilitary. The fight was really run from the rank of sergeant to about captain by Anglo-Indians. They were "mean mothers." I mean, they were really bad. They had no compunction. Naxalites never went to trial. They were

always killed in fights. It was difficult for me to understand some of it because they were in a corner with their hands behind their back and they were still "allegedly fighting." It was very, very difficult fighting. Most of these officers eventually immigrated to England or to Australia or Canada. They had no future in India because they were "Anglo."

Q: Was there any effect of our Pakistan tilt in those days?

O'NEILL: They never could understand why we were pro-Pakistani. I said, "You mean because they support us in the United Nations, they buy our weapons, they engage in trade with us, etc. and you holler at us, you're against us every time, against us over this and that?" "We have a right to be like that. We're Indians, we're Bengalis." I said, "We have a right to make our own friends." "Oh, you only want people who like you?" "That's what friends are for." The Indian general in charge (interestingly, Jewish) of that area was another friend of mine who had been in charge of an armored division going across into Bangladesh. He now was in charge of all Indian troops in that area. We had some very interesting conversations. He only got annoyed at me once because I got to know many of his middle rank officers. He felt that I was pumping them for information, which I was. But we had a good professional relationship. It was not a personal relationship. But he understood exactly what I was doing. He had a very low opinion of politicians and especially Indian politicians. He knew they were all bribable. This was, by the way, during the time when Mrs. Gandhi took over the whole government. She and her son ran it: forced sterilization, etc.

Q: She declared a state of emergency.

O'NEILL: That's right. It again shows you the value of consulates. [At times], had better information [from Calcutta] about what was going on in Delhi than the people in Delhi. They had very fine officers there, but Indian politicians would return home to Calcutta. It was easier for us to see them and they to see us in my house. I remember having a man by the name of Kamal Nath, who I think has finally been caught by his own government for misappropriation of funds. He came and gave us great information on Thanksgiving Day about Indian atomic energy research. He didn't know he was giving it. We had talked about a number of things. Afterwards, I remember saying to David Korn, who was probably the best writer in the whole Foreign Service, absolutely without par, "Well, I'm not going to write this, am I? You're going to write it, aren't you?" He said, "Well, if you write it, I have to rewrite it, so let me do it." So, he did it. He left out this piece. He had sent it out without showing it to me. I forget what I was doing the next day. I came up and I said to him, "We're got to report this." He said, "Yes, I guess we have to." I said, "Why don't we just to report it EXDIS [exclusive distribution] since it's sensitive?" The result was a beautiful cable from the ambassador in New Delhi (a professor from Ohio or someplace), or I guess it was written by the DCM, saying how much they appreciated the first cable and how much they appreciate our sensitivity in sending this other cable separately and restricted. David Korn said, "You know, luck to the goddam Irish." The Agency was upset that we beat them on this. The chief of station tried to take some of my sources. He eventually did after I left.

But it was for me a very stimulating thing. The poverty was atrocious. We met Mother Theresa before she came in November.

Q: I was going to ask you whether you had met Mother Theresa.

O'NEILL: We did. We met her and her nuns. Again, the previous consular officer was just a real asshole, a jerk, and was making these poor nuns go through all the things that had to be done to get into the States. So, I gave them all B-1 visas and said, "Now, make sure you enter through New York." I put a little note: "Under the patronage of Francis Cardinal Spellman." Never had another bit of trouble, not legal, but correct

The Bengali is really a terribly interesting person. He loves poetry, politics, and is not terribly interested in a great deal of profitable or economic work. But in all this, he is a ferment for India. The old saying "What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow" is or was at the time I was there very, very accurate. You could see the swings in mood, the beginning of Indira Gandhi and her son pushing too far, pushing the Bengali to do something which they hate to do: work. It was just that sort of ferment in the society which caught on. In that period under martial law, Mrs. Gandhi was able to do so many economic things. It has been forgotten, but there were useful things done. The Indian bureaucracy was and continues to be inefficient, ineffective, and corrupt. I think that will be an inhibiting factor in anything that happens for the foreseeable future.

Q: What was the religious situation like in the Calcutta region when you were there? Was it Hindu dominant? Was there much antipathy toward the Muslims? Were there any Muslims or others there?

O'NEILL: The Muslims were not a problem in Calcutta at the time I was there because they were so few. Their presence was barely noted. There was an Anglo-Indian community which was primarily Protestant-Catholic, but of no political influence, nor [were there Muslims] into Mizoland or into Assam or Nagoland. There were animists and Christians and they were a problem which was beginning at that time. I think David Korn pointed out to Delhi and Washington that the movement of Bengalis out of Bangladesh into that area was going to cause friction, which we see by today's paper does cause friction. I don't see religion in that area being a problem. I would not say the same for places like Bombay or in that particular area because they were adjacent to Pakistan. There is still a significant Muslim-

Q: Now, the Bengalis moving out of Bangladesh would be Muslim?

O'NEILL: Absolutely, but they were not moving into Bengali Hindu areas. They were moving into tribal areas to the north, where the land is rich and where there is work and, more importantly, where there is water.

Q: What was the position of the Soviets when you were there in Calcutta?

O'NEILL: It's amazing. It will always amaze me both in Calcutta and in Ethiopia how

they have such a good intelligent system, many contacts with the people, and still don't know what the hell is going on. In every case when I was there, any time there was a political controversy, they were always wrong. I knew the Soviet officer who was head of intelligence. He was a guest at my house. He was sent back to Moscow because he had so misreported the situation. I had a very excellent relationship with the number two at the Russian consulate general, which was big. [Calcutta] had Polish, Bulgarian, everybody was there. There was a big Eastern presence, plus an Iranian presence. Everybody was in Calcutta because at one time it was a stopover for all the planes going to and from Europe. Everybody refueled there. The next refueling place was in Bombay. I don't think the East Bloc was terribly effective. In fact, I think they were bad. They did not associate with the people. Anything they did was in a very formal or within a narrow parameter, but there was no personal interplay between-

Q: Even though Bengal was ruled by communists at the time?

O'NEILL: West Bengal at that time was not ruled by the communists, but was eventually ruled by the communists alone. Very, very bad relations. The other thing is, they had one token mixed marriage in their community. A Russian girl married somebody from Mongolia. In our community, which was much smaller, there were a number of mixed marriages: mine, a fellow who was married to an Indian girl. Somebody would come up and say, "Isn't it great that you have more mixed marriages in your community than the Russians?" We would say, "We really don't give a damn. We don't sleep for politics. We sleep for passion." Always shook them.

Q: What about the Chinese communist influence?

O'NEILL: They had a very difficult time. In fact, if I recall correctly, they had no representation in Calcutta. It was something that the Indians did not like to talk about. They knew that they were beaten by the Chinese. They felt aggrieved that after all the political support that they had given the Chinese during the Vietnam War, the Indians only sent a medical unit during the Korean War, they had always been a friend of China, voted for their entry into the United Nations, had tried to do all sorts of things for them, but when it came to a border dispute, they wouldn't acquiesce to India's point of view and then had beaten them badly. What hurt was that those units that did well against the Chinese were the Gurkhas, tribal units, not Hindu regiments. The Sikhs did well against them.

Q: Was there a Vietnamese presence in Calcutta?

O'NEILL: No, there wasn't a Vietnamese presence in Calcutta. There was one in Delhi, but it was a Saigon presence. I was going to be called back to go to Laos (1975) to help them evacuate in those final days, but I was involved in this Harcos-Fletcher matter. I was the only one who was accredited by the courts to attend these official secret trials. Delhi and Washington considered that more important than me going back to Laos.

Q: Did we have a Peace Corps presence there in that area?

O'NEILL: There was no Peace Corps.

Q: Because the Indians didn't want it.

O'NEILL: They didn't want it. They had left at some time. I can't remember when they had left, but we did not have a Peace Corps presence.

Q: Your tour in Calcutta ended in 1977, I believe?

O'NEILL: Yes.

Q: You were next transferred to?

O'NEILL: I came home for Portugese language.

Q: You took Portugese language and went on to Lisbon.

O'NEILL: Yes. There was a question about where I should go next. I thought it would be best to go back to East Asia, where I knew the place, etc. But my career counselor and Josephine said that I needed a different outlook on life. So, I was sent out to Lisbon as the consul, later the consul general. I did primarily consular work. I was responsible for the Azores. I did political reporting out there because the consul out there didn't want to, didn't feel she should do it, she was a consular officer. I visited Oporto, had some consular cases in Funchal. But of that whole assignment, we had one baby while we were there. That was Kevin, the fellow you just met who is going into the Marines. I was also sent out to Teheran on TDY. It doesn't show up on the records.

Q: Those were the bad days in Teheran.

O'NEILL: Yes. I went out in January of '79. The Shah was still in power. In February, the Shah left and Khomeini arrived. February 14, the mobs took over the embassy for the first time. That was interesting; Ambassador Sullivan was out there. Sullivan knew me because he had come in and replaced Byroade in the Philippines. He was very kind when I was out there. He said, "You know, after you left, the political reporting from that area just deteriorated." I was so pleased that he noticed my reporting. So, I was out there. What was interesting was the interplay between the embassy, Brzezinski, and Carter just before the takeover, during the takeover, and after the takeover. The absolute stupidity, ignorance of the senior American military officer.

Q: You mentioned the embassy, Brzezinski, and Carter. Where was the State Department in all of this?

O'NEILL: I consider Sullivan the State Department. Sullivan did all his work with Brzezinski. He did not go back through whoever was head of NEA. The first day when I got there, and I regret to say this, there were political officers of the junior and middle

grades who were on the phone back to Washington undercutting Ambassador Sullivan, saying that "We shouldn't be here, we should all be evacuated, we should all be sent home, not just the wives and the children. We all should get out of here. Stop issuing visas, the whole thing." A number of things happened here. One, we had probably the most incompetent consul general in the world, Lou Goelz, as the consul general in Teheran. He was issuing visas as fast as we could stamp visas without regard to who we were letting in. We were bringing in Pan Am planes to take out Americans and we found out that everybody on the Pan Am plane were Iranians. They weren't Americans. We were bringing in extra planes to take out third country nationals and Americans and found out the Iranians were leaving. We had a rough time taking out the Israeli embassy. Brzezinski personally called Sullivan to make sure that the Israeli embassy was taken out, on a priority basis, regardless.

First of all, let's talk about the military.

Q: Yes, and what were you doing?

O'NEILL: My job was to help get the Americans out of the area and to help adjudicate some of the visas that were being processed there. First thing, the senior American military officer, three stars, was from Germany. Sullivan asked each officer "Will the Iranian troops stand with the Shah? Can we count on them?" The American officer said, "Absolutely, sure, they will stand." Sullivan asked, "How do we know this?" "Because the officers had given their word as gentlemen." We're talking about Iranians. We're not talking about British officers. They just flopped. The other thing was that Brzezinski and Sullivan were talking to each other but were not listening to each other. Brzezinski could not, and neither could Carter (I think it's impossible for people to understand) understand that this thing was falling apart. This was the Shah. This was a man who had been courted by every President since President Truman. This is a man we put on the throne.

Q: He was thrown out once before.

O'NEILL: Right, and we had brought him back. Kermit Roosevelt, who was a CIA guy, brought him back. So, here we have all these things. Then we have another problem: there was low morale in the embassy. There was low morale in the Consular Section, which was the biggest consular section we had in the world. There was low morale there because Goelz would not stand up and [refuse to] issue visas. He had some very incompetent consular officers there, just awful. One who later goes at another post, doesn't follow up on an American who dies under mysterious circumstances. Really bad. It was Goelz himself. He just lets them go through. Somebody refused a student visa goes over and gets a tourist visa. Just nothing. Just awful. That was the problem.

Then you had the problem of whether the President, Mr. Carter, will be tough. In other words, will he say the necessary things. We had no relations with Khomeini. Nobody knew him. Sullivan now knows shortly after Khomeini arrived that things had gone bad and wants people out. The Agency does not want to go out. Many of the officers don't want to go out. Their families are there. They're making 25%. You've got "listeners" who

don't want to go out. Sullivan can't get a hold on it because to get this thing done, he has to get permission from Washington to send them home. He can't get it done. He just can't get it done.

Q: Washington would not give that permission?

