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

# AMBASSADOR DONALD PETTERSON

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy and Lambert Heyniger*
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is December 13, 1996. This is an interview with Donald Petterson. We're doing this on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*All right. Well, can we start at the beginning? Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?*

PETTERSON: I was born in Huntington Park, California, November 17, 1930, during the Great Depression. Like so many then, my father was without a job.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: We moved around southern California until I was three, my dad finally getting work here and there. We moved to Pismo Beach, California when I was three, and he-

*Q: That's up in northern, mid California?*

PETTERSON: It's central coast-

*Q: Central coast, oh?*

PETTERSON: Roughly halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, ninety miles or so north of Santa Barbara. My mother worked with my father in the Safeway store in Pismo. She later became a librarian. My dad stayed with Safeway until he retired about 30 years later. So I grew up in this small beach town, a tourist town, in California in the '30s.

*Q: Is that near Cambria Pines?*

PETTERSON: About 40 miles south of Cambria.

My two brothers and I had an idyllic kind of childhood there in that small town, free to roam the beach, free to roam the hills behind the town. We moved twelve miles north to San Luis Obispo when my father was transferred during the war. I was thirteen at the time and went through high school there before joining the navy in 1948.

*Q: At the high school, did you get any particular feeling about foreign affairs or anything like that?*

PETTERSON: None whatsoever. I was primarily interested in sports when I was in high school. I was a good enough student, at least until I got to be a tempestuous teenager and lost interest in academics.

The rock of stability of my adolescence was athletics. I was not a particularly good athlete, but I worked hard at it and lettered in a varsity sport. I was the first-string catcher on the baseball team. I admired one of my coaches very much, and I thought that coaching was what I wanted to do with my life. But I wasn't ready for college, and I knew it, so I joined the navy.

I told my dad, "Look, I've never been out of California. I've never even been to Los Angeles except one brief visit and I want to see the world. Please would you sign for me?" I was only seventeen. My mother and father agreed. I ate bananas all that summer trying to gain enough weight to pass the physical exam. I was worried the navy might not take me. But in 1948 the Berlin Crisis was on, the services were expanding, and they would take anything that breathed.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: My only deficiency was my scrawniness, and [laughter] I wasn't that scrawny! So I was accepted in the navy, took a train to Los Angeles, had a final physical exam, and joined other recruits there for a train ride down to San Diego, to boot camp. I had my hair shaved off and got some uniforms. That first night (I thought this was rather strange) they had some of us stand what they called a fire watch. I wondered, "Why do we have to do this? Why can't we just go to bed?" [Laughter].

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: The next morning, my first breakfast in the navy was baked beans, which I hated. And I thought, "Perhaps I've made a mistake!" [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: But it was too late. I survived boot camp as most young men did, young men and women now, of course. I decided that I wanted to go into submarines, but I had signed up for the aviation branch, and the navy held me to my contract. I was sent Airman's Fundamentals School at Naval Air Station Millington, Tennessee, near Memphis. I went to Memphis by train in a Pullman car.

*Q: It got you out of California!*

PETTERSON: It got me out of California. Marvelous trip! Crossing the United States in November, going over the Rockies, seeing snow falling for the first time in my life, watching the wonderful countryside pass by - that was the positive side of it.

The negative side was that the two petty officers who accompanied these boots cleaned us out good in poker and blackjack games [Laughter]. But when we got to Memphis, I didn't need much money anyway, for I was going into training. With hundreds of others, I had to wait for about three months until there was room in the classes, which were overcrowded because the navy had suddenly expanded without sufficient facilities to accommodate all the people who were coming in. While we were waiting, we had to do various kinds of menial labor, some of them make-work. I soon became very adept in the art of goldbricking.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Airman's Fundamentals was a mixture of mathematics, physics, and brief courses in the various specialties, such as metal working, aviation ordinance, mechanics, parachute rigging, and aerology, the navy's term for meteorology. I did very well academically in the tests and was able to choose the field I wanted. I chose aerology, and was sent to Lakehurst, New Jersey.

*Q: The old balloon, I mean, Lighter-Than-Air facilities.*

PETTERSON: Yes, up in the Pinelands of New Jersey. It was a nice setting. Parachute rigger trainees were also at Lakehurst. I joined a class of about forty budding meteorologists. The course lasted fourteen weeks, at the end of which we could choose from the available billets. We selected on the basis of our test scores. I managed to be number one in the class, so I had first pick. There were only two seagoing billets, and I had no intention of going to a shore station if I could avoid it. I took one of the two, both of which were on transports. I chose the USS General William Mitchell, named after the controversial army air force general. I took my first transcontinental air flight on a DC-3, which lumbered across the United States to Burbank. From there I made my way to San Diego to catch a ship to San Francisco, where the Mitchell was berthed. So I got my first brief sea duty on an oiler, which took a couple days to get up to San Francisco. I spent the daylight hours out on the deck chipping paint, the marvelous pastime [laughter] that the navy equivalent of grunts have to perform to keep the ships from rusting. I found that I didn't get seasick. I got a little queasy the first night out, went to my bunk, got up the next day, felt fine, and was never seasick in my years of sea duty. I went to San Francisco, boarded the Mitchell, and off to the Far East we went.

*Q: Just out of curiosity, why would there be meteorologists on transports? I would think it would be aircraft carriers or something like that.*

PETTERSON: Yes, meteorologists - aerographers - were on carriers and ships of the line. Especially on carriers, which would have a detachment of aerographers. Good question. I honestly don't know, but the larger transports, like the Mitchell, had one aerographer aboard who provided the captain with information about the weather. Perhaps it was because of the precious cargo, people.

At any rate, I was now a crewman on the Mitchell. My predecessor, a petty officer, stayed aboard the ship for my first cruise, out to the Far East and back. I learned some of the ropes from him and was available for other duties in the "O" (Operations) division, including chipping and painting and that sort of thing. My predecessor, the petty officer, didn't have to do any of that scut work because he had his meteorological responsibilities, including providing the captain with forecasts.

We went to Hawaii, to Guam, west to the Philippines, up to Japan, and then returned to the States for a couple of months. Then we picked up passengers and went back on a similar trip. Beginning with that trip, I was the lone aerographer's mate and was relieved of other duties, which made me happy.

I never really liked the navy as such. There was a lot of, to me, pettiness in the way people were handled by some of their supervisors. I realized there was a need for discipline and structure, but I thought that there was a lot of unfairness and unnecessary pettiness about it at times.

However, I loved the sea and visiting foreign ports. I retain vivid memories of my first voyages on the Mitchell: the sight of a land mass looming up on the horizon as darkness gave way to dawn; the ships that were sunk during World War II still clogging Manila

Bay; the beauty of the Filipina mestizas promenading in downtown Manila; in Yokosuka and Tokyo the teeming streets, market stalls, pedicabs and charcoal-burning taxis, the poverty, the still-visible scars of the war's air raids, and the subservient demeanor of the Japanese, which was so hard to reconcile with the image we had of a fanatical, brutal enemy.

At sea, my duties were to send out meteorological reports four times a day, every six hours. These became part of the network of reports worldwide that became the data from which meteorologists drew their weather maps and made forecasts.

*Q: Well, looking at it as a practical thing, troop transports are off by themselves, probably out where most of the fleet wouldn't be.*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes.

*Q: That might be one reason why they had you as part of the net, since they covered areas that wouldn't necessarily be covered by their own group.*

PETTERSON: Well that's a good point, yes. And transports spent a lot of time at sea, covering a lot of territory, consequently providing a lot of useful meteorological data.

So I had those four reports to do. Every morning I got from the radio shack the worldwide meteorological reports, from which I decoded the data, plotted it on a blank map, filled in air masses and fronts, and from that made a forecast for the captain. Then, when I had finished that and until the next six-hour report, I was free to do what I wanted. I spent a lot of time back aft on the fantail watching the sea unfold as we crossed the Pacific, watching the soaring albatrosses, and reading, and reading, and reading. While I was in the navy I had determined I was going on to college when I got out. I took what they called USAFI (United States Armed Forces Institute) courses.

*Q: You can actually get college credit doing those courses.*

PETTERSON: Yes. I remember taking an English course, and I'm not sure what else.

During the first of the two years I was on the Mitchell, we sailed out to the Far East and back, carrying troops, naval personnel, and dependents. We also went down to Panama, through the canal - which was a great experience - to Puerto Rico, Norfolk, and New York City. I had a great time there, roaming around with two buddies, riding the subway, seeing my first major league baseball game at Yankee Stadium, and going to the theater (also the first time for me), where we saw Mr. Roberts. The ship went back through the canal, this time at night, returned to California and then sailed again for the Far East. We were near Guam when the Korean War broke out-

*Q: June 25, 1950.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

We had some passengers for Kwajalein and Eniwetok. After going there and disembarking them, the Mitchell returned quickly to the States, went up to Bremerton, Washington to have our armament replaced or reactivated, and picked up ammunition. Then we went over to Tacoma, where we picked up troops, and headed for Korea. I remember that soldiers set up a machine gun on the after end of the ship, put targets over the side, and fired at them. This was a clear sign that these guys weren't all that well trained. They were training [laughter] on a transport on the way over.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: I later read how ill-equipped, how unready some of our troops were when they went into Korea, because the army had gotten fat and was poorly prepared for warfare.

Anyway, we went into Pusan in July (by that time, there was a perimeter around Pusan to which the South Koreans and the Americans had retreated), dropped off the troops, and went back to the States to get more. But first we had to go into the shipyard at Bremerton for the ship's periodic overhaul, after which we had a shakedown cruise, picked up troops again at Tacoma, and went back to Korea in October. The military situation had changed. The Americans were well up in the north, heading for the Chinese border - MacArthur's terrible blunder. We disembarked the troops at Inchon, went to Japan for more, and took this batch to Inchon as well. By now, late November, the Chinese had entered the war and the United Nations force was retreating. The Mitchell went to Hungnam, North Korea, where the massive evacuation of the UN forces took place after they had withdrawn south from the Yalu River. We took aboard allied troops, including British and Turks, but mainly American soldiers and marines, some of them shot up. I saw the face of war, how awful and utterly wasteful it was. The Mitchell and her crew were part of the operation that evacuated 100,000 UN troops and over 90,000 Korean civilians. U.S. naval and air bombardment kept the Chinese at bay until the evacuation was completed on December 24.