O'NEILL: Washington would not give that permission. Then comes February 14th. Mobs start to come across the wall. The Marines are armed and ready to fight. Everybody is battened down. Sullivan is trying to get some word out of Washington, but can't. He has two choices: a) he can fight and hope that everybody will not be killed; or b) he can give up. So, he decides to give up and he moves everybody, myself included, into the vault. By this time, smart guy that Sullivan is, there is hardly any secret papers around. There is just hardly any. He's only got one last channel, one crypto channel left. Then he hollers in to Eugene O'Neill, not me, the CIA communicator, and he says, "Is it destroyed?" O'Neill throws it in the barrel and says, "It's destroyed now" and then we surrender. Then they march us all out: Marines, secretaries, a couple of correspondents, into a courtyard. He has Skip Boyce, who is Sullivan's interpreter, who is now, I think, DCM in Bangkok. So, we're all marched out there and we're all lined up against the wall. We all know what the hell is going to happen. We're going to get shot. So, the Marines and the others start to put the women to the back. We say, "When they shoot, you fall under the bodies." Then Sullivan, God bless his heart, starts to move off to the side, with Boyce, his interpreter, hoping that if there is going to be shooting, they will shoot him and not us. So, he and Boyce keep talking. As this happens, another faction starts to come into the courtyard.

Q: These were all civilians, not uniformed people, on the Iranian side?

O'NEILL: All civilians. Every single one were civilians. All of them. They come in and then there is a big argument. Then the radicals start to move out. I would suggest that five minutes, give or take, we were all dead.

Q: Very close shave.

O'NEILL: Very close shave, closer than anything I had experienced in Vietnam. Really close. The thing that got me after this as we all sort of sat around in the American community who were there on February 14th, every one of us knew that if we had been killed, we would not have been avenged. Ronald Reagan... We just would not. So, February 14th until I left sometime in March, we never had complete control of that embassy. Their people were in the embassy.

Q: Oh, they were still there.

O'NEILL: Still there. We moved in and moved out. One of them forced me to give a visa under threat of a gun. I gave the visa and then I wrote under the page FORINSEED. When he got to New York, the immigration people picked him up, beat the living hell out of him, threw him on a plane, and sent him back. Barbara Watson, who was at that time assistant secretary for Consular Affairs, was asked by INS, "O'Neill is one of your

officers?" Then they asked about the visa. “Yes, that's exactly what he would have done.” When he came back, he had the “gall” to come to the embassy and complain to the Iranian guards, who then beat the living shit out of him also!

Q: A pretty brave act.

O’NEILL: Well, I knew the guy wasn't going to figure out if I put "INS" in among all these letters. It didn't make any sense to him. But when the INS people saw it, it kind of stuck out at them. We had no control. The bad thing about that whole thing was, one, lack of communication between the White House and Sullivan; two, the undercutting of the ambassador by members of his own staff.

Q: This I had never heard of.

O’NEILL: I told Sullivan personally to his face about this and his DCM, Nes. I told them they were calling back and he shouldn't let them. I told them, "They were calling back, saying everybody should be evacuated." I can't remember what Sullivan said. I said, "I'm not going anyplace." But that was it. As a result of that, when Reagan came to power, he sent out instructions: No embassy should be given up without a fight. That thing has never been taken off the boards. I remember, when I was in Khartoum, telling the security officer and the regional security officer that those were the instructions of the President of the United States and they hadn't been taken back. "We're not operating on them," they said. "Fine, give me something in writing about it." I did. But again, it's the question (I still feel this very strongly) of, if we had been killed, there would not have been the other portion, the 444 days. There would not have been the terrible damage done to our foreign relations. People say the Mayaguez incident after the Vietnam War was a waste of people. For the people's family who died, I can see their point of view. But the people in Hanoi did not see it that way and the people in Phnom Penh did not see it that way. That's why it's so important...

Q: That's why it happened.

O’NEILL: Probably, I don't know. Back to Portugal, beyond that incident, this was again Carter's time, we could not speak officially to the South Africans except in Washington and in Johannesburg, but the consular officer could talk to [a South

African]. We could not speak to the Angolans, because we didn't have diplomatic relations, but still people needed visas to go to the States and I issued them. So, I did that sort of stuff. That was two years.

Q: You couldn't have left Teheran with a very optimistic attitude as to the future.

O’NEILL: No. Khomeini lived in the 11th or 12th century, not unlike a lot of people that we'll talk about in the future in Khartoum. They're happy back there intellectually. This was a time of power for Islam; it's clean, it's clear, everybody knows what is right and wrong, not much different than fundamentalists.

Q: Two years in Lisbon and then you went back to Thailand.

O'NEILL: Yes, I went back on a direct transfer. This was the time when there were the "boat people" coming out of South Vietnam. They needed somebody who could speak Thai, somebody who had done consular work, and Lisbon bored me. So, I went back. I did refugee work for two years.

Q: In Bangkok?

O'NEILL: No, I traveled all along the Cambodian border down to Songkhla, it's on the sea. Anyplace the boat people came in, we tried to go.

Q: These refugees were mainly Vietnamese coming in, or Cambodian?

O'NEILL: There were two groups. The ones who came across the Thai southern land border were all Cambodian. The others were Vietnamese boat people who were coming out. Again, there was a tremendous difference of opinion about these people who were coming out. Lionel Rosenblatt and Shep Lowman and a number of others felt that anybody leaving Vietnam was entitled to go to the United States because we had lost the war, we should never have been there, we should never have destroyed their society. For people like Shep Lowman, who was married to a Vietnamese girl, and Lionel Rosenblatt, who had worked there, they should have known better. But they all felt a moral obligation which they felt the United States government should feel to help these refugees. We started to interview them [for refugee asylum]. We found they were fisherman who never had been on any side. We found that there were people who were merchants and had never been on any side, never had fought with us, never had fought with the Viet Cong. There were Chinese. There were a whole bunch of them. "Why are you coming out? Did the Viet Cong or the communists burn down your house?" "No." But after a while, they got the answers right, but then you'd ask them a little bit different and you found out that they were economic migrants. Then that caused a whole problem within the Refugee Bureau. For me, another problem was abortion. There were some people who were in the Refugee Bureau and in a number of organizations who were assisting in abortions. I went and saw Bert Levin, who was DCM, and I said, "Look, you know me. I'm not a great Catholic. You knew me before I got married. I had an interesting bachelorhood. But I can't do this." So, he said, "Look, don't. Just stay away from it. Do something else and don't let anybody bother you about it." I said, "I just don't want to cause the people up front a problem." So, I did a lot of interviewing, political reporting, and the rest.

The refugees started to become big business. Catholic Relief Service, Lutheran World Federation, everybody wanted to get in because they were charging significantly high administrative support costs and they were supporting a lot of other worthwhile interests. They would move these people into the United States with, at the beginning, little or no training, and they gave them some training, help them speak English. Still, I believe we had no obligation. They would get them in and say, "We are going to be responsible for

getting them housing and a job." They would get them in and assist with housing and then they would put them on welfare.

Some of the people we really owed, liked the Hmong, and Jerry Daniels, who spoke of Mao, a former CIA guy, he got a lot of the people sent to Montana, around Missoula, and places like that. He did a good job.

But for the rest, it was a business. Regrettably, some of these people, again, like Lowman and Rosenblatt, were involved in this. They were not honest about how they obeyed the Immigration Nationality Act. Then we had an immigration officer who was trying to do their job. We had people who were actually on the other side and who were murderers. We had all sorts of problems of trying to get these people sorted out. But there was a press to move these people.

On the Cambodian side, we had real refugees. Some we could tell really needed assistance. I remember writing to Bert Levin. I said, "You know what we're doing here. In many cases, we are taking the best and the brightest out of these communities and we're leaving behind a shell." We are. We left behind shells on both sides. The Vietnamese didn't care if these people left. As far as they were concerned, they were making money by selling space. I cannot believe that the Vietnamese government would have allowed it if they did not want over 400,000 of their own people to leave Vietnam. My God!

Q: Many of them were trained, educated.

O'NEILL: We did well on this. There are two points. One, we did not have a moral obligation to take them in; second, we did not press for those people who we should have pressed. We could have made some sort of a deal to get those people who were in the education camps, those officers, the rangers, the Marines, the Airbornes who fought so bravely, the district officers who were good people.

Q: There would be no objection to bringing them in.

O'NEILL: Absolutely not, but we couldn't get them out. We got these people.

Q: Was there much fighting among the refugees themselves?

O'NEILL: No, we wouldn't permit it.

Q: How about incursions by the Vietnamese?

O'NEILL: The incursions by the Vietnamese took place only in Cambodia. They came across the border for a variety of reasons. One, I think, initially because they were thinking back to their ancient history and they were going to take over Cambodia as a part of it. Cambodia was going to be like Laos, a territory. That was the initial part. The second part, I think, was (end of tape)-

Pol Pot was an absolute madman according to every Cambodian I ever spoke to. We were talking about why the Vietnamese made incursions into Cambodia. Even they must have been horrified at what this person was doing to his own people. I think there was a mixture in there. The Vietnamese wanted to increase their empire. They were going to take over Laos. It was not going to be a big problem. They wanted Phnom Penh and they wanted perhaps even to move a little further. The Vietnamese are imperialists no different than the Chinese. We will see this in the years coming. But the question of the Vietnamese has always been ethnic. It always will be. The Cambodians don't like the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese don't like the Cambodians, even in French times. You could never have had a Vietnamese-Cambodian mixed unit. They had to be separate.

There were people in the Refugee Bureau who were leaking to the press, who were managing the press, who had a list of telephone numbers if something wasn't done the way they wanted. They would have a story planted in Washington, Paris, and Bangkok, all over. It was a terribly bad way to do business. I'm sure the best people involved in the Refugee Bureau were supporting U.S. government policy.

Q: In your work, to whom did you report?

O'NEILL: I reported to Lionel Rosenblatt. He was head of the Refugee section. Bert Levin was the DCM. Bert wrote my review. He was a good officer.

Q: He was consul general in Hong Kong.

O'NEILL: He was consul general in Hong Kong and ambassador in Burma. There was also a disagreement between Abramowitz, who was the ambassador, who was definitely in favor of helping the refugees and whom the people who worked in the Refugee Section continued to tell Abramowitz what the Vietnamese were doing in Vietnam was similar to the Holocaust. To Abramowitz and his wife, Sheppie, it pulled their heartstrings. On the Cambodians, there was no doubt that they were entitled to protection. Whether they were entitled all to be brought to the United States was another question, but that's something I just don't have any more thoughts on.

Q: Was there any drug problem in the camps or not?

O'NEILL: Drugs were a problem, but they were an export problem, exports from the Golden Triangle thru Bangkok out to Europe and the United States. But that was entirely done by different groups and had nothing to do with the camps.

Q: At the end of this, you were given an assignment to the National War College, which was a nice thank you for some of the work.

O'NEILL: No, it wasn't. I got the National War College because of my writing to Bert and others within the Refugee Bureau telling them how badly the situation was being managed and that the people we were bringing out were not refugees, they were

economic migrants. This is how it all happened. Lionel Rosenblatt had Shep Lowman downsize the Refugee Bureau. He was under pressure to do it anyway. So, they decided to downsize by one position, by one position number, and by one position name: mine. So, I went over and I saw the administrative officer. I said, "Jesus, I've got four small children and just got here. Now I've got to go back. I don't have an assignment in Washington. I don't know what's going to happen me. Thank God, I just got promoted. I just made 01. What am I going to do?" He said, "We need you." I said, "Well, they just cut my position." He said, "They can't cut your position until you finish your assignment. They can't do it ahead of time." So, I go skipping lightheartedly to see Lionel and Colonel Mike Edlund, who were in charge at that time and said, "That's what's the deal. You'd better call Washington. Unless you get me an assignment that I want or a decent assignment someplace, I'm not willing to go." Some year or two ahead of time, I had asked to go to the Naval War College, but since I didn't have a university degree, I couldn't go to the Naval War College. So, in comes a cable: "Would you be willing to go to the National War College (which is more prestigious) in September? If so, reply to us promptly." So, I go back and I tell Josephine about this. We were dancing, we were happy. I sent a cable back. I go back and I spend one of the nicest, most pleasant years I spent in the Foreign Service. I learned a lot. It was good for me. I downsized, I relaxed, spent a lot of time with the family. We had some great speakers. We had Vernon Walters and President Ford.