We sailed to Pusan, picking up on the way a boatload of Koreans who were fleeing to the south. The civilians and many of the troops were disembarked at Pusan. I remember how ironic it was as Christmas approached that we had heard that MacArthur had, in essence, promised that the American troops in Korea would be home for Christmas. We spent Christmas Eve in the port of Yokosuka, dropping off the wounded and the others whom we took to Japan rather than Korea. The ship had been much overloaded with troops, carrying more than twice our normal capacity, and we were short on food. We ate a kind of hamburger gruel from the time we loaded the troops at Hungnam until we reached Japan. During daytime hours, there was a never-ending line into the chow hall. When we got to Japan, some steak and eggs, the navy's haute cuisine, was brought aboard for our Christmas Eve dinner.

The Mitchell returned to San Francisco in January, then sailed again to Japan and Korea in February, leaving the Far East in late March. On April 14, 1951, I left the ship and

reported for duty at NAS (Naval Air Station) North Island, San Diego. In May, I volunteered to be part of the navy's annual expedition to resupply Point Barrow, Alaska. Headed by a commodore, the operation was called COMBAREX. I waited at the amphibious base at Coronado, doing some preliminary logistical work with three other aerographers while COMBAREX ships were being loaded. In July, we boarded the USS Seminole, an attack cargo vessel, and off we went up north, skirting the Aleutians, and heading northwest up into the Bering Straits. We passed through the Chukchi Sea and went east around the top of Alaska to the most northern point in the United States, Point Barrow. At that time of the year, the ice flow had receded to the extent that ships could get in and the small base and the oil workers there could be supplied for the coming year. While our cargo was being unloaded, I visited the town and wandered around the tundra. We played a softball game with the Eskimos, who beat us. I stayed awake for 48 hours because the sun never went down and there was a lot of noise aboard ship. Then we headed back to Coronado, arriving in September.

In November, I was then transferred to NAS Corpus Christi, Texas. I bought a car while on leave in San Luis Obispo, a 1946 Ford. It looked to me like a good car. But I hadn't got very far on my way to Texas when I found that it drank a quart of oil every 50 miles [laughter]. I chugged across the southwestern United States to Corpus Christi and began my work there for the last nine months of my enlistment. As a petty officer second class, I headed a section of aerographers at the naval air station, doing, among other things, forecasts for the naval aircraft that flew patrols out into the Gulf of Mexico.

While I was at Corpus Christi, I got some flight time. I had never wanted to go up in airplanes, particularly naval aircraft, but to get some flight pay, I flew as an observer in an SNJ, a primary trainer that was used for meteorological observations. Affixed to the plane was an instrument for recording barometric pressure, temperature, and so forth. I was fascinated by what I saw from the air, by the view below and by what was in the sky, the cumulus clouds boiling up as we ascended. I thought, "You know, I'd like to fly one of these things." I had a friend who was a pilot. He got some training films from the air station's library. They were narrated by film actor Robert Taylor, who'd been an instructor during World War II. Encouraged even more by the films, I went off the base to Cuddihy Field, a civilian airport, and took flight lessons. After eight hours of flight instruction, I soloed. It was one of those days you never forget. It was breezy and there was a crosswind on the runway. But I managed to get the airplane up and down without killing myself. After 35 hours, I got my license. The day I got my license, I went out to one of the available airplanes - Don Petterson, ace pilot.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: The airplanes I was flying, mainly Aeronca Champions, didn't have radios. So, after taxiing to the edge of the runway, I faced the tower, got a green light, turned, went out onto the runway and took off. For some reason I had turned 180 degrees wrong and was taking off downwind. It was a long runway, thank goodness. I couldn't understand why it was taking me so long time to get airborne. I was shooting landings, and on the final leg of my first attempt, got a red light from the tower. I couldn't figure it

out. What's going on? Then suddenly it dawned on me what I had done. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I got back into the right pattern, landed into the wind, and went up to the tower, where I was put in my place!

*Q: Yes. [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: But I loved the flying. It was a great relief from the navy and the overbearing officer who was running the aerology department. I flew cross-country as far as Galveston and shorter hops to places like Alice, Victoria, and Palacios. Had a great time. I really enjoyed it.

Then the time came to get out of the navy, and I did.

*Q: Where did you go? You left in when? This would be about '52?*

PETTERSON: Yes, I completed my hitch in the navy on July 22, 1952. I had enlisted on July 23, 1948. I drove out of the gate, took off my hat, threw it in the back of the car, took off the black low-cut navy shoes, which I hated, and threw them into the bay, got back in my car, and drove away. I passed through Colorado, where I visited friends, and proceeded to San Luis Obispo, where I enrolled that September in San Luis Obispo Junior College, a very, very small junior college – enrollment then was less than one hundred. Still intending to become a coach, I took required lower-division courses – English, economics, history, chemistry. I took an anatomy course, in which we dissected cats. I went out for football, but there weren't enough players to field a football team. So I waited a bit and went out for basketball, where I became a part of the second-worst junior college team in the nation (I calculated we were second worst because we only beat one other junior college team, and they were awful). [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I was the sixth man on the squad. There were about ten of us. I started occasionally, but generally I came in off the bench. I had a lot of playing time and did reasonably well. I was, again, no great athlete. I was planning on going to San Jose State, which had a good physical education program. I had straight A's, except for one course I took in radio broadcasting. The teacher didn't think much of my acting ability [laughter].

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: But academically I had done very well. I was still intending to go to San Jose, when friends of mine asked me to come along with them to Santa Barbara. My best friend and two girls we liked were hoping to get scholarships at UC (University of California) Santa Barbara. I went with them and, lo and behold, I was offered a scholarship, not an athletic scholarship, but an academic one. That decided that: I would

enroll in Santa Barbara. While we were there, I talked to the football coach, who, surprisingly, encouraged me to try out for the team. Mind you, I weighed 132 pounds, which shows you how desperate he was!

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: On top of that, I wasn't particularly fast [laughter] - a small, slow halfback. Well, I was fairly fast.

With my friend Bill Blythe, I went to Santa Barbara and in September 1953 enrolled as a physical education major. In the next three years I had fun and worked hard. I was determined to get as stellar an academic record as I could because I knew I was not going to be a hotshot athlete and would not have that as a credential to get a good coaching job. I did well academically and also managed to stay on the football team, which, again, is a commentary on UC Santa Barbara's prowess as a football power in those days. Out of ten games scheduled, we might win four. We never had a winning season in those three years. Our coach, Stan Williamson, an All-American center from USC, called us "his little intellectuals." [Laughter] There were some good ball players, one of which became an All-American and went on to play pro football.

I remember that when I was a senior. I had visions of moving up from third string to become second-string left halfback. But Stan brought a kid over from the track team who hadn't played football before. I was annoyed. This guy couldn't block or tackle. But, boy, could he run! He learned enough of the rudiments of the game that I soon was back where I belonged on third string! Johnny Morris went on to be an All-American and play for the Chicago Bears. I played a little bit, now and then, and got my letter.

Before I graduated, I had student teaching. I was lucky to get a coaching position. Usually physical education student teachers taught physical education classes at a junior or senior high school. I'd had one session of that at a junior high school. But I also became the junior varsity basketball coach at Santa Barbara Catholic High School. My team won the league title. Catholic High's head coach and athletic director offered me a job, while I was still in school (I had started graduate school by that time), coaching the varsity baseball team. I took the job.

In the meantime, after graduating in 1956, I had changed my major. I had decided that, although I liked the coaching of the games, I did not like the physical education side of the profession. Nor did I really care for the drudgery of practice day in and day out. I realized that I did not want to be doing this for the rest of my life.

So I switched to political science. A girlfriend of mine was a political science major. She talked me into taking a course. I found it interesting, the professor liked me, and I decided I would work for a master's degree in political science. This required me to take some of the liberal arts lower division requirements that I didn't have to take for my BA degree in physical education, including a foreign language and certain other courses. I took those at the same time I was taking the master's degree course work. After two more

years at Santa Barbara, I had finished the course work and written most of my thesis. But my scholarship and G.I. Bill benefits had run out. I didn't have the wherewithal to go on for a Ph.D.

I had been working all the years I was at school. I drove a school bus when I was in junior college. I worked one summer as a roustabout for the Continental Oil Company in Ventura, three summers for the California State Division of Highways in San Luis Obispo, and another summer for an oil exploration company on a boat off the California coast. During the school years at Santa Barbara, I had various part-time jobs, including hasher at a sorority house.

*Q: Washing dishes?*

PETTERSON: Washing dishes and, you know, making friends. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: College was good times; a lot of work, but a lot of fun. Santa Barbara was a fine place to be; sometimes a little hard to study on sunny days, when the beach time was beckoning. But finally in 1958 I had everything just about ready for the MA (Master of Arts). I had to complete my thesis, which was on the Latin American foreign policy of the Truman administration. I decided I had to leave Santa Barbara. My friends had finished school, some had married, most had gone somewhere else, and I had been in Santa Barbara for too long.

So I went to Los Angeles and looked for work, thinking that perhaps I could get a job using my special credential in physical education. But that proved a dead end. Then one day I saw an ad in the L.A. Times, went to the State Building downtown, and with 300 other candidates applied for a job with the California State Personnel Board as a personnel analyst. I took a test, had an interview, and got the job, which kept me in food and housing and allowed me to save some money. During that year, I worked for the Personnel Board giving examinations to applicants for various kinds of state jobs, writing ad copy, and making recruiting trips to college campuses.

Sometime during that year, I applied for a teaching assistantship at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) and was accepted. In the fall of 1959, I left my job with the state, enrolled in the graduate program of the political science department at UCLA, and began working as a teaching assistant.

Let me go back to my second year in graduate school, 1957-1958. A friend of mine told me he was going to take the Foreign Service examination and suggested that I also take it. Well, I had no idea what the Foreign Service was. My focus for three years had been on physical education, and I had only completed one year of studies in political science. There was one hell of a lot that I did not know, including anything about diplomacy or the Foreign Service. So I went to the professor who was handling the applications, talked to him about the Foreign Service, and thought, "Well, that sounds interesting!" My friend

and I drove to Los Angeles in December, the month the examination was given.