Q: Were any of the military college or people you had known in Vietnam there?

O'NEILL: No. My closest friend at that time was a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps by the name of Butch Neal, who is now a two star Marine general, who was a Marine spokesman during the Gulf War, really a first class officer, a nice guy. It was useful (later deputy commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps).

Q: I agree. That year at the War College, I think we all find that about the best year in the Foreign Service.

O'NEILL: I've got one story to tell you about that. Of course, the military always thought we were champagne drinking, cookie pushing idiots. We all had to jog. So, I used to jog in the morning at 7:30 or 8:00 o'clock. One day, I've put on my jacket and shorts and I'm doing my jog in the snow. All these guys would come by and give me the finger and everything else. I continue my jog. They were all kidding me. Then just before we break for lunch when the others did their job, the commanding general stands up and he says (I forget why he was there.), "There is no necessity for jogging today because of inclimate weather." I stand up in a loud voice and say, "The State Department has already jogged in inclimate weather" and sit down. Every single one of the military had to go out and jog. I never felt so good!

Q: That's a wonderful story and it's so typical of the workout.

O'NEILL: Yes, but they were great guys. I learned a lot from them. The lectures are superb. The only lady we had in our class was Barbara (Bam Bam) MacNamara, who is

now number two in Operations at NSA.

Q: We had no women in my time. Those were the benighted days. At the end of that year, you went to a different part of the world, Addis Ababa, as DCM. Was that an assignment you looked forward to? How did that come about?

O'NEILL: When I had left Bangkok and went to the National War College, for some reason, David Korn, who was my consul general in Calcutta, wanted me to come out and be his DCM. David was going to be ambassador to Mauritania, but there was another Korn in the Department at that time, a political appointee, Korn. He was a very Zionist Jew. Mauritania wouldn't take him. They confused the Zionist Jew with my David Korn. So, that finished him. But when he was going out to Mauritania, he called me up o the phone and said, "Come out and be my DCM." I said to him, "Ambassador, my function is not political." "It will be all right." I said, "I have to worry about the children's school." "It will all be all right." I went to the National War College. He gets Addis Ababa. I get Addis Ababa. I knew that he wanted me and I wanted him. So, I went out.

I'm very fortunate in that I always follow people who are not terribly industrious. So, I again follow a very unindustrious number two, who goes on and becomes consul general in Salzburg. So, I went out and it's Mengistu's time of bloody murder, 20,000 Cubans in the country, thousands and thousands of Russian advisors, Yemeni air force people up in Asmara, just littered with all types of Bulgarians, Hungarians, Poles, the rest. We had a very small embassy. We had three or four station people who eventually got PNGed out. We had four or five State officers. We had a big communications staff. We had "listeners" and others. There were about 12. There were a couple of secretaries. We had a six or seven man Marine guard detail. All told, we had, I think, 28 people.

Q: Were dependents there?

O'NEILL: With dependents. It was a great dependent post. I came in to see David. He says, "I want you to report. We aren't doing enough. I can't do it all. I'm glad to get rid of this idiot. I want you to really start focusing on the African embassies because my predecessor did not focus, didn't do anything. He did the British, the French, the Italians, and the Germans." So, I do that and I start to pick up contacts. The British had a really excellent embassy there. Ambassador Barber. The second man's name was David Bowman, later chief of Protocol at the FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office]. The Germans had a good embassy. For some reason, David did not get along with the French. I think it was because the French did not like the fact that David spoke French so well (He was a graduate of the Sorbonne), and because he was not terribly good with the chargé or ambassador. They weren't entirely open with David. David was cold. He can turn into ice. So, I had that. So, I did just a whopping amount of reporting. It was so much reporting that Josephine was very upset with me at times because I spent hours and hours at the embassy. We all lived on the compound. I was about 30 yards from the house. It was just terrible amount of time that was required for political reporting.

Mengistu had also East Germans there, with whom I became very close. I became close

with three groups: the East Germans, the Chinese, and the Russians on that side, which the security people even now bitterly ask me about. Here we had the problem. We have a station which was good, has some good contacts, and we don't have any overt reporting. So, I go on and start doing all this. To be honest, you could be out every night in the week there. I was out five nights a week and one night we'd entertain. Josephine's cooking and friendliness were a real asset. So, we start to get this reporting. I do the writing of it. David does the rewriting, writing, rewriting. But we turned into a fabulous team. Pretty soon, David and I know as much about what's going on in that town than all the other embassies combined.

We find out a number of things. One, the Russians did not get along well with Mengistu. Mengistu loves the East Germans. But the East Germans [look down on him]. Mengistu hates the Americans because when he was in training in the United States, people treated him [condescendingly like a black American]. He's not a nigger. He's not a Negro. He's not an African. He is an Ethiopian. It's a mindset. It's terrible for our relations, but we understand it.

Q: Did Mengistu ever receive David Korn?

O'NEILL: Oh, yes, he received me, too.

Q: Oh, good.

O'NEILL: He had a good foreign minister, a good deputy, Ato Bekele. He had good people. When we were there, he was okay. He had a nice wife. She was very, very religious. She could sort of break on his more erratic and murderous moods.

Let me tell you a story about Mengistu. Mengistu is the son of an imperial lord. The father took extremely good care of him, saw that he went to a good military academy, arranged for his training in the United States, took care of his mother. This kid (Mengistu) had it going for him, not withstanding the fact that, by our standards he was illegitimate. When he comes to power, he is the chairman. His father dies. (After Haile Selassie was killed, Mengistu buried his bones under his office and has killed hundreds of thousands of others more, including one of his ministers in a cabinet meeting. This was a bad boy.) His father dies. A man of honor, a man who was loyal to his emperor, etc. So, they have a great funeral for his father. His wife goes to the funeral. He doesn't. He sits off in a car nearby. The funeral goes on for hours as the people praise the honor, the nobility of his father, everybody knowing that the son is sitting out there and he's hearing this, knowing that in praising the father, they condemn him. He couldn't do anything because Mengistu knew as the people were praising his father, they were never going to say anything like that about him. They never did.

Another story: Josephine goes out to do the shopping. This tells you about Russian-Ethiopian relations. She goes around to all the stores and she complains to me that she's always being followed. So, I say, "Are they bothering you?" "No, they're following me." So, I go and I see Lev Mironov, who was the deputy at the Russian embassy and later the

ambassador there. I said, "Look, we've done business together. When my Marines caused a problem, we settled it out. When one of your people caused a problem, we settled it out. We've exchanged information. I've never lied to you. Now I have a real problem. People are following my wife. You know my wife. She's been here in your embassy. You've been to my house. She is not involved in this business." He says, "I know." "So, why are you doing this?" "Because I've been told to." So, I said, "It upsets her." He said, "Why don't you tell your wife that these people are only for her protection and that's it. Then Lev said, "When my wife goes down to shop, she doesn't have any bodyguards and they spit at her and the other ladies of this embassy." [The Ethiopians] hated [the Russians]. They called them "poor Americans, poor white trash."

Q: This is in Ethiopia.

O'NEILL: This is in Ethiopia.

Q: Run by Mengistu.

O'NEILL: Run by Mengistu.

Q: And supported by the Russians.

O'NEILL: And supported by the Russians. It again shows the relations. The East German Stasi, absolutely first class. The deputy head of their mission was Stasi. I knew him very well. While we were there, around Christmas, David Korn is not in the country. He's gone back to see the family.

Q: You were in charge.

O'NEILL: I was in charge. The Stasi catch one of our CIA agents with his hand in the pocket book. I mean, catch him with people. Regrettably, this agent without any physical coercion but to save his own ass, this American rolls up the rest of the organization, gives it away. We don't know that he's been captured. All we know is he's disappeared. I hear but I don't know that he's been picked up. This is when the Agency and State worked really the best I've ever seen in my life, not because I'm involved, but we really worked correctly. I went over and saw the two CIA guys. I'd give you their names, except they're still active. I say, "What are we going to do?" So, we sit down. I said, "I will go down to the Foreign Office and say that's he's missing, that he's been on the booze, and he's having trouble with his wife and that he's sleeping with somebody else. We can't find him." We don't want to turn the guy in. We'd like to have him back before David comes back and maybe save his career. The Foreign Office says, "Don't know a damn thing about it." They really didn't know a damn thing about it. So, we start making all sorts of inquiries. I start some messages back to the Department. Every message I send back to the Department I immediately tell the Agency the State number. When they send their message back, they tell me the number so we are able to keep each of our own sides informed.

Q: So you're coordinating.

O'NEILL: Coordinating. We had a disagreement about how to handle it. I can't remember what the disagreement was. I think it was modalities. We both reported exactly the differences we had in both our channels. Finally, I'm out at some party and I see the Minister of Justice. I say to him, "Look, we are having some really terrible problems about this. We know you've got him." I don't know that. He might be dead in a ditch. He minister says, "Yes." I say, "It's time that we get this thing settled out. You have to pass this to Mengistu." So, I go back and tell the chargé, David Korn. The Ethiopians because they won't talk to us tell the Israelis in Nairobi that they have the CIA agent. President Reagan sends General Vernon Walters, who was in Africa at that time, to go to Ethiopia and get the agent. This is the first time that I met General Walters.

Q: The famous general.

O'NEILL: By this time, David is back. So, we go out to the airport to see our friend, General Walters. The first time I've seen him. This great hulk of a man, obviously with gout, comes lumbering off the plane, flops in a car, and we go up to the embassy, and we say, "What are you going to say to Mengistu?" "The President of the United States wishes to have back Mr. Timothy Wells," who was the officer who they picked up. His name is no longer classified [Goshu Wolde]. We said, "What else?" "Nothing more." We go down and see the Foreign Minister. Walters says the same thing. Our friend Mengistu is up in Asmara because he's having military problems up there, [needs] to put some spine in some of his soldiers. So, we have to fly our friend, General Walters, up there. David goes up. I stay in Addis Ababa. Mengistu wants to negotiate. Walters has no instructions to negotiate. His instructions are to bring him back, nothing more. That's all he has to say. "My instructions from the President of the United States are to bring back Mr. Wells." Mengistu gives him a three hour lecture on Ethiopian history. Walters goes back to Addis, decides he will not sleep in Addis, but he'll go back to Nairobi and sleep in Nairobi. He sleeps in Nairobi. We get a message saying that General Walters should come back the next day and get Wells. So, we get Wells. But then they PNG the whole station. The whole station is gone. I remember how this all happened because I was at dinner with the Finnish chargé and I get a call. I've got to go to the embassy. So, I leave the dinner and go to the embassy. I'm told to put our staff aboard a Lufthansa flight. I go to Lufthansa and I (You understand how much I had to pay for this) ask Lufthansa to delay a flight. For Lufthansa to delay a flight is sort of like asking God to put the world on hold.

Q: Germans are very punctual.

O'NEILL: Raised to let the sun set in the west and rise in east or something. I have no idea. So, I get them to hold the plane for about 45 minutes. We get them out. It was just miserable. The whole station was wiped out - every single person.

Q: How had they captured this fellow?

O'NEILL: The Stasi was very good and they had obviously been following him or following somebody involved in his cell and they raided the house and they caught him.

Q: And they turned him over to the Ethiopians.

O'NEILL: The Stasi were never visible. We never, to the best of my knowledge, saw a white face. But they did it. I know because the East German who was-

Q: They trained Mengistu's bodyguards, too.

O'NEILL: Yes, they did. Before this, there was another man at the East German embassy who, just after I had come in, started to spread a lot of very bad news about [me], specifically that I was chief of station, and that I was involved in all sorts of shenanigans. I went and saw David. The next day was going to be an East German national day. We would go. If he would go, I would go. David who hated these things with a purple passion said to me, "You go and you tell the East Germans that you're coming, you're going to stay for a few minutes, and leave, and why." So, I did this. I embellished on it. I said that "I personally will have nothing to do with any member of your embassy as long as he's here." Within months, he was gone.

Q: How long did they hold our man? Was it a matter of weeks?

O'NEILL: Weeks, probably as much as a month. It was a mess because he disappeared, his wife was around. She's still in the Agency, by the way, under her maiden name. His girlfriend was around, I believe, pregnant, though I can't recall. When he comes back, he's with his wife and he gets her pregnant. It was "Peyton Place," a real repugnate situation.

Q: Yes. Talk a little bit about the famine in Ethiopia.

O'NEILL: In '83, we had no AID mission in Ethiopia for political reasons and for aid reasons, aid reasons being that AID did not believe there was any need for it. There were a number of NGOs and they were doing some work: mother healthcare primarily. We were providing some small stuff. Since there was no AID officer there, I was the AID officer. I would sign all the necessary papers to get stuff in. But it also gave me an excuse to travel because I wouldn't let the food in unless I could see it. I used that reason through my whole more than three years in the country. So, that all went along. There was a deep dispute in Washington. On the AID side, was a man by the name of Francis Xavier Ready, who said we should not give any food at all to Ethiopia regardless of the famine because all we would be doing is to support Mengistu and his people because even if they didn't use the food, other food would be used by him. So, all we were doing in one way or another was feeding the Ethiopian army, which was not [in our] best interests.

Q: This was not a State position, I think.

O'NEILL: There was no common position across AID, State, and CIA. There was no one

group being for it and one group being against it. I, who had served in Calcutta and was in Vietnam - was used to seeing dead bodies and famine and all the rest, was upset by what I was seeing. I knew what was going to happen because they were starting to eat their seed grain. David had me write an "O'Neillgram," which in effect was very stark. "We can tell how bad things are because the children are dying. The children have red hair. The women are self-aborting and many women have decided not to have children. The water is dirty. Communications are bad. Humanity deserves-"

Q: Are we talking about one region?

O'NEILL: No, it all began up north in what is now Eritrea. It was a disaster. Then, if anything was grown, one side or the other would steal it. So, we had this very difficult problem. David for moral reasons because he was a very moral person, and I because of maybe a mixture of morality and politics, or because I couldn't see any utility of letting people die... Ronald Reagan, the great conservative, said, "We do not make foreign policy on the bodies of women and children." So, that broke it out. But they eventually had to get rid of Francis Xavier Ready, who was a political appointee, he was made the ambassador to Equatorial Guinea.

You'll appreciate the humor of this because that was the last TDY post I ever had. I closed down Equatorial Guinea. I'll give you a story about this. Senator Kennedy comes out with his children, a man whose politics I don't like, but who I like as a human being. He takes his boy who has lost his leg and his daughter, who is a very smart, tough, intelligent young lady, up to Mekele. We arrived in Mekele a little late, but on time for the Kennedys. We stand out there with a Jesuit, who was at that time head of the Catholic Charities, the only decent person I ever saw running Catholic Charities. You heard this horrible moan and the wind comes sweeping down the mountain. The temperature had to have been 10 degrees Fahrenheit. It was about 6:00 pm. The weather was so cold that refugees were huddled and the Kennedy boy started to cry. A tear falls down his face. The tear froze on his face. God bless him, Kennedy; he came back and helped to move more food in that area. Mickey Leland came out later, but was all show. He had with him a black congressman from the first district of Philadelphia (Gray), who had a mind like a computer. He was a brilliant man. He left the Congress, I'm sorry. He went to take over the United Negro Fund. He did a tremendous job in getting more food out. It was terrible. But there were, again, because of personal relations, things that could be done then without regard to politics. We were trying to get food into an area. We had the food, the Russians had the plane, and the Poles had the helicopters. We also got a couple of DC-3s. There were the four of us. We went around. David did not do it. He sent me to do it. I say, "What can you do" and Fracher from AID and Machmaer from AID. We did do this. The Poles would spot the area with helicopters. We supplied the gasoline for the Russian aircraft and all of us delivered food. A small thing, I told Lev Mironov at that time the reason why Lev and I should be friends was that sometime in the future there was going to be some really bad problem and there would have to be a bridge and we would solve it. I said, "The chances of our countries ever being friends in our lifetime is nil." Of course, look at us today. We're friends. The politics were horrible because Mengistu killed people. He killed some of his best generals.

The papal nuncio there, Monsignor Thomas White, always cheated at tennis. It was his great flaw in life. He cheated at tennis. Anyway, he had great information and managerial experience in refugee matters there.

The other thing was that even the Poles and the rest wanted to talk and they wanted to talk in a manner in which they wouldn't get their ass in trouble. So, at these big cocktail parties, I did as much work as I did in the office.

Q: What you're telling me is that we have to combat this in conjunction with people who we considered our enemies at the time.

O'NEILL: Absolutely. We did more because we had all the food. Let me also say that Mengistu and some of his crew stole millions of tons and made lots of money out of it. Francis Xavier Ready was right: we did help the government. It was our own choice. We wanted to feed them. It's just awful.

Q: Was it during this period that Congressman Leland was killed in that crash?

O'NEILL: No, that was five or six years later.

Q: Did we give any assistance to getting the Jews (Falashas) out of Ethiopia into Israel?

O'NEILL: Yes. That was again that horrible person, Lou Goelz, who was now deputy assistant secretary of State. There was a Jewish organization whose name I won't mention because they still do work like this (and I'm not talking about Mossad) who also had people in Ethiopia, in Addis, who I knew well. They wanted to get people out, but to get people out through the airport, they had to have a visa to go someplace. My feeling was "Let's give them a visa, but let's give them a real visa with a fraudulent number on it." We've got A visas and B visas and L visas and all. "Let's give them (because we didn't have that type of visa) an X, Y, Z visa. So, if they have this visa, then they can leave. They can get their exit permit."

Q: You did this to show Ethiopian authorities.

O'NEILL: Right. They had no intentions of going to the United States. They were not getting a visa which they would use to enter the United States legally. They were getting a "visa" to nowhere.

Q: That would get them out of the country.

O'NEILL: Right. I sent this information back to Washington and Lou Goelz goes through the goddam roof. I never got another job in the consular cone after that. He wrote that such an issuance would violate the integrity of the visa. What we had to do eventually was to give a visa to go out with the assurance that these people would fly to the United States and then go back to Israel. It shows you how-

Q: You mean from Ethiopia to the U.S. and back to Israel?

O'NEILL: Yes. It goes to show the weird stupidity of this. Lou had served on the border in Mexico. He had served in Iran and given thousands of visas to Iranians who were not eligible to enter the United States. He goes and gives us this trouble. We help with the Falashas by going up into Gondar, where they were. I made half a dozen trips up into Gondar. One time, the governor of the province beat up one of my local employees. Fortunately, I was traveling with Senator DeConcini and Senator Trible. I immediately met with these two senators and protested immediately to the governor. I told her, "We're going to protest. We're going to see Mengistu." But they had a nut up there as head of security, a man who was sent out on a regular basis to East Germany to get his head screwed on right. It was bad. We would go up into the villages. I will say about the Falashas that I did make one mistake, an egregious one. I didn't know they were so many. I thought they were in the many thousands. I didn't think they were in the tens of thousands. I was off by a significant number.

Q: Did the Israelis know how many there were?

O'NEILL: No, they did not know how many they were because they were constantly on me to find out how many there were. I don't think it became obvious how many there were until we got up into the late 1980s.

Q: You often wonder, if they knew how many they were, whether they would have been so eager to take them all in, where they were having a tough time assimilating.

O'NEILL: You know, believe it or not, they had an easier time assimilating the Ethiopian Jews, the Ethiopian Falashas, than assimilating some of the ones from Morocco and some of them who have just recently come out from the Soviet Union. The Ethiopian Falashas have turned out to be excellent soldiers and border guards and things like that. They are still discriminated against because of their color. We have a friend who is an Ethiopian-Amharic who recently visited Israel. She said that many of the children cannot speak Amharic anymore. They only speak Hebrew. She said some of the older people are starting to lose it. She said that sometimes it's difficult for them, but she noted, "My son has trouble when he goes down to Georgetown because he's half Amhara, half American."

Q: Well, it will work out. I remember, when I was in Israel, we had only a few of them there and they were having a tough time then.

O'NEILL: Now there are more.

Q: Then they brought in thousands.

O'NEILL: And now they're a voting block. There's nothing like the ballot to make people sit up and take notice.

Q: Any more comments about your time there? Tell us about this TDY you had in Djibouti.

O'NEILL: That was after I finished Ethiopia. Let me say this about the Cubans down in Ogaden. When I was there towards '86, they had been turned into beer soldiers. They were selling their weapons, shoes, and clothes for beer, the Cubans. They had really deteriorated. One, they weren't being paid much. The other thing is that in looking at the time that we were in Ethiopia, the Amharas as a tribe were the dominant tribe. They were the ones who provided the kings or the emperors. This is no more. We can go back and talk about when I was in Eritrea. There were any number of times when the Emperor, Haile Selassie, or Mengistu could have made some equitable solution with the Eritreans for a united country. But Mengistu was not a rational man. I think, by the time we got there, he was slipping slowly but surely into a state of mental imbalance. He was only interested in people who didn't have the guts to tell him the truth. I only met him once one on one. I used special English when I have to talk to certain people because while he spoke English, he didn't particularly like it. He didn't like to speak English. He understood all the sayings. He also thought I was CIA and wondered why I wasn't thrown out. I said, "Maybe because you wanted to have an embassy in Washington." Of course, that was not the reason. That was pure bragging on my part.

Q: It had its effect.

O'NEILL: It had its effect. The question of Mengistu's mental competence - (He's alive, by the way, still in exile in Zimbabwe) he killed without feeling.

As for Djibouti, I'd come back to Washington and I went up to see Jim Bishop. We were very lucky at that time. We had the greatest front office in the Africa Bureau. We had Crocker, Wisner, and Jim Bishop, fabulously great guys. So, I had gone up to see Jim Bishop to say "Mea culpa" because I had gone to Frank Wisner and told him after Addis I wanted to go to Khartoum and be the DCM not knowing that Frank did not do personnel work, never has, never will, not terribly interested in it even for his own people. Even with our Vietnam association. So, I went and said, "I really should come and see you. I'm sorry I didn't do it. What can you do for me?" He said, "Tough, baby, I don't have anything for you. But I need somebody to go out TDY to Djibouti." I said, "My French is rusty. I haven't used it since Vietnam, but I'll be very happy to go out." He said, "Alright, you go on out because the ambassador is being called back to the United Nations for three or four months."

Q: Djibouti was now independent?

O'NEILL: Yes. So, I went out for three months. They had a big problem down at the port over AID food. Things weren't being moved. The AID guy there, his mind was not really between his ears. It was resting someplace else. We had one fellow at the station. They were trying to build a new embassy, etc. So, I went out. I cleaned up the AID portion of the thing and then started to do some small reporting on Somalia, helped with the

administrative stuff, did some reporting on Ethiopia from that side of the border, and made myself somewhat useful. The Ethiopians were kind enough seeing that I returned from Washington to increase staff in their embassy. It was just very nice. I told them how much I enjoyed my time in Addis and told them what I was going to do only three or four months. It was useful for the future. Later on, I was involved in Somalia. I was involved in Eritrea. It's not a big place. I went out and saw the Legionnaires, who were very, very, very well disciplined, but I saw them play among themselves: mean mothers. Of course, Djibouti is really sort of like Shanghai in the ’30s. There is nothing that's not for sale there. It's great working. I'd get up about 5:30, have breakfast, work until 1:00 or 2:00, go home and have lunch, and sleep until six or seven in the evening. It was so unbearably hot during [the rest of the] time. At 7:00 pm, I would go out to eat.

Q: The sun was down and you could begin operating again.