*Q: It was the first Saturday in December, I think, in those days.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: I don't know what it is today.*

PETTERSON: The test was given in a large room in the Federal Building and took several hours of the morning and afternoon. There were many candidates. On the way back to Santa Barbara, I told my friend that I was sure I had failed because I had missed so many questions (not realizing that the test was not scored on an absolute basis, but on a curve, a relative basis). In January, I was notified that, to my surprise, I had passed the written examination and was therefore eligible to take the oral examination. Well, that was interesting! Ironically, my friend, who was a very good scholar and fine political science major, did not pass the exam.

In March or April, I went to Los Angeles again to present myself to the oral board. In the terminology of those times, I "tubed" the oral exam. The three examiners asked a lot of questions about the United States, its history, geography, and economics. Of course, there were other questions too. I simply was not up to speed. After the exam, I went out into the hallway to await the verdict. A few minutes the chairman of the board came out of the examination room and let me know I hadn't passed. But he intimated that I ought to think about taking it again. So I thought, "Well, by gosh, you know, I will!" However, the State Department did not give the examination that December. It would not be given again until December 1959, when I was studying and working at UCLA.

*Q: As a grad student, were you going towards a Ph.D.?*

PETTERSON: Yes, I was pointed in that direction. I had read some articles that previous summer in Holiday, a magazine that was quite popular in those days. The issue I had read was devoted to Africa. I was fascinated. My focus, such as it was, had been on Latin America…

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: As you would guess from the subject of my Master's thesis. But after reading this issue on Africa, I determined that I would switch my focus to Africa. I was fortunate that James Coleman, one of America's premier Africanists, was at UCLA. He became my mentor, my advisor.

*Q: Just might add that 1960 was when the United States discovered Africa.*

PETTERSON: That's right.

*Q: I mean Africa was sort of exploding as a point of interest, all the countries becoming*

*independent. We saw this as a great opportunity to spread our influence, and it was very exciting.*

PETTERSON: That's right. Of course, it was at the height of the cold war, we were vying with the Soviets for influence in Africa, and accordingly we put a lot of resources into Africa. As you know, American interest in Africa was marginal at best in the pre-World War II days; it intensified somewhat during the war because of the continent's military significance. But it really wasn't until the late '50s and early '60s, the time of the explosion of African independence, that Africa became important in the eyes of the U.S. government.

In 1959, when I started at UCLA, Jim Coleman was helping bring prominent Africans, people like Joshua Nkomo, to the campus. Sékou Touré addressed the student body; so did John Kennedy, incidentally. It was an exciting time. I very much enjoyed my work with Coleman.

But I very much despaired over some of the other coursework that I had to take. The political science department was approaching political science through a sociological prism, stressing the work of Max Weber and Gabriel Almond. I found their writings, not Weber's so much, but Almond's and some of the other contemporary sociologists next to unintelligible. I wanted a more traditional approach to political science and came to realize that I wasn't going to continue with the Ph.D. beyond that first year, not at UCLA. But I had the TA (Teaching Assistantship} and I continued my studies. Then, in December, the Foreign Service officer exam was given again, and I took it.

I passed the written again, began to prepare for the oral, and wrote the State Department that I would prefer to come to Washington to take the exam rather than wait until the board was set up in Los Angeles. I wanted to show them that I was very serious. I flew to Washington and took the examination in April.

*Q: April of 19…?*

PETTERSON: Nineteen sixty.

*Q: Nineteen sixty, yes.*

PETTERSON: And passed it.

*Q: I'd like to catch the flavor of this, if possible. Can you give some idea of some of the questions that were asked at this time?*

PETTERSON: Hmm. Two other graduate students at UCLA and I wrote an article on the oral examination for the Foreign Service Journal, which printed it. I re-read it not too long ago. At the outset of the oral, the examiners asked me what my objectives were, what I wanted to do with my life, and why I wanted to join the Foreign Service. In part those questions were designed to put the candidate at ease, but, I later learned, the

substance of the response and the candidate's expressiveness were important. I remember there were questions like, "Tell us where the Snake River is." "What are the leading products of this Illinois?" I had prepped myself on that sort of thing and I did well. I recall that I was asked questions about Africa and Latin America and about current affairs in the United States. Woe unto the examinee who was not abreast of major events covered in the press. I was asked how I, as an American official, would handle a hypothetical problem that arose in an embassy.

The examination lasted an hour, and I knew I had done better than before. The three examiners seemed to be somewhat intrigued that a former physical education major was in front of them. I went outside the examination room to wait for the result, which in those days, unlike now, was given right away. The chairman came out and told me I'd passed. I was on cloud nine, because I had been pretty gloomy about my future in political science.

*Q: I'd just like to capture a little of this too. I was a history major in college, and I've always kind of wondered what a lot of this stuff is on political science. What do they do? Particularly, I find it so impertinent to anything that I know, outside of recent history. I mean, what is all this stuff?*

PETTERSON: Well, sure. Political science is an oxymoron. I mean, there's no science to it. There have been attempts to make a more scientific approach to politics and international relations. But in reality much of political science is largely historical. There are theories of international relations, which put political science it in a somewhat different light than history. And political theory is deeply grounded in philosophy. I believe political science stands as a separate discipline from history, as such, but it certainly is not a science.

*Q: But I guess this is a case that remains a case. Different universities, different departments, are dominated by a certain way of looking at things, is that it?*

PETTERSON: Yes. At UCLA the attempt at that time was to find a different approach to political science and, it seemed to me, perhaps to give it a certain kind of added legitimacy. I don't think that effort lasted very long, but I'm not sure. For me the approach was obtuse, the jargon even more so, and I was miserable trying to become a part of this. But, at the same time I was happy to be working with Jim Coleman.

Not knowing whether I would pass the Foreign Service exam, I was considering that after I left UCLA, I might opt for a career working overseas for an American company. To do this, I would study for a year at Thunderbird - the American Institute of Foreign Trade at Tempe, Arizona. I was already figuring how I was going to get the $500 I would need for enrolling, and where I might work that summer to earn enough money to make it through at least the beginning months at Thunderbird.

When I passed the Foreign Service exam, my troubles ended. I remember going down to the first floor of New State, whose construction was barely finished.

*Q: Yes, I was just saying, I took it in a Quonset hut next to old State, but by that time, it was a whole new building.*

PETTERSON: Yes. I went to a bank of pay phones on the first floor, just outside of the cafeteria. I called my parents with great elation and said I was going to become a Foreign Service officer. I had taken my wallet out, in which I had a phone number or two. I was so pumped up that, after calling, I rushed off and left the wallet behind [laughter].

I went back to where I was staying in Virginia with a naval officer friend of mine from college, realized I had lost the wallet, called, and found, to my deep pleasure and relief, that somebody had turned it in to lost and found. There probably wasn't a lot of money in it [laughter]!

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: So the day ended on another high note. I flew back to Los Angeles, dropped a course or two, continued my work as a TA (Teaching Assistant), and continued my studies with Jim Coleman. A few weeks later, at the end of the school year, I drove to Santa Barbara, where I stayed on a little farm with two other college friends. We looked after the farm's orchard, and I drove taxi, a Yellow cab, in Santa Barbara.

I was in a sense living in a dream world. I had no idea there was a register and that I could have been low enough on the register not to have been called in. So I blissfully was waiting for a call, and, thank God, it came! [Laughter]

*Q: Did you have any idea really what the Foreign Service was about-*

PETTERSON: No!

*Q: Not only the administrative side, but what Foreign Service people did? Did you have any contact with any Foreign Service?*

PETTERSON: No. I knew nobody from the Foreign Service. I had read, of course, the State Department literature about the examination and some basic information about a career in the Foreign Service. But I really didn't know what I was getting into. I knew only that I was going to become employed on a full time and that I was going to embark on a career that would take me overseas. What little I did know sounded great, especially superimposed on my tremendous relief at finally getting out of the academic grind, which had become really onerous because of the situation I found at UCLA.

Well, in June…

*Q: Sixty?*

PETTERSON: June of 1960, about June sixth or seventh, I had a call from Personnel in

State offering me a chance to enter a class at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) in one week's time. Could I make it?

"Sure I could," I said. Fortunately for me, I had passed the exam with a score that put me high on the register, thereby enabling me to get in a class that soon. I said goodbye to my friends, said goodbye to Yellow cab, got in my car, and drove to San Luis Obispo to say goodbye to my parents. I was driving my 1958 Volkswagen Bug, which I couldn't afford when I bought it. But the monthly payments were only something like $29, which even I could afford! I loved that car, underpowered little Bug! It was the first new car I'd ever had.

From San Luis I drove north to Chico to say goodbye to my brother who was working there, his family, and my grandmother. I headed east, crossed the Sierras, and for five days drove across the United States. I went through Salt Lake City, Denver, and across the Plains and the Midwest into Pennsylvania, down into Maryland and Washington, arriving on June 12. The next day I went over to the Department, presented myself, and was subsequently sent over to Arlington Towers to join my A-100 class, which was already in session. And there it began.

*Q: Could you characterize how you felt, characterize the A-100 course, some of the people who were in it, what you were picking up about the Foreign Service, and that sort of thing?*

PETTERSON: Sure. I was deeply impressed by the quality of the people in my A-100 course. There were twenty of us, a small class. The next class had forty members.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: I met people like Hume Horan and Norm Anderson. Both of these fellows could speak more than one foreign language. I couldn't manage even one at that point. My two closest friends in the class were Margaret Beshore, the only woman in the class. She was very a talented, bright, outgoing, beautiful young woman. And Jim Baker, James E. Baker, who was the only black in the course. More than half the class had attended Ivy League schools. One, Tom Greene, had a Ph.D., and another, George Rueckert, was a Ph.D. candidate. There were many MA degrees and one or two law degrees. It was a very talented group, and I felt like a hayseed in a way. I was the only West Coaster. There was a fellow from Nevada, very bright, very intense - Doug Ramsey, who later was a captive of the Viet Cong for several years.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: There was all this talent, which I saw arrayed as the days went by. I didn't have a sense of inferiority, but I knew I was in a select group of people.