O’NEILL: Right. I improved my French and the rest. There was one very bad problem there, which I solved. We had a Marine general who was in charge of CENTCOM. He had come in to Djibouti, had met the French general, told him he was the senior military officer in the whole area. He was not noted for his diplomatic tact. He said he wanted to use Djibouti a sort of staging base and was going to take this up with the president of Djibouti, Goulet, who is still, by the way, in power. He must be 90 if he's a day. He went off and he saw Goulet. He made all these promises. He didn't clear it with DOD. He didn't clear it with State. He didn't clear it back with anyone. The Djiboutians don't know what's going on. The French believe that we are going to come in and take their back door, which Djibouti is for them. They need Djibouti because they don't have “long legs.” They have “short legs” and they need to refuel in Djibouti for Tahiti, Reunion, for all the other places they have along East Africa and in the Pacific. So, I come in. The first thing I do after seeing the foreign minister is go running over to see the French ambassador, Ambassador Thomas. I tell him how pleased I am to be here. I tell him how my son, Kevin, speaks French with a French accent because he went to lycée in Addis Ababa and he's now at the Lycée Rochambeau in Washington because I don't want him to lose his French, which, thank God, he never has. Then I say things like "You know, when I'm here, I will do nothing with this government without talking to you first. I'm going to see the foreign minister. I'll be seeing the president when he returns. I don't intend to see very many of the local politicians because I'm waiting just for our ambassador to return. I ask the ambassador, “Do you and your army ever have generals who talk before they think?” He said, "Occasionally." I said, "You know, we have them in the Marine Corps." That was the end of that. Then I found out from our people in Paris that he had sent back saying, “They've got a new officer here. He speaks French and he seems to know the area. He's been very helpful and has told me all about Ethiopia and what Washington is thinking.” Ambassador Thomas, a very fine guy, very nice.

What was luck of the draw was his political officer, who was married to a Thai/Vietnamese girl. So, she was a little lonely there. She spoke excellent French, of course. She had nobody to speak Thai with. So, we went to a dinner one night and we started to speak Thai. We spoke for a few minutes. Then we spoke French. She also spoke English. Then I would say to her, "What's the exact phrase in French for this?" I

would ask in Thai and she would say it. We had a wonderful time. By the time the ambassador returned, the question over us storing things in Djibouti had gone. We had started the first (not in my time, but about six months later) agreement in which we kept the French informed, that we would bring in our observation planes to refuel in Djibouti so they could watch Russian submarines coming down the Red Sea after they had been refueled at Dalak Island.

Q: I think that's one of the most astute things you did in your service was to call on that French ambassador first thing because he would have found out immediately what you were going to do and he would have resented it.

O'NEILL: Absolutely. I did the same thing when I was in Equatorial Guinea. The Spanish prefer that you always tell them what's going on. They always know more than you do about certain things. After they trust you, they'll tell you everything.

Q: Did we get involved at all in refugees from Yemen when you were there in Djibouti?

O'NEILL: No. By that time, the civil war in Yemen had quieted down. All the people who had been picked up by the Britannia and the rest had been moved on. The British had an honorary consul there who was in charge of one of the British banks there, who I had met on a previous trip down there, who was very nice. It was good. I didn't do a lot of in-depth reporting out of there, but nothing fell apart while I was there.

Q: After your tour in Djibouti, you came back to Washington and became an inspector?

O'NEILL: Yes.

Q: Who was the chief of the Inspection Corps at the time?

O'NEILL: It was a civilian. He had just come in and he just retired about a year ago.

Q: Not Bill Harrop?

O'NEILL: No, he was the first outsider. Good guy. I really worked for Ambassador Ed DeJarnette and Ambassador Walker. So, I worked for those two.

Q: Were you a program or administrative inspector?

O'NEILL: Consular.

Q: Where? Did you travel overseas?

O'NEILL: Yes, I did all the Scandinavian countries, Spain, Portugal, Jordan, Cyprus, Greece, Kuwait, Bahrain, and maybe one other.

Q: Well, you got to see some places where you hadn't been.

O'NEILL: Yes. But most of it was sort of cut and dry though. At one time, I was pulled off inspection and went to a country which is not named here to tell an ambassador that it was time to go home, time to leave the service. He had started to become an imperial ambassador.

Q: Was he a career man?

O'NEILL: Yes. He had enough years in. It was regrettable. When I came out and talked to him, he fairly well knew what was going on. I said, "Your assignment is coming up soon. Why don't you just pack it in? It's better for everybody." He agreed. He said, "Well, anyway, I have an onward job. I think I'll take that." I said, "Alright. In that case, why don't we assume that this conversation, for all practical purposes, never took place? You don't sign any papers. I don't sign any papers. I just came up to ask you about morale in the embassy." He said, "Does any of my staff know about this?" I said, "The only one who knows is your private secretary and I'm sure she will say nothing; and the regional security officer who I have not told completely the truth."

Q: Was the Inspection Corps effective in your point of view?

O'NEILL: The Inspection Corps today are headhunters. Let me caveat this. I recently had problems with the Inspector General's Corps. I'll mention it in brief. I went down to Bermuda. I took my son with me at my own expense because I was on TDY. I couldn't bring a car, couldn't bring anything. My son came down with me because he was having some personal problems. Everybody knew about it. He came down. He lived with me. I sent him to school. I paid the fees. But he went to school in an embassy vehicle, which was on the way to pick up mail and would pick him up when it went down to deliver the rest when school was over.

Q: It would have gone whether he went to school or not.

O'NEILL: Yes. [But the IG became] all upset about it. I pointed out that when I used the embassy car for other business, private business, I always paid my own and always paid the people. They wanted 45 days without pay and $1,000. I fought them and won on all counts. But it was two years that interfered with ongoing assignments and caused a number of other problems. Officers who are currently in the Foreign Service Inspector Corps who are career officers say that they have some pressure to catch officers. The old Foreign Service inspectors was regrettably not good either. You put a guy in there for a couple of years either to reward him, punish him, or to wait for a new assignment. They didn't do the things they were supposed to. So, there has to be a balance. I think it's right that we have an outsider running the Inspector General's Corps, I really do. But I think it's got to be focused; I think that we should stop looking for nickels and dimes. Everybody knows to be careful about them. I wish it would start using a little bit of common sense. Otherwise, it will mean all sorts of problems.

Q: I've been wondering for some time if it was worth the money and greater manpower.

O'NEILL: You have to do it because the Senate wants it done. I think it should be done because there are still idiots out there who take advantage of their TDY, their education allowances. Regrettably, with the pressure on visas, there are going to be problems with the visa issuing process. Just imagine that we had somebody in Buenos Aires that was issuing visas to Koreans to come to the United States when the Korean population in all of Argentina is less than the number of visas issued. We had an officer who was out on one of the islands doing the same thing for Chinese. These things can be done, but we should never leave anyone in Manila issuing visas on the line for more than a year. Then do six months and break them up. If we have lines out there 10 miles long, that's their problem, not ours.

Q: That's right. Jamaica, Manila, Mexico City, Dominican Republic, many places like this. Do you have any comments that you'd like to make about your time in the Inspection Corps?

O'NEILL: One, I learned a lot. I learned how not to do things. I think the reason that the three posts I had after that, each one of them got superior marks for administrative work and internal controls, because I had done that. The other thing is, I was able to sit in and watch how ambassadors didn't take care of their people and to watch how important it is to have a good DCM. If you don't walk to the embassy, if you don't walk into the kitchens, and you don't walk into the communications sections, don't pick up your own traffic, you know garbage. You don't know a thing. You're operating in the blind. People were very annoyed with me when I was in Khartoum and again in Addis Ababa. I would walk in and inspect the kitchens, look at the stoves, complain and bitch about it, and make the medical officers go in and inspect them, too.

Q: Speaking of Khartoum, that's where you went next after your time in the Inspection Corps. Did you go as DCM?

O'NEILL: I went as DCM. I worked for Jim Cheek. Jim Cheek replaced Korn in Addis Ababa.

Q: How did this eventuate? Did you ask for this?

O'NEILL: I had always wanted to go to Khartoum. So, I lobbied fairly strenuously for it.

Q: It seems to me that you had nothing but hot posts and you wanted the hottest, I guess.

O'NEILL: If you're going to try to be good at something, you have to stay there. So, I had three years in Addis. I had a few months in Djibouti. I had been following Khartoum, Sudan, had always wanted to go there. So, now it came up. I arrived, again fortuitously, at a really interesting time. There was a whole change of government. Saddiq el-Mahdi had just been overthrown by General Bashier, who nobody knew.

Q: Our embassy didn't know him?

O'NEILL: Didn't know him. We had a terrible ambassador there before Ambassador Cheek. He went to every party. He spoke beautiful Arabic. He didn't know what the hell was going on. He was caught entirely by surprise. I remember coming in and being there a week. I went through the embassy and went through the commissary and went through the rest. I went in and saw a USAID officer in the consular section, saw her near tears. I said, "What's wrong?" She said, "You know, we're $85,000 in debt." I said, "Did the DCM know about this?" "I sent him the figures." "Has anybody talked to him?" "No." I'm talking about the previous DCM. "Did anybody talk to the ambassador?" "No." So, I do a sweep through the embassy. I find fire hazards, things not in order. I pull out index cards and say, "It says you're supposed to have 85 widgets here. I only counted 20 widgets. A literal mess.

Q: Run by an American supervisor?

O'NEILL: Yes, who was very lucky because he got promoted just as I arrived on board and who left shortly after I arrived. He wanted to extend. Wouldn't let him. So, I went up and saw the ambassador. I wrote this all out. I said, "Look, this is what I'm sending down to the administrative officer. I want you to see it. I'm not going to give you a copy because I think, eventually, they'll come and complain, but I don't want you to be blindsided." He read it and said, "What am I going to do?" I said, "I don't know, but we've got inspectors coming out here. I don't know what you want to do." He said, "Do you think I should stay on for the inspectors?" I said, "Sir, you don't have a DCM here who is responsible. Your old DCM is gone. So, he can't be blamed for it because he's gone. You will be blamed for it. I suggest you leave a little bit earlier than planned, as you've done your three years. I'll hang on to the post for three or four weeks when the new ambassador comes in. I know he's ready to come."

Q: Had we named one already?

O'NEILL: Yes, Jim Cheek. We had named one already. This guy was on his way out. I said, "Leave on time or early."

Q: Before the inspectors get here?

O'NEILL: Before the inspectors. So, what happens? I try to get this thing in order and we find out a whole pile of things. One, there has been a revaluation of the local currency. The administrative officer had "forgotten" to mention it to the allowance division. [Furthermore], people had gone on home leave while still getting their 25% in the States, had gone on annual R&R leave in the States and still gotten their 25%. I again tell the former ambassador. He says, "What am I supposed to do?" I said, "Well, if you're involved in this, if you have gone on leave to the States and still taken the 25%, then I suggest you give it back immediately." He said, "Well, I'm too high grade to get 25% anyway." I forget how it all worked. Eventually, the inspectors came in and fortunately for Jim Creek and myself, I've got all this documented: letters down to saying "You can't do this." The administrative officer went home and never served overseas again. The

DCM and other officers had to give money back. It's funny: the DCM went on to be ambassador, and has gone on to be ambassador a second time. It shows you, unless the inspectors catch you while you're on post... It's regrettable. Eventually, like I say, Jim Cheek and I came out of that smelling like a rose.

But then again, as we come along, I start to meet the Islamic fundamentalists by happenstance. I still haven't got any idea how it all happened, though I give a lot of credit to Bob Downey, who was, regrettably, for only a short period of time my chief of the Political Section. He then went on to Lagos, an absolutely fantastic officer. I start to meet them and then I start to meet the more high ranking ones. I start going out to the mosques on Friday night after prayers to eat "fritur" and drink warm goat's milk. We had a deal. If I went to the mosque, we did not talk politics regarding Sudan and the United States. You'd talk about politics involving Russia, England, literature, anything. So, I got to know them very, very well. I got to know Hassan el-Turabi very, very well. I wrote countless cables on him. I wrote what is, I think, the definitive bio on him that's still in the Department. I got down south to-

Q: Did you get into troubled regions?

O'NEILL: Oh, yes. In fact, toward the end of my assignment (I don't want this to sound like a braggart) I had become very influential within Islamic fundamental society. They knew that whatever I told them was the truth. When Hassan El Turabi was beaten up in Canada by some Sudanese, I found out because the chief of intelligence, Nafi Ali Nafi, called me over to his office and asked if this had happened. I said I hadn't heard about it. He said, "How much information can you find out?" So, I went back and I sent a NIACT to Washington and to Ottawa, saying, "Could you please advise?" Then they advised. I went back and I told Nafi. Then they finally got their communications going. All they had was one officer in Ottawa, who was not at the office that day, that week, that month. They were very grateful for all the help. I cannot tell you how happy I was to get the news that it did not take place in the United States, though now there is a conspiracy theory that the CIA arranged to have Turabi beaten in Canada rather than the United States.

Q: Our friends are always willing to help us with those theories.

O'NEILL: Right. The other part of this thing was that Turabi wanted to go to the States. Our embassy in Cairo did not want him to get a visa. I fought strenuously that he get the visa, both on consular grounds and political grounds. Frank Wisner was the ambassador in Cairo when this was going on. Finally, we got the visa. But then there was another visa issue to the Sheikh Abdel Rachman, the fellow who was involved in the blowing up of the World Trade Center. That was issued by a member of the Central Intelligence Agency in Khartoum by mistake. We've been suffering from it ever since. The Agency [and maybe others] knew that he was traveling in the area looking for a visa and never told us.

Q: His name should have been in lookout books and everything else.

O'NEILL: Anybody who knows that area knew who Sheikh Rachman was. He had been acquitted of complicity in the murder of Sadat. That name should have shown up like a shot. But we had, in the consular section an FSN, a Christian from the south who didn't recognize the name, didn't go to the lookout book, whatever. I can't tell you what a terrible thing it is that that had happened. It was atrocious. It happened when I was the chargé.

Q: I remember reading in the paper that he got his visa in the American embassy in Khartoum.

O'NEILL: There was another one. Then, of course, the most difficult time was when we had to evacuate the embassy during the Iraq-Kuwait war.

Q: I was going to ask you about the effects of the Gulf War. Sudan was on the other side there.

O'NEILL: Sudan verbally was on the other side. Of course, our Egyptian friends were doing us no help because they wanted our relations with the Sudanese to be as bad as possible. Irv Hicks was the deputy assistant secretary for Africa. Everybody panicked over this whole damn thing. It was, again, the Powell Doctrine in place. We were having troubles in Somalia. We were just evacuating Somalia over internal events. Jim Bishop was the ambassador there. Schwarzkopf did not want any Marines anyplace, except near Kuwait. He didn't want to let anybody there and he didn't want to let any of his troops away from the Gulf. He wanted the whole bloody place evacuated so it wouldn't be necessary for him to protect it. He saw as his primary duty to defeat Saddam Hussein. First of all, we evacuated all the civilians, all the dependents, and some of the staff. Jim Cheek decided to do this. Then he had put me in charge of making sure the place was absolutely letter perfect to get out in a hurry. At the end, we could have burned everything in about 10 minutes. Everything else, like EXDIS, extra passports had been shipped off to Nairobi. All the bio files were shipped off to Nairobi. Anything that we could. We were down to the Marines, the RSO, the U.S. bodyguards, one political officer, a refugee officer, the embassy doctor, the communcations section, administrative officers, and a consular officer.

Q: And a station chief.

O'NEILL: And the station chief and his smaller crew. We were ordered to evacuate. Then the question is, "Will they leave anybody behind?" So, it's decided that I will stay behind, live in the ambassador's residence, and work out of the British embassy. So, they bring in a New Jersey National Guard C-147 and we bring out all the Americans that are left who want to go with us, all the Brits and everybody else who want to go. They were all brought down to Nairobi.

Q: Leaving Joe O'Neill in Khartoum.

O'NEILL: Leaving Joe O'Neill in Khartoum with some automatic weapons, his Sudanese

bodyguards, the local staff, and one administrative officer, Mike Margereaux.

Q: Living in the ambassador's residence and working out of the British embassy.

O'NEILL: The residence was right across from the British embassy. It was a very interesting time. I couldn't fly flags. I couldn't go around town. Allen Ramsey was the British ambassador there and he took his job - of making sure nothing happened to me - very, very seriously. But I was still under pressure from Washington to tell them what the hell was going on around. I was really constrained. Once, the British ambassador really got pissed at me for being too active. In fact, he got so mad that he told me that he was thinking of having me withdrawn back to Washington because he wouldn't be responsible for me anymore.

Q: Were you able to send cables using his circuits?

O'NEILL: Only his circuits.

Q: Through London and into Washington or directly?

O'NEILL: Yes, London into Washington. It was not an easy time.

Q: How long did this period last?

O'NEILL: About a month. Then the Egyptians come and tell me that the Palestinians have a "contract" on me. I tell them, "Absolutely, this is not true." Then the Germans come by and say, "The Egyptians are telling me that the Palestinians have a contract on you." The Russians come by and they tell me the same thing.

Q: Everybody is putting a "contract" on Joe!

O'NEILL: That the Palestinians have a "contract" on me. But the Russians do something. I really understand why they did it. They tell Washington from Moscow that they have information on a "contract" on O'Neill. So, the deputy foreign minister calls in the ambassador and the DCM in Moscow late at night to the foreign office. They don't know what the hell is coming off. They come in and they say, "We want to tell you, we're your friend. We want to warn you that your man (They give the name and the name is spelled correctly) who is working out of the British embassy, even though he's got Sudanese bodyguards, is going to be murdered by the Palestinians on orders of Saddam Hussein. Even though we are trying to help you with Saddam Hussein by being intermediaries, we want to tell you about this issue just to show you that we're your friends." These guys went charging back. NIACTS go flying all over. A call goes out to London: Tell O'Neill to come back now, no ifs, ands, or buts. Get him back! So, I have time only to send one cable, which I make sure I put a number of addressees on, saying how bad this is. The Egyptians just did not want anybody there. We have now, again, in 1998, withdrawn our embassy out of Khartoum for security reasons. The French have increased the personnel at their embassy. The Egyptians are there in force. The Germans are there. Everybody's

there except us. We are trying to lead a plot against the Sudanese. Let me make a comment about Hassan El Turabi.

Q: Excuse me. Did you leave then?

O'NEILL: Yes, I had to leave. I came out and the British ambassador has bodyguards, too. He doesn't use local bodyguards; he uses his own. Eight Royal Military Police. They all accompany us. Again, thank God for Lufthansa. They put me aboard a Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt. I never felt so protected. They almost want to put me in a bullet proof vest, but I wouldn't wear one. So, that went along. Allen Ramsey later becomes ambassador to Morocco, and is Sir Allen. He is now retired, a great officer.

Q: But the Egyptians got their wish, didn't they?

O'NEILL: Yes, because they kept saying to Washington. It delayed a carrier because we kept a carrier in the Red Sea longer than we should have. They kept saying that the Sudanese had large numbers of surface to surface missiles, that they were going to let Saddam Hussein use air bases in Sudan to bomb our ships coming through. One, Saddam could not have gotten his planes down to the Sudan. They don't have surface to air missiles. They didn't have surface to surface missiles. [The Egyptians] kept pouring out piles of garbage. We sat there and we listened to it. On the other hand, Downy replaced me. So we never officially shut the embassy. And, of course, we got the full embassy up and running in late April 1991

Let me say one more thing showing how our friends, the Egyptians, tried to do things. Just before the Iraqi-Kuwait war, a cable comes out of our embassy in Cairo suggesting that there be some sort of an alliance in the Red Sea with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and maybe Ethiopia to all work together, have like a small NATO, in which the Americans would put up the money, the Egyptians would put up the army and air force, and the Saudis would put up money. They would then have an entity. I knew what was happening. The Egyptians wanted to suck us in. But then I said, "Who are we going to fight? Israel?" If we use this, what will the Egyptians suggest, that they take back control over the Sudan and the waters of the Nile? I did a really terrible thing on it. I torpedoed that one. You could see what President Mubarak was trying to do. He was trying to be the leader with everybody else's money. He would supply some soldiers and he would get the maximum political gain.

Q: It doesn't seem to make much geopolitical sense or anything else.

O'NEILL: No. I'm surprised it ever got by Frank Wisner.

Q: Any more comments about your time in Sudan? How did the people feel about Americans? Were they hostile?

O'NEILL: No, they were very friendly the further I went from Khartoum. Under Nimeiri and again under the Mahdi, especially under Mahdi. President Reagan had given bulgur

when there was a great famine out in the west. It was called "Reagan bulgur." Everybody knew where it came from. We built a road out there. We did a lot of things. Our reputation with the Sudanese is excellent. A lot of their people have been educated in the United States. The other thing is, when people think about Sudanese fundamentalists, they think of people on camels with bloody swords charging down on Christians. Most of the senior people in the government had been educated in the U.S. Turabi has a degree from the Sorbonne in law and the University of London in law. His chief of intelligence, Nafi El Nafi has his doctorate in microbiology from the University of California. Others had been to Kansas, Tennessee, Yale, Harvard, and various universities in the U.K. and Germany.

Q: They had been around.

O'NEILL: They had been around. They had seen the corruption in the west and, like fundamentalist Christians, want to return to the past. With them, they would like to go back to the ninth, 10th, and 11th century, to the bloom and the glory of Islam. They can't do it and they can't move forward.

Q: It's frustrating.

O'NEILL: It's frustrating for them and then it's again frustrating for us in trying to put together some sort of an entity that will balance off these people. The southerners are Christians, but they are divided by language, tribe, and interests. They have been fighting each other long before the Muslims ever got there. They are as corrupt as anyone you'll ever see.

Q: The southerners.

O'NEILL: The southerners. Garang, who is the "great leader of the south" was a great ally of Mengistu and used his troops to kill Ethiopians on the border between Sudan and Ethiopia. That's why Meles Zenawi, who is currently the President of Ethiopia, and Isaias Aferke, who is currently the President of Eritrea, they would do business with Turabi and some others, but not with Garang. Remember, Africans are like Irish: they never forget. They remember who did the murdering, the raping, the looting, and, with that, the destroying of the water wells.

Q: It doesn't bode well for other parts of Africa I can think of today either.

O'NEILL: No. For Zaire. Anybody who thinks Kabila is a democrat forgets that one of his great teachers was Che Guevara. Che Guevara worked closely with Kabila 30 years ago.

Q: Yes, we forget Che Guevara and days in Africa.

O'NEILL: That's right.

Q: After leaving Khartoum, you came back to Washington?

O'NEILL: No, I was direct transfer to open up the embassy in Eritrea.

Q: So, you became the chargé in Asmara.

O'NEILL: That's right. One of the reasons I was made the chargé there was that when Jim Cheek and I first entered Khartoum, we had other interests beyond bilateral relations. Washington had finally decided that Mengistu was going to lose and that Meles and Issayas were going to be the new leaders. We knew nothing about them. So, Jim Cheek assigned me to start having contacts with these people. So, I did. I started to have contact with all of them. In fact, Isaiah was sitting in Jim Cheek's home when I walked in and told the ambassador that Asmara had fallen without a shot. Issayas could not believe it, because the Amharas said they would destroy it and burn it to the ground like Berlin before they would give it up. Issayas said, "I don't believe it." I went back out and reconfirmed with BBC and then with the Agency. I went back there and I said, "Mr. President, the Ethiopians have surrendered Asmara." He still remembers, I was the first one to call him "Mr. President." So, one of the reasons I was sent over was I didn't have an assignment and the other was that I knew the President.

Q: Well, you had, of course, the requisite background in the area, which was very important. You were there for the independence in '93 then.

O'NEILL: Again, this is where my arrogance becomes my bête noire. There was a referendum to see whether the people of Eritrea wanted to be independent or not. In May, when there was an independence vote and celebration, who would recognize the country? The referendum went off flawlessly. I was involved, the United Nations, everybody was involved. Flawless. No cheating, no nothing. It just went well. Some weeks after this, not very far after, the United Nations answers itself "Completely clean. We believe the referendum was free and fair." The Italian Minister comes down from Rome and says, "We're going to recognize the country today." The president and the foreign minister say, "We're not prepared to be recognized. We were going to be recognized on independence day. Everybody wants to recognize us on that date." The Italians say, "We can't give you any money. If we return saying you don't want to be recognized by us, what can we say in Rome?" So, the foreign minister goes hustling around and his deputy goes hustling around. They say to the Sudanese, "This is what's going to happen." The Sudanese ambassador says, "I intend to recognize you. I am an ambassador with plenipotentiary [powers]." The Egyptians say the same. They come to see me. They say, "What are we going to do?" I said, "First of all, I'm going to have to think about this. I can't do it immediately." They said, "Alright." So, I go running back to the embassy. They came to see me at lunch in the house. I put a NIACT on the wires to Washington and through Addis Ababa because I'm still de juré working for Mark Baas, but not de facto. Though I'm separated, I still technically report to him. So, I send out this thing: "I know we're supposed to do this. This is what I intend to do unless if pressed to the wall." Then I write out a letter which I cannot recall. It says, in effect, "The government of the United States has every intention to recognize you, etc." I send this off. Then I don't get any response. I

wait hours for a call. I finally get a call. They said, "We just got the cable." I said, "It's a NIACT." They said, "Don't you know the Department?" I said, "What am I supposed to do?" They said, "Well, we're going to the White House." So, I then sent out another cable saying, "The Italians, the Sudanese, and the Egyptians are going to recognize. I think it's incumbent upon me not to wait until we get all the papers done or we will be something like the 85th country to recognize. It will cause us terrible problems." I don't have any answer. I get no answer back, no cable back. So, I type up the letter and I stick it in my pocket because there is going to be a ceremony at the hall to officially announce that the referendum is approved. So, as we get up and start to leave, I notice the Italian ambassador has taken his minister in. I start to move toward the door, trying to take with me the Sudanese ambassador, who is a good friend. The Sudanese ambassador doesn't really care one way or the other, but the Egyptians hang. Then we look together and we decide that we can't just let the Italians and the Egyptians do this. So, we wait and then the deputy foreign minister comes and says, "You'll have to make your mind up." I said, "Well, I have a letter." I had the embassy seal on it.