*Q: Yes! [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: We suffered through some very boring lectures about the overseas activities of the Department of Commerce, Department of Agriculture, and other foreign affairs agencies. But we learned the rudiments of what the Foreign Service was all about. We had speakers on foreign policy issues. Some were good, some not so good. The course was very much an introduction into how the State Department worked, what the Foreign Service was, and what the foreign affairs community consisted of. It didn't last long, six weeks as I recall.

*Q: I think about six weeks, yes.*

PETTERSON: The time passed quickly. We had one weekend out at Front Royal where we really got to know each other. I found that all these talented people did not meet the stereotypical notion of a Foreign Service officer corps populated largely by an Ivy League elite, which of course was false to begin with. My classmates were, by and large, people from middle class backgrounds. Most of them had served in the military and most, like me, had been enlisted personnel. They were down-to-earth, very bright, very pleasant, outgoing people. I formed some lasting friendships, especially with Maggie, Jim Baker, and Mark Lissfelt.

*Q: I have to say, that it's been my experience as I've done these interviews, and I put myself into this category, too, particularly of our generation. They came really, for the most part, from rather modest backgrounds. But, often, particularly because I think the universities were much more open in those days, you could go to a Harvard or Yale on a GI bill without having a lot of money or something of that nature. If you were bright and you earned enough credit under the GI bill from your military service that you could go anywhere, there was a tendency for the right people to head for the Harvards and Yales.*

PETTERSON: Sure.

*Q: So then they headed for the Foreign Service, and there's been this feeling, well, you know, because the Harvards or Yales, they come from moneyed East Coast families and all that, which isn't the truth. It was just because people with both intelligence and drive would often head for these schools. So their backgrounds were much more modest and much more middle American than one might imagine.*

PETTERSON: This was very true of my class, of those who had gone to Harvard, Yale or other Ivy League schools. I was impressed by their credentials, but more so by their personalities and their abilities. It's curious that the three of us that became ambassadors, Hume Horan, G. Norman Anderson, and Don Petterson all had assignments as ambassadors to Sudan.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: I had been counseled at the Department by a middle-grade or senior officer, I can't recall which. He said I should count on a Washington assignment. I was a bachelor, and he thought I should stay around Washington with the idea that I could find

an American bride.

*Q: [Laughter] Yes, I've heard this before. This is sort of the idea. You're sort of assigned to go out and find yourself an American wife. [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: He also said he was recommending that I take French language training because I wanted to go to Africa at some point. I had expressed the wish to divide my career between Latin America and Africa. He said I could take French during my departmental assignment. And that is what he laid out for me.

In the last week of the A-100 course, the twenty of us sat around a table, waiting to hear what our assignments would be. Somebody came over from the Department and opened up the envelope. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter] Yes.*

PETTERSON: "And now..." He went around the table with the assignments. Margaret was hoping to go to Mexico. I was sure I was going to stay in the Department. It turned out that Margaret was assigned to Panama and I to Mexico, to the embassy in Mexico City. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea. I was going to go abroad, learn a language - because I would have to take Spanish before going to Mexico - and begin my career in a very positive, for me, way.

I began FSI's intensive course in Spanish. I had had Spanish in junior high school, a couple more years in high school, and a year or so in college. So I had had a fair amount of Spanish in school. At FSI, I went in for a preliminary test, and was asked something in Spanish. I had no idea what that person was saying! As it turned out, the Spanish teacher said, "Que hora es?" What time is it? Well I knew the word "que," I knew the word "hora," and I knew the word "es." But I'd had such little conversational Spanish in those school years that when she strung it together, I simply did not understand. "Que-hora-es?" Well, I got a zero plus in speaking, though somewhat higher on the written portion of the test. Then began the course. Most of those 14 weeks, it was just Margaret Beshore and I, so we got a lot of good time with the language tutors. I ended with a three in speaking and a three-plus in reading.

I took the consular course after that. As you know, in those days most junior officers who did go overseas had a consular assignment for their first job. That was the case for me. I was going to Mexico as a vice consul and third secretary to be assigned to the visa section of the embassy's consular section. Therefore, the consular course was very meaningful to me. A heavy portion of it was on visa laws and regulations. The course was given by a consular officer, Harvey Cash, who was excellent. I completed the course work, got in my car, took my meager possessions (everything I had went in the back seat of the Volkswagen), and drove to Mexico. I went down through Virginia, into the Carolinas, across the tip of Georgia, across Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and into Texas. Then I took the old Pan American Highway down the eastern range of the Sierra Madre Mountains. As I drove to Mexico City, I was on top of the world, being able to use

a foreign language for the first time in my life, listening to the radio, reading the signs along the roads and in the towns, and talking to people when I stopped for food, lodging, or gasoline.

*Q: On your way down to Mexico, this is 1961?*

PETTERSON: January of 1961. I was in Washington during the election and left just before the inauguration of John Kennedy. It was an exciting time to be in Washington and to join the U.S. government. At least it certainly was for me, and I'm certain many-

*Q: I think for most people there was a real spirit at the time.*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes.

*Q: You're a part of the new generation taking over, and the world's your oyster, and we had a role to play.*

PETTERSON: I was a staunch supporter of Kennedy. During the election, when I first got to Washington, I lived with five naval officers, my friend and four of his colleagues, all of whom were deep-dyed Republicans and thought that Richard Nixon was by far the best candidate. I lived with these guys as a Democrat and backer of Kennedy in the election and was very pleased with the outcome of it [laughter].

I had an intense interest in politics and government, especially the new Kennedy government. It embodied a new generation, as you know. I remember watching as Kennedy would come out on the stoop of his Georgetown house and announce who was going to be what in his government. His first appointment was-

*Q: It was Soapy Williams.*

PETTERSON: Soapy Williams, yes.

Anyway, there I was in Mexico. I'd been overseas when I was in the navy, but I'd never been immersed in the culture and the life, as I would be in Mexico, nor had I ever had the language, so I was quite happy as I drove down into Mexico. But I became terrified when I got into my first traffic circle. To me it was a wild scene. It seemed as if drivers were bent on suicide as they zoomed into the circle. I managed to get the car to the hotel, which was near the embassy, and park it. I didn't get back in the car, literally, for a week after that. Later, I learned to drive like a citizen of Mexico City and went charging into traffic circles like everyone else. The trick was to look straight ahead and not worry about what was on either side of you.

I reported in to the embassy, where I began working very soon afterward in the non-immigrant visa section. The embassy in those days was housed in the Sanborn Building. Sanborn's famous Mexican restaurant was on the ground floor, and some commercial offices occupied the next few floors. The consular section was on the fourth floor. The

rest of the embassy didn't begin till the sixth floor, so we were physically separated from other embassy sections. As time went on, I realized that the consular officers felt more than physically separated from the rest of the embassy.

*Q: [Laughter] I like to put at the beginning of each section. You served in Mexico from 1961 until when?*

PETTERSON: From January of '61 until about September or October of '62. My Mexican assignment was cut short.

*Q: So what type of work were you doing? Can you describe a little bit the atmosphere of the embassy?*

PETTERSON: Yes. The caseload for the non-immigrant visa officer in Mexico was enormous. We had, literally, hundreds of applicants a day, as many as a thousand or more in the peak season. There were, I think, four or five of us. I can recall working with Bill Hallman, Carolyn Kingsley, Walt West, and there would have been another officer on the line, called the NIV line. Mexico City was well known in the Service as a "visa mill."

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: We sat in cubicles separated from the applicants, who were in a waiting room right outside of our cubicles. They entered through swinging doors. Frosted glass in the doors assured our privacy and the privacy of anybody who came in for an interview. Behind us were windowed walls with openings through which the papers of the applicants came through, given to us by the Mexican visa clerks. We visa-issuing officers were in a row, large walls affording us a view of what was going on in each other's cubicle.

The work consisted of sifting out the many bona fide non-immigrant visa applicants from the possible or probable non bona fide non-immigrant visa applicants. The first step was to look at the application to see where the person lived, his or her profession, and so forth. In many cases, it was quite obvious that the applicant was from an upscale *colonia* or section of Mexico City, going on a business trip, or shopping, or to visit relatives - clearly eligible for a visa. In these cases we didn't interview the person. We just stamped the passport, signed the visa, and sent the papers back to the clerks.

If in reading an applicant's data card, you had doubts - let's say the applicant was a *campesino* who was going to visit his brother in Chicago, where thousands of Mexican illegal immigrants had gone for work, then you had to talk to him. The refusal rate was quite high, because many people knew that it was a long wait for an immigrant visa, and that they might not be able to qualify anyway. Consequently, they tried to get through by getting a non-immigrant visa. Again, the refusal rate in Mexico City was quite high. All kinds of people wanted to go to the States for different reasons. For example, there were what we called "the maid cases." A young woman would come in with an American couple, who said they were sponsoring her. They claimed they had befriended this young

girl, who was uneducated, and wanted to take her to the United States to help her in her education and to acquaint her with American culture. Well, these were obvious falsehoods, but required polite refusals, because we knew the Americans would demand that we'd give the visa or demand to see our superiors. One learned tact.

Working in the visa section was a very good opportunity to begin a career, to use the foreign language that you had acquired and were still learning, and to meet Mexicans and, through them, learn more about Mexico.

It also afforded me a chance to meet a young lady. Just before I left Washington I had my final advice from my counselor. I don't recall much of what he told me, but I do vividly remember he said, "Young man, whatever you do, do not marry a foreigner. This will be bad for your career."

"Yes, sir."

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I'd been on the visa line less than a week. If I approved a visa, I had to pass it over to Bill Hallman so he could sign it, because I didn't have a stamp yet with my name on it. One day about a week after I'd started working, an application form came to me. I looked at the picture and saw it was the face of a beautiful young woman. She had applied for a visa to go to Brownsville, Texas, with an aunt to go shopping. She was from a nice *colonia*. There was no reason to interview her, but I wanted to see her personally! [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: So I got on the loudspeaker system and called her in. She came in, and indeed she was a beautiful young lady. I asked her some pro forma questions. I didn't know what to say or do, other than conduct the interview. She was a little bit nonplused. She wondered why had she been called in. Most people that day had not been called in. But she answered the questions and went out. I turned over to Hallman and said, "Bill, what do I do? How can I meet this girl?" And he said, "Well, ask her for her phone number and tell her that you might want to call."