I tell Washington what I have done. Washington was not pleased. They said that they knew why I did it, they said I should not have done it; they weren't happy. I would like to make a point here. Some year or two later, when my efficiency reports were being reviewed, I am low ranked for exceeding instructions, though Mark Baas, who is the officer who wrote the efficiency report, said I showed courage, etc., as did the inspectors. It was just awful. To this day, it's a day on which I recognize the government, that it stands. We're the fourth in the line. Four countries recognize that day. That's why we're number four. It upsets me.

Q: Of course. It was the delay in Washington that probably caused it.

O'NEILL: We finally brought all the papers out. All the papers came out on May 15th. By that time, when we handed in the formal papers, 87 countries had recognized Eritrea by that date.

Q: This was, of course, in the first months of the Clinton administration. The probably weren't well organized for this sort of speedy action.

O'NEILL: They weren't all there. They weren't organized and nobody was willing to take them on.

Q: No, even though your old friend, Tony Lake, was back as NSC advisor.

O'NEILL: He had not put his stamp on it. He hadn't gotten set up. The other thing was, when I came over to Eritrea, there was more than just me coming over. Hassan El Turabi started to get worried. I state this with some care. He sent a message to his ambassador in Khartoum that I was to be watched very carefully while I was in Eritrea because I knew them very well, I knew the Koran, the politics, and that I should be considered dangerous.

Q: Not friendly, but dangerous.

O'NEILL: Dangerous. But even at that time, as long as I was in Eritrea, senior Sudanese officers would come over from Khartoum by private plane to talk to me and ask me to report to Washington this or that. We had a fine ambassador there, Peterson, but they still kept coming to me. I had Somalis start to visit also.

Q: Were you there for the independence day? Did we send out a special delegation or not?

O'NEILL: No, we didn't get that done. We sent out one officer, who later became our ambassador, Houdek. Everybody else sent deputy heads of state, ministers, the rest. We sent out one officer.

Q: Did the Ethiopians send anybody?

O'NEILL: They sent their president, who made a great speech in Tigrean, which then comes back to what we talked about before. It's now the Tigreans who are the major influence in the Horn of Africa. They hold most of the influential positions in Ethiopia. There are a number of tribes there.

Q: Any other comments about your days as chargé there?

O'NEILL: Yes. It was not easy. Eritreans are not easy people. We had a consulate general there in the old days, a great big compound which was still there. I wanted it back. It was my property. It was diplomatic property. We had bought it. They said they couldn't find the papers on it. I spent $100 and somebody found the papers and then put the new stamp of the new government on the papers. The Minister of Defense wanted it. He's now Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Eritreans wanted me there because they knew me from Sudan. They knew I was a friend. They knew I had contacts. I said that I would not fly my flag, I would not issue visas, and I would let no other officer be assigned me until I got my consulate back. They stonewalled me. Finally, Hank Cohen came up. Hank is not the most effusive character you'll ever meet. So, I briefed him on what I wanted done. He had done all the things and he had talked with President Issayas. There we were at lunch. I said to Cohen, "Mr. Assistant Secretary, I really would like to take you around to the old consulate building, which I expect to get back, but I can't get it back. If I can't get it back, that's why I didn't fly any flags on the car to come and receive and why I can't ask you to stay overnight." Cohen wasn't going to stay overnight.

Q: But you couldn't ask him.

O'NEILL: It didn't matter. Cohen wasn't staying there. The President turns to his minister of defense and is very coarse. He said, "I thought we had agreed to give the consulate general back." Petros Solomon didn't say anything. Issayas looked at me and said to me something. I said, "I couldn't think of a more appropriate time to bring this matter up." He said, "You'll get the consulate general back." I said, "When?" He said, "This week." I said, "Thank you." So, I got the consulate back.

Q: That was a real feather in your cap, I think, and Hank must not have forgotten that one.

O'NEILL: Oh, he did. He forgot. But the point is, it saved the United States Government in excess of $10 million. All the buildings and grounds, etc.

Q: Did you ever have military attachés with you?

O'NEILL: No, when I got there, I had one car and one typewriter.

Q: That was it.

O'NEILL: That was it. I found my old chauffeur, a driver from Addis Ababa, had retired in Asmara. I rehired him. Because we knew nothing about the country (Nobody had been through that country in 15 years), I started to travel. This was before Josephine and the children came out and even later when she was there. They went home from Khartoum and then they were going to come out again. I traveled all over the country. I was the first American officer in 30 years to drive from Misawa to Asab through the Donakel Desert. It's called the Donakel Desert. No roads, no nothing, absolutely barren.

Q: For four wheel drive vehicles.

O'NEILL: Yes, we did it. It was from Misawa to Asab through Donakel. The first officer to have done it in 30-odd years.

Q: Whatever happened to Kagnew Station?

O'NEILL: It was taken over by the Ministry of Defense, is still used by them. They, I think, now have moved all the soldiers out further along to a new area. But in the process of giving it up, it was a relay station, but then as technology got better, we didn't need it. In addition, the Eritreans, who were later my friends, were kidnaping our soldiers and shooting at us. One of the things in dealing with the Eritreans is that they knew that I was traveling through their areas when I was DCM in Addis Ababa, 1983-1986, with the Ethiopian Army when I was moving food and doing the rest and trying to find them. They knew about that. They said to me in '89 or '90, "How come your policy has changed towards us? We haven't changed intrinsically." I said to them, "Because you're going to be winners and we don't back losers." They appreciated that.

Q: Yes, I'm sure they did. Well, that came to an end; your chargéship there. A new ambassador came out?

O'NEILL: Houdek came out. It also was the end of my career. I became involved in Somali affairs. Somalis came up to see me. The President was involved in Somalia. I made TDY trips into Somalia.

Q: Out of Djibouti?

O'NEILL: Out of Asmara. I told the Department it should never get involved in this area. When we got involved, I said we should withdraw and let others take over. I compared Somalia to a "poison chalice." In fact, I wrote a cable on it: "Somalia: the Poison Chalice." I suggested we pass the poison chalice to those who thought they had an antidote for it who were willing to drink it. We had neither an antidote nor were willing to bear the pain. I also, which was the crowning blow, wrote to the Secretary in a NODIS cable. He liked the cable. He gave it the 6th floor.

Q: That did it then.

O'NEILL: That did it.

Q: Tell me about your TDYs to Bermuda and Equatorial Guinea, two quite different places.

O'NEILL: And also to Bosnia. When I came back, they put me on the Somali Desk, but I wasn't fit for it. I had never served in Washington. I didn't know how to do these things. So, the director general had an EEO and OIG complaint in Bermuda. She asked me if I would settle it out. The people in Bermuda thought I was coming down for a day or two. I came down for a week, went back and said, "These people are never going to get together. They have no concept of how to get along. It's too small. There is one tandem couple and one secretary. It just isn't going to work this way."

Q: You say it's an EEO problem?

O'NEILL: Yes, there was an EEO problem. There was also an OIG problem. So, it was the DG, Genta Hawkins, who sent me to Bermuda. It was good for personal reasons. I took down my son, Kevin, with me. I found out that nobody had been doing any reporting. Bermuda was in the process of voting for independence. The Governor General down there, Lord Waddington, former Home Secretary for Margaret Thatcher and later her leader in Lords. It was a general opinion of both of us, talking about history, that in 1776, the Bermudians shipped all types of arms and munitions to George Washington. In the '30s, they shipped booze to the United States. We thought that two out of three was enough. We didn't want Bermuda to start shipping anything else. You can sort of guess what they were going to start shipping.

Q: We had a consulate general there at that time. Career?

O'NEILL: No, always non-career. They were in the process of holding it for a non-career. So, they sent me down. I worked closely with Lord Waddington and others, especially black females, in Bermuda. My comment to them was, "In Bermuda, black females stand up and hold office. In Jamaica, they lie down in office. Take your choice." They knew exactly what I was talking about. Sir John Swan was not happy with me. He knew I was only there for a short period of time. He was the Premier. When the

referendum came along, he put his own political life on the line. The referendum was voted down heavily. He left. A new premier came in. Then one of my friends, on whom I had written a bio (I'm terrible about bios) is now the Premier. She is really a fine lady and is probably the only premier or head of state who has had a bio written on her years before she got there saying she was going to be it.

The EEO complaint, it was quiet while I was there. To save money, they brought me out six weeks before the new man got on board. In that six weeks, the whole thing rose up again. So, it's now in the courts. The IG complaint I just took care of. I went back to the IG and said it was "de minimus," a non-starter.

Q: Wouldn't that be something that we would have sent out a special inspector for?

O'NEILL: They thought it could be handled and it could be as long as they were not left together alone. When I was there, the gentleman did excellent work on base negotiations (We were closing down a base) and on economics. His wife, who was the administrative officer, kept us out of all sorts of trouble. Absolutely wonderful person. I had horrible problems with my per diem from a previous post or something. It was all messed up. I said to the secretary, "I don't know what to do with it." The secretary said, "Would you like me to take care of it?" I said, "Yes. Here are the papers?" I asked, "What should I do with it?" She said, "Do you know how to do this?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Bring it back when it's ready for my signature." Everything worked out nicely. They just couldn't get along together. They just didn't get along together.

Q: You mentioned a military base. Do we still have our base in Bermuda?

O'NEILL: We closed it.

Q: I landed there once.

O'NEILL: Sam Donaldson went down there for "Prime Time" or "60 Minutes" or something and did an atrocious piece on it, showed an admiral playing golf, giving the impression that the golf course was on the base, which it wasn't. It was off base. He was showing people on beaches, saying in effect that the beaches were on the base, but they weren't. It should have been turned into a Coast Guard base for interception of narcotics. That's what it should have been turned into. But we couldn't do it. Once it got in the papers, it was gone.

Q: So, those years between '93 and '96, you were in and out, I guess, on these TDYs.

O'NEILL: Yes. When I came back after Bermuda, the DAS in the African Bureau asked if I would go out and take care of Equatorial Guinea.

Q: What was the problem or the situation there?

O'NEILL: The situation there was, we had an ambassador in there who came into

Equatorial Guinea, as a first time ambassador. He made “his bones” doing human rights in Uganda. He came in and he was going to be the human rights man in Equatorial Guinea. He was going to get rid of the head of state and have a democratic government there. He was going to lead the Spaniards and all the rest in this tremendous march toward democracy and human rights. In the meantime, he had the Peace Corps withdrawn. He had the AID withdrawn. He ruined relations with the Spaniards when he complained to the Spanish Foreign Minister that their personnel were not pushing on human rights enough. He complained to the French Foreign Office saying the same thing about the French embassy. He complained to the United Nations about it. He wrote 16 and 17 page cables out of Malabo. I've never written a 16 or 17 pager even after talking to Hassan el-Turabi.

Q: And this is out of Equatorial Guinea? A 16 page cable?

O’NEILL: That's right. He had Ambassador Render, who was chief of AF/C, crazy over this thing. He almost got PNGed, except somebody advised the President, "If you PNG him, you make him a great hero and that's not what you want to do, so you wait." There was terrible morale in the embassy because nobody knew what was happening. We couldn't get pouches-

Q: Was the ambassador still there?