So I called her back in. By this time she's really [laughter] perplexed. "What's going on here?" Incidentally, she spoke no English. Somehow I got her phone number. She went back out and told her sister about this crazy gringo. But I guess she was intrigued to a certain extent.

As it turned out, the shopping trip was called off. I, thinking that she'd gone to Brownsville, waited ten days before I called her. She'd been waiting, wondering if this strange foreigner would call. When I did call, I'd been schooled in what to do by Bill Hallman, who spoke flawless Spanish with a Mexican accent and really knew Mexico. He and his wife Eileen, who were wonderful people, had Mexican friends and were well

schooled in Mexican culture. So Bill was my advisor on this, and he said I should telephone and ask permission to go to the house to call on the young lady. I did that, and as Julie - her name is Julieta [Hoo-li-et-ta], and she was called "Zhu-lee" in her family - as she later told me, all the extensions on the phone line were picked up as soon as they knew it was the American. So I, in my not flawless Spanish, asked for permission to come over to call on her, and I was given the permission.

Bill had advised me that the next step was to go meet the family and ask for permission to take her out, if she was willing. I went to their house in Colonia Polanco and met the family. It wasn't an ordeal, but I was a bit nervous and saw this beautiful girl again. I chatted with her and then asked her for a date. She was agreeable. I asked her mother or father (I don't recall now), for parental approval, and got it. It was made clear that the date would have to be chaperoned. Our first date was at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, where Van Cliburn was giving a concert.

*Q: He's a famous pianist?*

PETTERSON: The famous pianist who in 1958 had won the Moscow prize. He was a celebrity and a pianist of real note. It was agreed that Bill and Eileen Hallman, a married couple from the embassy, and thus respectable in the eyes of the Mexican family, would be the chaperones. I went to the house, and her father's driver drove us to Bellas Artes. We met Bill and Eileen there, attended the concert, and were driven back home, and that began the courtship.

I went to the house frequently. Julie's brother-in-law, Joaquin, advised me to come over every night. Why he did this, I'm not sure, but it was accepted by the family, although they later told me they wondered why I visited so often. I would drop in most evenings, and they'd feed me, [laughter] which helped me. It helped me survive. Julie and I would sit in the parlor under the watchful eye of an aunt who was in an adjoining room and could see us through a mirror. We would talk. We would go to movies, always with someone from the family. Chaperoned, we would take trips to places around Mexico City or to nearby towns, such as Cuernavaca. We got to know each other, and before long, two months or so I proposed. She accepted and we decided that we would get married in August.

I talked to Ann Claudius, who was the head of the consulate section. Ann was not enthusiastic about the idea, but when she realized I was determined, she gave me advice on what I needed to do, which was to send in a letter of resignation with another letter asking for permission to marry a foreigner, as you had to do in those days. There had been an executive order of the President written in 1939 that didn't prohibit marriages with foreigners but made them difficult. It made clear that marrying a foreigner was not the best thing for the American Foreign Service officer to do.

At any rate, the papers went in, and Julie and I continued our courtship, still under close scrutiny. [Laughter] She began studying English at the Binational Institute - the USIS (United States Information Service) Binational Institute in Mexico City. My Spanish kept

getting better and better, since I used it not only at work, but also outside of work. The day of our wedding began to approach, without any word from Washington.

In the meantime, a security examination had been conducted. Julie was asked to come into the embassy to talk to a security officer. She came, and her mother came with her. The security officer told me later that it was the first time he had ever been cross-examined. When he started asking questions about Julie, her mother began to ask questions about me. "Has this man ever been married before?" that sort of thing. [Laughter]

Julie passed the security examination, and we had no reason to expect any problem, but no answer from Washington. I didn't know what to do. My parents were coming for the wedding. My mother had never been out of the United States. My father had been only to France and Germany right after World War I, when he was in the army. Coming to Mexico would be a big event for them. Invitations were ready for the August wedding.

Finally Ann sent a cable to Washington, to a friend in Personnel. The request had simply been lying in somebody's in basket. So my resignation was turned down, and permission was given to me to marry. On the 22nd of August, we had the civil ceremony, after which she went home, [laughter] I went to my apartment, and, if anything, the chaperoning was more intense. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: We were married on the 26th in a chapel of a private school. We couldn't be married in the church as such, because I wasn't a Catholic. I had gone to a priest for instruction. Then we had to get approval by the Church authorities. One day Julie and I went to the Zocalo, the huge square in the old part of Mexico City where the government buildings and the National Cathedral were located. I was to be interviewed at the Cathedral. Julie's mother accompanied us, which was fortunate because the priest, who was to pass on whether or not this marriage should take place, had been their parish priest years before. He recognized her, she recognized him and remembered that at that time he had been living with a woman and their two children. So, if there had been any dispensation on his part to give us trouble, that evaporated immediately. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: With permission from the spiritual authorities and from the U.S. government in hand, we were married first by the authorities of the Distrito Federal de Mexico (Federal District of Mexico), and then by the Church, and we began our married life.

*Q: Don, could you tell me a bit about how you found the embassy relations within the embassy and all from your vantage point?*

PETTERSON: Well, as I said earlier, the consular section was separated from the rest of

the embassy. We felt a little bit left out of things. We labored all day on visa matters and didn't have all that much to do with the rest of the embassy. In time, I got to know people from the upper reaches in our very large embassy. As can happen, and often is the case in the largest embassies, there was an institutional impersonality that came from the bigness. Leadership in the front office can help overcome this. We had a well-regarded ambassador, Thomas Mann, whom I was taken up to meet at one point and whom I did see once or twice at the residence. But really, I had very little contact with the ambassador.

I did my stint in NIVs (Non-immigrant Visas), and then went over to immigrant visas for a while. There was a different type of caseload, but the work was just as intense. In visa work we often seemed to be on the verge of exhaustion, struggling with a very high volume of work. Perhaps that situation contributed our sense of camaraderie. As busy as we were, some of us looked for opportunities for political reporting. Most of us junior officers were interested in the long haul in having a shot at political work. On at least a couple of occasions, I got some worthwhile information from a visa applicant. Once someone from El Salvador came through, I recall, and had something to say of some interest to the front office, to the political section, or to the ambassador's aide, who was a conduit for information that might come from consular officers. It was considered an accomplishment if you could get a squib into the Weekly, which was prepared by the embassy. The Weekly, as I think it was entitled, was a compilation of information of lesser importance. It was the kind of report that didn't go out telegraphically but was supposedly of interest to some end users back in Washington. Not very exciting stuff. Still, if you got a little bit of something into the weekly report, you felt had accomplished something.

My last job in the embassy was in the protection and welfare section, working under Diego Asencio, who later became an ambassador, and who already possessed qualities of leadership, and a lot of pizzazz as well. Diego was an operator. For example, he had put together had a group of unpaid retainers, professional people from the Mexican community. We would draw on them when we needed expert advice or assistance to help Americans citizens get out of trouble. We had a psychiatrist, we had a funeral director, we had a liaison with the police, and so forth. I learned a lot from Diego.

My particular specialty was dealing with the Federal Registry of Automobiles. An American who drove his car into Mexico had to have certain kinds of papers, and if he didn't keep those papers, or didn't leave the country with his car when he was supposed to leave, he was in deep trouble. The Mexicans viewed any irregularities with cars with deep suspicion because there was a lot of black marketing going on in automobiles, and one could make big money bringing in an American car and selling it illegally. I spent a considerable amount of time at the Registry negotiating on behalf of Americans who had run afoul of it.

I did the other kind of work that officers do in protection and welfare - accident cases, hospitalizations, death cases, and people who were in jail for one reason or another. Because of its proximity to the United States, and also because, I was told by the

psychiatrist we had on retainer, its culture was so different from that of the U.S., Mexico attracted a lot of mentally unstable Americans, some of whom had deep mental problems. A lot of them pitched up at the embassy, and we had to deal with them. It was sometimes colorful work.

*Q: Yes. Did you have any particular case or something that you thought about?*

PETTERSON: One case, not in protection and welfare, but in NIVs, comes to my mind. I think I handled it diplomatically. I saw the papers of a woman about 65 or 70 years of age who wanted to go to the States. She was from a good *colonia*, but I thought that maybe I should talk to her. So I called her name on the loudspeaker system, and I waited. Nothing happened. Then I saw through the frosted glass the palm of a hand moving in a circular direction feeling the glass. Then the hand moved across, and slight bit of pressure was put on the door. The cubicle had a swinging double door, which was quite high so that no one could see over it, and there was an open space of maybe a couple of feet at the bottom.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Once again the hand appeared on the frosted glass. Then, before I could get up, I looked down, and saw this elderly lady crawling under that door.

*Q: Oh, no. Oh, no.*

PETTERSON: She had never seen a swinging door before.

*Q: Swinging door before.*

PETTERSON: So she-

*Q: Crawled…*

PETTERSON: And I stood there with my mouth open. She got up, and I invited her to sit down. I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to embarrass her. I talked to her, concluded that she merited getting a visa, and told her so. She got up, thanked me, and before I could say anything further, she got down on her hands and knees and crawled out under the door. Maybe when she came in, I should have said, "Madam, you shouldn't have crawled under that."

*Q: Yes, yes.*

PETTERSON: But I didn't want to embarrass her.

*Q: Yes, yes, yes.*

PETTERSON: She was such a sweet lady. So I didn't say anything. I…I, well, what you have done? I don't know whether what I did was right. But I didn't say anything, and she

crawled out. [Laughter]

*Q: Okay.*

PETTERSON: Bill Hallman and Carolyn Kingsley on the two sides of me were cracking up. [Laughter] I suppose that's not a very good example of how one learns to become a diplomat or not, but…

*Q: Well, now I think one does face these things. I mean really very sweet people, they're up against a foreign culture or something they're not used to, and they're not quite sure how to react. They're trying to do the thing, and you don't want to embarrass them. It's not awkward, but it's the sort of thing we have to learn.*

PETTERSON: Yes. Well, after it was over, I didn't feel too bad, because there was no laughter. There was no hush outside. Nobody wanted to embarrass the lady, I guess. And anyway, and she got her visa.

Protection and welfare strange cases? There's too many of them for me to remember anything in particular. We had people who came in who said they were being followed by American agents, a man who had a radio implanted in his body and was being tracked, another who was under constant radar surveillance, a woman who said strange people were trying to poison her, that kind of thing.

*Q: It was, you know, the Rockefellers were reading their minds?*

PETTERSON: Yes, yes, things like that.

*Q: I did the same thing in Frankfurt and almost. I mean, it's very sad.*

*You left there when, 1962?*

PETTERSON: Yes, I had applied for hard language training, specifically for Swahili. That summer of '62, I would say about July, I received notice that I had been accepted for Swahili language training and that my onward assignment after language training would be Zanzibar. Now this was a rare thing, when you had advance notice a year ahead of time-

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Not only of your training, but also of the following assignment.

Swahili language training was to start in November. We left several weeks earlier, Julie and I with our baby, Susan, who had been born in late July and was about two months old when we departed Mexico. We drove to California to see friends and relatives. From there, wee drove across the United States, still in the same VW (Volkswagen) Bug. We arrived just at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I began Swahili training, the second

class in Swahili given by the Foreign Service Institute. Julie enrolled in an English course in downtown Washington. In my class, there were five of us going to various places, including Uganda, Kenya, and, of course, Zanzibar. In time two people peeled off early for their assignments, and we ended with three of us in the class. I slogged through the Swahili and got a three, three. I had been reading all I could about East Africa and Zanzibar. And Julie and I did what a Foreign Service junior officer and his spouse would do in those days to get ready for a Third-World assignment. We had to buy supplies of things we wouldn't find where we were going, and we bought them as cheaply as possible. For example, with another couple, we bought glassware from a restaurant supply store in Washington, D.C. I bought my tropical suits from Schwartz-

*Q: S.S. Schwartz in Baltimore, a place where everybody…it's one place you could buy summer clothes during the winter.*

PETTERSON: Exactly, and at a price that a junior officer could afford.

*Q: Oh, yes. Oh absolutely.*

PETTERSON: We didn't get princely salaries, but it was great when I first started working to have a paycheck coming in regularly for the first time since I left the navy. I started out at $5,500 or $5,600 a year. By this time, at the beginning of 1963, I was making about $6,500.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: We got reservations on the USS *Constitution*. In those days you could journey by sea if you were going to a place where U.S. lines were traveling. We had a ten-day trip to Genoa, which was wonderful, a wonderful way to travel-

*Q: Oh, yes.*

PETTERSON: A civilized way to travel. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter] Yes.*

PETTERSON: We went to Genoa and visited with our friend Carolyn Kingsley, who was assigned to the consulate there. After two days, we took a train to Rome, where we boarded a propeller aircraft for the trip to Nairobi. It was a long flight, and it was late in the day when landed at Nairobi's airport. We transferred to a DC-3 and flew to Mombasa, Tanga, and finally Zanzibar, arriving in the darkness of night. Getting out of the airplane, we were enveloped by warm, humid tropical air. We were met by Frederick "Fritz" Picard, the consul, and Dale Povenmire, the vice-consul, and driven over to Fritz's house for dinner. From there we passed through checkpoints manned by British soldiers. The pre-independence elections had just been held, and there was tension on the island. We were taken to our house, a thatch-roofed, whitewashed coral and lime structure that originally was a stable. It would be our temporary home until Povenmire,

whom I was replacing, was transferred.

Our life in Africa had begun.

*Q: You were in Zanzibar from when to when?*

PETTERSON: From July 1963 until November 1965, over two years.

*Q: I wonder, could you explain what the situation was when you arrived, not what happened after, but when you arrived, and what our consulate was doing or expected? I think that's where we'll end it this time.*

PETTERSON: The American consulate, the first consulate in Zanzibar, was established in 1837. As a cost-saving measure, it was closed in 1915, but reopened in 1961. The reopening was occasioned by the establishment of a Project Mercury tracking station on Zanzibar Island.

*Q: Yes, our space program.*

PETTERSON: Project Mercury was the first manned space effort of the United States, and tracking stations were set up at various places around the world. Zanzibar was one of them. At that time, Zanzibar was moving toward independence. It was a British protectorate under the guidance of British colonial authorities, led by the resident. His title was "resident," not "governor," because Zanzibar was a protectorate, not a colony as such. The protectorate consisted of Zanzibar Island and the island of Pemba, which lay about 45 miles northeast of Zanzibar, and a few very small islands. Arabs had dominated Zanzibar since the end of the seventeenth century, when Omani Arabs seized control of it. The Sultan of Oman moved his sultanate to Zanzibar in 1832. It became a British possession in 1890, when the Germans, who had gained control of Tanganyika and were on the verge of occupying Zanzibar, agreed to let the British have it in exchange for Heligoland. The British ruled through the Sultan of Zanzibar but retained ultimate power and administered the protectorate.

There had been some turmoil in the years immediately leading up to independence, because of deep antagonism between the black African majority and the Arab minority who continued to dominate Zanzibar politically and, with the Asians, people of Indian and Pakistani origin, economically. The Arabs were a minority, with about 50,000 inhabitants, whereas the Africans numbered some 250,000. The Asians, a community of about 20,000 divided into various religious sects, were mainly businessmen, shopkeepers, and professional people, most of them living in Zanzibar Town. The European community numbered about 500 - the British colonial administrators, some business people, and spouses and children. The sixty or so Americans in Zanzibar were counted as members of the European community.

The elections in 1961 had been accompanied by riots and some killings. So the British, concerned about the '63 elections, brought in troops, Scots Guards, to maintain the peace.

The election went off with no violence.

*Q: The election had taken place before you arrived?*

PETTERSON: Yes, just before our arrival in July 1963. A coalition of the Arab-led Zanzibar Nationalist Party and a smaller party consisting mainly of people of mixed blood, won the elections. There were accusations that the British had gerrymandered the electoral constituencies so that the African majority would not win. In the event though, it was the divisions among the Africans, their inexperience in politics, and the organizing skills of the Arabs that won the prize for the Arabs and their allies. An Arab named Ali Muhsin led the coalition government.

From the elections until independence, which came on December 12, 1963, although the African politicians voiced strong opposition to the acts of the pre-independence government, there were few overt signs of serious unrest among the Africans. Yet, many worried that after independence there could be some trouble, for the Africans were deeply upset by what had occurred. I remember that a Special Branch police officer, a Briton who was about to leave Zanzibar, told Fritz Picard that there would be trouble, but not until well into the year.

With the arrival of Zanzibar's independence, our small consulate became an embassy. Picard, the consul, was to became the chargé d'affaires. I was the other State Department embassy officer, and Stuart Lillico was the U.S. Information Service officer. Imelda Johnson, was Fritz's secretary. The four of us made up the American diplomatic establishment in Zanzibar. The other Americans on the island, in addition to our families, were associated with the tracking station.

*Q: Why don't we stop at this point, do you think? I think this is a good place. We're talking about independence. You're getting ready for independence. We're taking about December of '63, I guess, aren't you?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: We'll pick it up at that point in Zanzibar, okay?*

PETTERSON: Okay.

*Q: Great.*

***

*Good morning. This is Lambert Heyninger, Nick Heyninger, and today is Friday, November 30, 2000. I'm at the house of Ambassador Donald Petterson, Don Petterson. We are picking up on his oral history four years after his interview with Stu Kennedy.*

*So, Don, let's start, and let me ask you what you have to say about Zanzibari*

*independence.*

PETTERSON: Neither the British nor the Americans knew that for months, almost a year, before independence, a shadowy figure by the name of John Okello was making preparations for an armed revolt. The African majority party, the Afro-Shirazi Party, which had lost the election, had determined that, if necessary, they might resort to arms to take over the country, whose government they believed rightfully belonged to them. Okello, who was from Uganda, had come to Pemba in 1959. Four years later, in early 1963, he came to Zanzibar and began plotting revolution. The handful of people in the Afro-Shirazi Party who became aware of this did not include the party's leaders.

During the independence ceremony, there was an ominous incident that foreshadowed trouble. At midnight, when the British flag was lowered, the lights went out, and when they went back on, the new Zanzibar government flag was raised. There were cheers from among the gathered dignitaries, but the Africans, including the hundreds who were off to the side of the cricket pitch where the independence ceremony was held, were ominously quiet.

On January 12, 1964, a month after independence, the revolution took place. During that month, the Arab-dominated government had done just about everything they should not have done to anger the Africans. They passed legislation that was unfavorable to the African population. In addition, they made it clear that Zanzibar was going to align itself with Egypt and the Arab world, rather than with the sub-Saharan, black African world, as the Africans wanted.

On the night of January 11, I had come home in the evening. There was a well attended dance going on in the African quarter, Ng'ambo, where I had taken the children's nanny home, but I saw no sign of anything untoward. At about 2:30 in the morning, the phone rang. I went to the hall and answered it. While I was walking to the phone, I could hear popping sounds. Fritz Picard, my boss, the American chargé d'affaires, was on the line. He told me that something was up and that I should begin to notify Americans to stay home. The firing became more intense. I could hear it quite distinctly. Our next-door neighbor was Ali Muhsin, the leader of the government (not the prime minister, but the de facto leader), and armed revolutionaries had come to get him. So we were very close to the action at the time. As the morning wore on, Fritz, Stu Lillico, and I managed to get in touch with most or all the Americans. They hunkered down.

It became apparent that the government was no longer in control. At about seven o'clock, Okello got on the radio for the first time and began a series of broadcasts in which he announced that the radio station had been seized, the government had been toppled, and a new government was taking over under the leadership, Okello said, of Abeid Amani Karume, the head of the Afro-Shirazi Party.