O’NEILL: No, he had been moved. I told the Department I didn't speak Spanish. I spoke French. Again, I said my French was awful. They said, "Go down and do anything." So, I went down. The first thing I did after seeing the foreign minister, saying, "Look, I'm not here to interfere in internal affairs of the government. We're the same color, but that's all." He speaks good Spanish; I don't speak Spanish. I said to him in French, "I'll make you a solemn promise: I will never send anything to the Department of State on any information I receive unless I first check with you. Count on me. I intend to see some people, but you will see them and I will see them." He said, "I want to assure you that nobody tried to threaten your ambassador." I said, "I believe you." I said this in front of all his officers. "I believe that nobody in your government or anybody in your employ tried to threaten the ambassador." They were not exactly sure.

After seeing the foreign minister, I went over and saw the Spanish chargé, José Marie Ridau, a young officer. He had recently returned from Moscow, was definitely going to be a Spanish ambassador. This was the officer who the American ambassador told that he, because of his age and experience, was going to be in charge of the diplomatic community and was going to lead them in this foray into human rights. I came over, apologized for not speaking Spanish. He spoke excellent English. I said, "You know, you are the senior here because you were chargé longer than I and I surely intend to coordinate with you. I'm not Bennett. I don't look like Bennett. I don't act like Bennett. Furthermore, to you, Equatorial Guinea is important. To us, Cuba is important. Cuba is a pain for us. Equatorial Guinea is a pain for you. I intend to work with you.

“I understand that elections are going to be held and that the international community will

be involved and that the Spanish government will be leading." The chargé says, "Well, we can modify it if you have any objections." He said, "They won't be free and fair. They will be somewhat free and somewhat fair." I said, "Something like Chicago. I will go to the meeting with and stand by you and listen to the translations by my local personnel and learn Spanish as quickly as I can. But I will know at one of the first meetings to say in Spanish 'The Spanish chargé' speaks for the American chargé in this matter." After that, no problem with any of the diplomatic missions or with the United Nations.

Then there were people in prison. The American chargé would not go out and bang walls or make a march down to the jail like the former ambassador. The Spanish chargé and myself would go and we would meet these people. I would see people and he would say, "Now, you have a choice. You can let them out of jail and we will report that they were in jail and released, both of us, or we will report that they are in jail and being tortured. We have to assume they're being tortured because they are in jail." They would say, "Well, it's going to take us a day or two." We would say, "Five days. Get them out." They were all out. By the time he left and was replaced by an ambassador, there were no political prisoners in jail. Something like 40-odd prisoners were released.

In Washington, Ambassador Render felt I was too close to the President and too close to the people and, in a way, not pushy enough about getting the human rights thing on the front burner.

Q: There were no Americans in jail.

O'NEILL: No. These were all Guineans.

Complicating this matter because I get along very well with oil riggers and other people, I knew that Mobil and United Meridian were the only ones able to find the oil. They did on my watch. I didn't see any reason why our relationship deteriorated so badly that we couldn't do business with these Guineans. Washington, the desk officer and Render, both felt that the oil companies could take care of themselves. I knew better because there was a border dispute between Nigeria, with Elf on their side, and Equatorial Guinea with Mobile and United Meridian Corporation, and America on their side. Elf wants to get closer to the president of Equatorial Guinea against the U.S. oil companies. Render felt I was much, much too close with the President, much too close with his chief of security, who was, is, and probably will be a murderer. I said to Render when I came back for Christmas, "I can't play it both ways. If I scream at these people, they're in jail and they get beaten up. I get these people out and I have to do business with them." She was not pleased and mentioned in my efficiency report that I was much too close and much too far ahead of the Department on that matter. But we do have our oil and there was nobody in jail when I left and the elections were going to be held. I feel that there's got to be a balance. You can either be all oil and forget the human rights or you cannot. I think it can be managed. We did improve relations. When I left, I got an honor: They gave me the Order of Independence, which they didn't give the previous ambassador, and didn't give to any of the ambassadors, as I can recall. They offered to give me land in Equatorial Guinea, which I could not accept. But I told Washington this. I see a sort of narrow-

mindedness by people about human rights, which we will go on to, but you have to get these things done. One of the desk officers, I think, said, "You know, so what if somebody stays in jail an extra month?" I said to her, "What's the difference between getting one slap every day and the slapping stops after seven days or stops after 37 days?" But we got all our pouches through. After that, we had no trouble with anybody. People came in and out. When somebody got sick, we were able to get them out in a hurry. The French, whom I always admire, took care of the gardé publique, their people. When the French officer responsible for them (and I traveled with him twice) went out into the "boondocks" to these stations where his Guinea officers were, these officers reported to him as if they were French officers standing in the center of Paris. They found out he was coming. Their shoes and everything sparkled. They came and they saluted properly. They spoke in French. They told him anything he wanted to know about everything.

Q: They respected him.

O'NEILL: They respected him and the French were smart. They're increasing the number of officers they have out there training the police. They're going to put one officer up in President Obiang's home province and they're going to build a school for training police up there. They're going to leave an officer up there. Do you think that officer isn't going to know everything that happens in that area? They're training their military. They're not sending out some officer. The officer they sent out was a captain who was a graduate of St. Cyr. This officer was a Russian language officer. He was learning English. He will eventually be a general in the French army.

Q: How large a staff did we have in Equatorial Guinea? It must have been very small.

O'NEILL: Small. Before I arrived, when the ambassador was there, you had the ambassador, a secretary, a political officer, a consular officer, and a communicator: five people. When I came out, there was the communicator and a secretary. We eventually got an administrative officer. They wanted to send a consular officer. I said, "Don't send a consular. I don't need it. We'll just train the secretary," who was very, very good. She was Spanish speaking. I got her an honor award, which she richly deserved.

Q: Were other agencies there?

O'NEILL: No.

Q: No military?

O'NEILL: No. The previous ambassador had done such a job. First of all, let me say something about the government of Equatorial Guinea. It is murderous. Under the old regime, they killed everybody and they still do an occasional killing. But there is a significant difference in the murderousness. It's not completely bad. It's not completely good. But if you want to measure it, I'd say it was a hell of a lot better than Bosnia or Rwanda.

Q: Let's go on to Bosnia. You did a TDY there. In what capacity was that?

O'NEILL: I'd come back from Equatorial Guinea. By that time, my ability to secure a job in Africa or the Africa Bureau was finished. It was dead. The letter to the Secretary, comments on Somalia, the reporting out of Asmara, they just didn't want me around anymore. I was just not their officer.

Q: A prophet is not welcome in his own country.

O'NEILL: They'll forgive you if you're wrong, but they won't forgive you if you're right. I haven't been wrong. I just had not been wrong. So, I came back and they put me in declassification. I sat there. Then Bill Pope, who had been the African officer in Paris, while I was in Khartoum, remembered me and I remembered him. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "God, that must be interesting." Some weeks later, he asked me, "Are you interested in going out to Bosnia?" I said, "I don't know the area, but, God, yes, I would be interested." He said, "We need a deputy head of mission for border watching between Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina." I said, "Great. That's fine for me." So, I went out until we closed down. I traveled extensively to Serbia Montenegro and got into Tuzla and Sarajevo and the rest.

Q: Names that have become famous in recent years.

O'NEILL: Yes. Then I came back and stayed on the Serbian Task Force until September of this year. Then I went to Jennifer Ward, who was the director general for Personneland asked her if there was going to be any change. She said, "If you're willing to hang around, there may be something in June of this year (1997), but I can't guarantee anything." I saw Dick Shinnick (S/S-EX) and he said the same thing. I was becoming embarrassed to be doing nothing. Washington was not my cup of tea and they weren't going to give me anything of any utility. Again, some of it was my own fault. There were jobs that were around, but I didn't hear about them. If my personnel officer knew, she wasn't telling me. I hadn't really an infrastructure or a group of friends in Washington who would be my rabbi. So, I thought about it and I said, "No, I'm going to pull the plug and set up for retirement in declassification." By the way, people say there is a life after the Foreign Service. I told Jennifer, "Yes, there is, but to be honest, it's not as sweet."

Q: Any final reflections on your career? Would you do it over again?

O'NEILL: Oh, yes, I'd do it over again. I think I might have done one other thing. Instead of going to Lisbon, if I had gone to an Arab country, I think that would have been... I really have a great affection for the Koran and for the Muslims. I'm sorry that I had not done that. But I did not know anything about Muslims at the time that I chose Portugal.

Q: Would you recommend to a young person today a career in the Foreign Service?

O'NEILL: Not unless he's got friends in the Service already. I can't see it. First of all, the whole lifestyle has changed. When we went into the Foreign Service, it was an

occupation, not a vocation. When we went in, we went in for a lifetime. Now, the management people say you do 20 and you get out. You're no different than a trainer in the Army. We learn our profession over years. It's not like running a platoon or a company. It takes us time to learn some of these things. I think one of the reasons I was effective in the Foreign Service is, I wasn't all over the place. I spent 12 years in Southeast Asia and 14 years in East Africa. These things are like osmosis. When you're in the area and people know you're there, they also have friends on the other side, on the same side. If you know X, they may know Y and both of you may know A. You may next be in there someplace and they know you. They don't care what you do. I could be a drunkard as long as they know me. They know I'm a Catholic. They know I go to church on Sunday. They also know I drink a little. They also know other things.

Q: But they know you.

O'NEILL: They know me. They know I never told them a lie. If a guy or a gal is going into the Foreign Service, I definitely suggest they go to small posts to start. Female officers are extremely good in the Middle East. I know, everybody says, "Oh, ladies can't get along in the Middle East." Absolutely not true. Robbie Newell, who was my consular officer in Addis Ababa, now a senior officer, can go into any office in a foreign office in Saudi Arabia and be able to do business because she is not considered a lady as Saudis consider a lady. She is an American.

Q: You're talking to the man who sent April Glaspie to Jordan in 1966. I know well of what you speak and I agree entirely with you.

O'NEILL: Not only that, they can go places we couldn't go. They can go and see the people who hold the money: wives. Everybody says the wives don't have any influence. I know Hassan El Turabi's wife. She can make Hassan El Turabi's aides jump and I mean jump. When he's getting tired and she wants them out, she comes in and sends them away. She decides who they will marry. Her daughter married the son of Saddiq el Mahdi. The two fathers are political enemies, have been enemies for years. The wives who are sisters arranged this. Wives arrange marriages, they arrange finances, and the rest. The men, they do the outside: the foreign affairs and the hullabaloo. The "Minister of Interior" in the house is the wife. My friend, Robbie, knew as much of what was going on [as anyone]. She knew who was the favorite wife, what influence, where money was spent, where the children would go, should I send my daughter to such and such a school? They asked Robbie. You don't think that makes a difference when Robbie goes and sees the old man and says, "Oh, I saw your wife and how nice your daughters are." She can say that. I couldn't say to the minister "What a beautiful daughter you have." He'd cut my goddam throat in a second!

But if you're going to go in, first of all, you've got to have the necessary paper, the necessary degrees. It would be useful to have languages. But the best thing is some street smarts. You can't learn them. I know plenty of officers who speak any number of languages. I think about the former U.S. ambassador in Khartoum. He speaks Russian, Arabic, all these. He can't communicate and find out what was going on.

Q: You're absolutely right, Joe. In the final analysis, the main point is to get your point across to another person and put it in a way that he'll understand.

O'NEILL: Right. You can't learn that from "Skies and Spy" and all this. Ladies still, whether in front or in back, in most of the nations that we do business with (That's everything, that's not just Eastern and Western Europe.) - it's run by ladies. Ladies have tremendous power. If they're not taken into context and not taken into the way it's supposed to be done, you lose an asset. Hassan El Turabi's wife liked me because I arranged things for the family. When her daughter came to get a visa, she stood on line and I heard about it. I put on my coat and my tie. I walked outside. I asked if she was the daughter of Hassan El Turabi and she said, "Yes." I said, "You will please come with me." I took her into an office. I sat her down. I brought a female clerk in to sit with her while I took care of her papers. When I came to talk with her, I let the female sit with us. I then said, "How are you going to get home?" She said, "I will get a taxi." I said, "I will give you a car." She said, "No, I can't take a car home." I said, "Please, I insist." She wouldn't take it, but she told her father and mother.

Q: I think that's a good note in which to end this extremely interesting interview.

End of interview