Karume was actually, at that time, in Tanganyika, in Dar es Salaam. Young revolutionaries who had came to his house on the night of the 11th had told him that he should leave the island because it might be dangerous for him. He was taken to Dar on a

boat. Two other leading Zanzibari opposition politicians had also gone to Dar. One of those was Abdulrahman Mohammed, "Babu." The Americans and the British viewed Babu as a Communist who was exerting a dangerous pro-Communist influence. Just before the 1963 elections, he had broken with the Zanzibar Nationalist Party, of which he had been the Organizing Secretary. Much more radical than the party's other leaders, he founded his own political party, the Umma Party. In the first week of January, the government banned the Umma Party, searched its offices and Babu's house. As a warrant for his arrest was being prepared, he fled the island and went to Dar es Salaam. So the big actors of the opposition were in Dar es Salaam when the revolution took place, which further indicates that they really were not in charge of its inception, as was said later. Okello was. Nevertheless, he announced that Karume would head the government. Karume came back to Zanzibar the day after the revolution, along with Babu and Abdul Kassim Hanga, who would become Karume's vice president.

To get back to the action that morning, about midmorning Fritz said we should all gather near the airport in case we needed to evacuate. He had been trying to get in touch with the government and with the British authorities, who were still there. Although the British had ceded control to the new government, many British civil servants remained, some of them occupying high administrative positions. Fritz did reach some of these officials, but none was well informed about what was happening. He also tried to communicate with Afro-Shirazi Party leaders, but without success. Thus he did not know the degree to which Americans and other foreigners might be in danger. However, he did not determine at that point that we should evacuate.

The firing around our house had subsided by the time that Fritz had called me. So when he said we should go to Stu and Helen Lillico's house, which was not far from the airport, I figured it was no safe enough to do so.

I had gone into town on my bicycle about seven or eight o'clock to see what was going on. I didn't tell Fritz I was going to do this, but I thought it would be interesting. As I approached Ng'ambo, Africans told me I should get out of there because it was dangerous, and indeed, people had been killed in that area earlier that morning. Most of the violence was taking place outside of Zanzibar Town by that time, but it was still dangerous in town.

Julie and I bundled up the two little girls. I guess I neglected to mention that in September, Julie gave birth to our second daughter, Julianne, at the Karimjee Jivanjee Hospital (soon to become the V.I. Lenin hospital). Julianne was the second American ever to be born in Zanzibar.

We put the two little girls in the Volkswagen, and I drove from our house, past Ali Muhsin's, to the road that led to the airport. The prison was close to the left side of the road a couple hundred yards farther down. As we approached, a rebel attack on it was taking place. Suddenly we saw just ahead on the right side of the road a group of twenty or thirty men armed with various weapons. When they saw us coming, they turned and pointed their weapons at us. But when they saw who we were, they yelled at us to get out

of there and removed the roadblock they had place across the road. We chugged by.

*Q: You did not turn around?*

PETTERSON: No.

*Q: You continued on?*

PETTERSON: I continued driving on, thinking, "Well, that's that," I suppose, if I thought anything! [Laughter]

We came around a corner less than 200 yards after that, and there behind some palm trees was another group of Africans, another log across the road, and another firefight going on. Once again we were confronted by people with weapons, everything from spears to old rifles. Bullets were actually whizzing over the car, as I stopped it. I could hear them smacking into trees. The rebels, as before, saw that we were foreigners. They told me to drive around the roadblock and get out of there, which I did. [Laughter]

We went on our way. Once we were clear of that area, I had to stop the car for a moment and steady myself, because it dawned on me how close we had come to losing our lives. Julie was extremely scared. Poor little Susie, who was a year and a half old, was very, very frightened. The baby [laughter] didn't have any problems. She was in her basket at Julie's feet. Susie was on Julie's lap.

We proceeded, and drove out to the Lillicos' house. There we gathered with the other Americans who had come together to wait and see what happened. Picard, who lived a little further out, had not arrived yet. I talked to him on the phone, and he said to come over, which I did. It was quiet in that area. He and his wife, Shoana, had been packing. After we had talked for a bit, I took Shoana and their three children to the Lillicos'. Fritz followed later. Once at the Lillicos', Fritz, who had been in contact with the embassy in Dar es Salaam by telephone, called again to inform them of the state of play. Even though the rebels controlled everything by that time, they had not cut international telephone service.

Peering through gaps in the shutters - we had closed the door and shuttered the windows - we watched revolutionaries as they went into nearby Arab houses. We could hear people screaming and saw some killing. It was frightening. The Americans who were gathered with us were very, very apprehensive. At some point in the early afternoon, Fritz decided that he and I should go to the airport to see if we could arrange for an evacuation. We drove the less than one mile to the airport. As we approached it, a car filled with Africans headed towards us, and as it went by us, the long barrel of a large weapon emerged from one of the windows and blasted a cloud of black smoke and I don't know what else. They apparently were trying to give us a fright, not harm us. They succeeded, but nevertheless we went on to the airport control tower, where we talked with the two British air traffic controllers. They pointed out some groups of armed rebels who were standing about in the tall grass just beyond the periphery of the airfield. They told that it was too risky for

any aircraft to try to land. Fritz and I left and returned to the Lillico's.

*Q: Hang on a second.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Who was in control of the airport at this point, Arabs or Europeans?*

PETTERSON: Europeans.

*Q: Europeans.*

PETTERSON: The airport was managed by an Arab professional, Ali Khalifa, and it had a mixed-race staff. The air traffic controllers were British. At this time, when Fritz and I were at the airport, nobody else was around, just the two controllers.

*Q: Were there any either East African Airways, the small East African Airways planes, or charter planes around?*

PETTERSON: No, there were no aircraft there. The East African Airways flight that normally would have come in that morning had been diverted. The prime minister of Zanzibar had been trying to get a shipment of weapons in. He had communicated his request through the controllers, who were in radio contact with the mainland. But the weapons never arrived. Shortly after Fritz and I left the airport, the Africans took it over.

Our decision then was whether to evacuate or not. Fritz decided that an evacuation was called for. Because it would have to be done by sea, we would need to go into Zanzibar Town and congregate there with the Americans who lived to the north of the city. Once together, we would prepare for an evacuation. Fritz asked me and a fellow named Irv Zolo, who worked for the tracking station, to drive into town to see if the road was safe. We got into my car and headed into town. I was sweating profusely, and not just because it was hot and humid! We both were nervous because we didn't know what would be around each curve in the road. As it happened, we encountered no problem. We saw some results of the revolution. Cars shot up. We saw no bodies. They had been removed already. We went all the way into town. Conditions seemed to be safe enough for the rest of the Americans to make the trip. After we went back, everyone got their things together, and in a convoy of several cars, we drove into town to the English Club, which was right on the beach.

In the meantime, the Americans who lived on the other side of town had gathered together in one of their houses. After hearing from us about the decision to evacuate from the English Club, they drove toward town in several cars. Unlike us, they did encounter rebels, who stopped them, threatened them, and might have harmed them. But someone with authority interceded, and they were allowed to proceed. On their way in, they saw some grisly sights of Arabs who had been killed and had been mutilated in a very gruesome fashion. So they had first-hand experience with some consequences of the

revolution's first day, consequences to-

*Q: The Africans that threatened those people in those cars, did they know that they were Americans?*

PETTERSON: Yes, well, they knew that the people were Europeans, as all whites were termed.

*Q: Europeans? Why would they be sort of angry with Europeans?*

PETTERSON: Well, there was no love on the part of many of these people for foreigners, who led comfortable lives and had all the things that most Africans didn't have. But this was not the problem, for there really was no deep hatred. The rebels carrying weapons were, for the most part, simply ragtag fellows who had no discipline, who had been drinking, or were on something, and they were out of control. They were trying to shake down the Americans. At one point, a baby began to cry, and one of the rebels said to the mother to shut the baby up, or he would kill it. They were pretty nasty. But then someone more reasonable arrived, someone in authority, and he changed the climate of what was going on there. The Americans were allowed to proceed, and reached the English Club without further incident. There were 60 or 65 Americans at the club, and later some Europeans tourists in town joined us.

*Q: So that includes the people from the tracking station as well?*

PETTERSON: That's right. The official American community - the small embassy and USIS staff - along with the tracking station people, and our respective families. With the tourists, there must have been some seventy to eighty people in the hotel as the sun went down. We decided that we would man a command post downstairs. Upstairs, men, women and children got set for the night. Fortunately there was some food in the establishment, and people were able to get something to eat that night. I stayed downstairs and manned the command post all night long, as it turned out, because of an incident that took place in the middle of the night.

Fritz Picard became very concerned about the fate of Stu Lillico's secretary, a young Zanzibari woman whose name was Fathiya. She was an incredibly beautiful woman, and Fritz was having an affair with her, which I mention because it turned out to be quite germane to what could have happened to the Americans. The revolutionaries were looking for members of the government. One of her relatives was a cabinet minister, a man named Mshangama. She was at his house, which was not very far from the English Club. Fritz had been talking to her on the telephone, and she told him that rebels were coming.

Fritz came down from upstairs and without telling me and the other fellow who was with me at the command post what he was going to do, he went out into the street and began to make a racket. I didn't know what he was doing. I went out and told him to come back into the English Club, but he persisted. What he was trying to do was to divert the

attention of the rebels who might be endangering Fathiya and her family. He wanted to get them to stop what they were doing and come to the English Club instead. He succeeded in doing this because very soon a group of armed men came by and tried to ascertain what he was doing. He bantered with them for a while. Finally they told him to shut up and go back inside, which he did. At that point, I was simply worried about Fritz. I didn't know what he was doing. He then explained, and I was very angry because he had put all of the people in the English Club at risk. Whether or not his diversion saved Fathiya, I'll never know, but at any rate, the rebels did not go into that house. Later that night Fathiya, her mother, and her two children came into the club. Fritz had telephoned her and told her to come there. He met them at the door and took them inside. She was downstairs, and his wife was upstairs.

*Q: Oh, really?*

PETTERSON: Yes. He arranged for her to stay in a place downstairs away from the Americans who were upstairs, including Shoana. In fact, nobody knew about Fathiya until the end of the following day.

In the morning, the embassy in Dar es Salaam informed us that approval of the evacuation had been given, and that an American destroyer, the USS Manley, would be coming in to take the Americans off the island. The Manley had been in Kenya at the port of Mombasa on a ship visit when the revolution occurred. The ship was ordered to steam back and forth off the coast of Zanzibar over the horizon until the decision was made that an evacuation could be carried out.

During the course of that day, Fritz continued to act in a way that disturbed me. For example, when we went out of the English Club onto the beach to talk to rebels, Fritz, at one point, brought his five-year-old son with him. Throughout the day he carried a mug of beer with him, whether he was in the club or outside. It caused a lot of people to raise their eyebrows. It was bizarre behavior. Nevertheless, he showed some very fine qualities later in the day. Certainly his judgment as to the need for the evacuation was not questioned by anyone. The Americans, all of them, were thoroughly frightened and wanted off the island.

The Manley picked its way into the harbor very slowly about mid-afternoon. A small boat came ashore with Jim Ruchti, who was the deputy chief of mission at the American embassy in Nairobi. He had been in Mombasa for the ship visit. The captain had asked him to accompany the ship to Zanzibar and to give him political advice. Jim received permission to do that. He brought with him a Kenyan cab driver, so there would be somebody who could speak Swahili, listen to the radio to hear local broadcasts, and thereby help keep Ruchti and the captain abreast of what was happening in Zanzibar Town. After the ship had anchored, Ruchti came ashore in the ship's whaleboat with the executive officer and several sailors. They were not permitted, initially, to land until Fritz prevailed upon a group of armed rebels on the beach to permit Ruchti and the executive officer ashore. The sailors had to remain in the boat. Fritz and I took Jim and the exec to the English Club, where we continued to try to contact the revolutionary government.

*Q: Let me just ask you a quick question there, interrupt you. Picard and the captain of the ship had not themselves just decided to evacuate the personnel who were at the English Club? Just go ahead and do it?*

PETTERSON: No. The State Department, Defense Department, and White House had approved Fritz's request for the evacuation. But when the executive officer of the ship came ashore with Jim Ruchti, we had not yet received permission from the rebels. It was only through negotiating with the rebels on the beach that were we able to get those two people off the whaleboat, so that they could wait with us to see whether or not permission for the evacuation would be granted.

*Q: Permission from the?*

PETTERSON: From the rebels.

*Q: Revolutionaries?*

PETTERSON: That's right. As the afternoon wore on, a phone call from the rebels finally came. It was from Aboud Jumbe, one of the ministers in the new government, who said that he wanted to come over and take Picard to the revolutionary headquarters. In due course he arrived in an open Land Rover with armed people in it. Jumbe himself was heavily armed. Fritz and I, along with Jim Ruchti and the executive officer, got into the Land Rover and were driven to Raha Leo (about a mile away), the site of the radio station and the African community center. Raha Leo was now the command headquarters of the revolution. There was electricity in the air when we neared Raha Leo. Hundreds of Africans who were in a very fierce mood ringed the place, many or most armed with everything from sticks to old swords; an occasional rifle was seen. As we approached the headquarters, better-armed revolutionaries came into sight. They carried police rifles, and a few had automatic weapons. We saw Arab prisoners, some of them bloodied, some lying near the entrance to the revolutionary headquarters, all looking despondent. The crowd was so excited because they knew that at that moment, or soon thereafter, Ali Muhsin, whom they hated, would be brought in.

*Q: The tension in the air!*

PETTERSON: Yes, it was so tense as they began to swarm toward the Land Rover, that Aboud Jumbe yelled at them in Swahili (he had a bullhorn) to get back or he would open fire. They obliged, and a way was cleared for us. We got out of the Land Rover and waited for somebody to come out of revolutionary headquarters.

After a while, a figure emerged, a man dressed in a semi-military uniform. He had on dark shorts and a dark blue shirt, a peaked cap, knee socks in the British style. He approached us, went up to the executive officer, pulled a revolver out of his holster, stuck it right at the exec, either in his ribs as I remember it, or in his face as Jim Ruchti remembered it, and said, "How do you do? I'm John Okello." With that, he put his

revolver back in the holster and said there was going to be some target practice behind revolutionary headquarters. Would we like to join in? Well, figuring that the targets might well be some of the captured Arabs, we declined.

He escorted us into Raha Leo. We went up the stairs into a meeting room, where after another wait we were ushered into the room. Sitting there behind a table with Okello were Abeid Karume, leader of the Afro-Shirazi Party and now the president of the new government, Babu, Hanga, and several others.

*Q: Back from Dar es Salaam?*

PETTERSON: Back from Dar es Salaam. Karume had come back to Zanzibar by boat early that morning with Babu and Hanga. The British high commissioner had met with them just before we did, and as he left we entered. The discussion began. Fritz, first of all, told Okello (who had put his revolver on the table with the barrel pointing at Fritz) that we would not negotiate at gunpoint. Okello made no reply, but picked up and reholstered his weapon. He didn't say much during the ensuing discussion, in which Fritz made the request for an evacuation. Babu replied angrily, so did Hanga; Karume was uncomfortable. They were angry that the Americans had brought in this warship. And it seemed to us, as we thought about it a bit later, that they didn't know whether the Manley might open fire. In any case, they really didn't care for the evacuation. They didn't want to see it happen, but they agreed to it, fearing there might be consequences otherwise.

Finally, Karume indicated that he would not oppose the request. Then he turned to Okello and said, "It's your decision."

Okello sort of shrugged and said, "All right."

This made it clear to us there that Okello was indeed of great importance. I say this because later on there were those belittled Okello's role in the revolution. In fact, the official history of the revolution barely mentions him. But he was the force that pulled it off. Weeks later, others with more political sagacity took control.

We returned to the English Club. Fritz went off to the hotels to pick up those tourists who were still there. While Ruchti and the executive officer went down to the boat to get the crew ready for the operation and to notify the captain what had happened at Raha Leo, Lillico and I met with the Americans, who waiting for us on the club's upper porch, which overlooked the beach. Earlier, we had stipulated that women and children, regardless of nationality, would go first. However, now a couple of the Americans, tracking station employees, said, "Uh-uh, Americans first, foreigners second." Stu and I said [laughter], "Not on your life! Women and children first." And we made that stick. With Fritz now back, everyone who wanted to go was at the club, and the whaleboat and another boat, the captain's gig, began taking the evacuees out to the destroyer. The sun had gone down and it soon grew very dark. I took Julie and the babies down to the boat with the few possessions that she had brought, mainly things for the children and some clothes. We said goodbye, and I kissed her and the two little girls. She was fearful, as she

said later in letters to her parents and to mine, that she would never see me again. I had no such thoughts, myself! [Laughter] I was having too much of an interesting time! Off she and the children went into the gloom. We had set up some portable lights from the ship on the beach, but their beams didn't carry much beyond 30 or 40 yards out to sea. The boats would disappear into the darkness as they went out to the ship. After all the evacuees were aboard, the Manley sailed to Dar es Salaam.

*Q: Let me interrupt you again for a second.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Were personnel from any other consulates taken off, the British for example?*

PETTERSON: No. There were no other diplomatic establishments, just the British and the Americans at that time. The British had not made a decision to evacuate. They considered it, but had not yet decided. There was some criticism of the American decision to evacuate, but Fritz had sound reasons for doing what he did. (1) We had no idea that the word was out not to harm foreigners. (2) We were unable to get in touch with the revolutionaries. We didn't know whether the violence would get worse, or whether it would subside. (3) There had been animosity shown toward the Americans by some of the very people who carried out the revolution. They had protested the presence in Zanzibar of what they termed the American rocket base and demanded its removal. There was a lot of hostile propaganda directed against America in that month after independence.

The Manley arrived in Dar es Salaam harbor that night, but couldn't go in through the channel, which was very narrow.

*Q: Including yourself?*

PETTERSON: Oh, no, no! Pardon me! I forgot to mention that Fritz and I stayed. We had agreed that somebody should stay behind to look after the embassy and the property of Americans. Washington said that if we wanted to stay we could, so that left the two of us on the island. The next day, in Dar es Salaam the Americans disembarked from the destroyer. My family and Fritz's family remained in Dar until a week later.

*Q: How about Fritz's girlfriend?*

PETTERSON: She was there. Everybody [laughter] saw her on the Manley.

*Q: She went over to Dar as well?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

Fritz and I then went home that night and drank a lot of beer. I had a beer or two, but by that time I'd been up for over 48 hours and was very tired. I went home to my now lonely

house. By the way, we were no longer in the stable. We had moved two months earlier to my predecessor's house in another part of town, a much nicer home.

The next day, Fritz and I were told by the revolutionaries not to leave our respective houses, but later in the day we were given permission to go about our business. My Swahili came in to very good use, either that day or the next. We were driving from Fritz's place to the embassy when we came upon a group of armed men, who yelled in Swahili, "*Simana*," which meant, "Stop!"

Fritz didn't speak Swahili; I did. I said, "Fritz, stop the car" which he did. [Laughter] Otherwise, he would have kept going and we might have been shot at.

By the way, my Swahili (and I'm talking to Nick who studied Swahili with me)-

*Q: A classmate.*

PETTERSON: That's right…was very useful. I formed a friendship with Karume as a result, because I was the only American who spoke Swahili and my Swahili was getting better and better all of the time. We carried out our conversations in Swahili. I was very deferential to him; Fritz was not. Fritz, unfortunately, was a bit patronizing with Karume, and that came back to haunt him, as I'll explain.

On the morning of January 16, four days after the revolution, we were at the embassy. Fritz received a telephone call from the British high commissioner, who somewhat testily said, "Some of your people are causing a problem down at the port, reporters, your people, Americans." He said they were a matter of "grave embarrassment." So Fritz told me to go there, which I did. At the boat landing, I encountered several armed men who were gathered at the top of a concrete sea wall from which steps led down to the water. A couple of British colonial port officials also were there. I could see the top of a dhow's mast. After explaining who I was and why I had come, I was allowed go to the edge of the sea wall. I saw that there were seven men in the boat. We talked, and I learned that they were American, British, and Canadian newspapermen – reporters for Time, Newsweek, The New York Herald Tribune, a Canadian paper, and a British paper – and an Indian photographer for Life magazine. So they weren't just Americans, were not, in the words of the High Commissioner, "your people" only. They had sailed in the dhow from the mainland, arriving in Zanzibar the previous night.

They started asking me questions. Foolishly I answered. At that point a rifle was pointed right at my face, and I was told to "Shut up!" So I stopped talking, [laughter] the better part of valor! Some authorities from the revolutionary government joined these armed people at dockside. They said that the men in the boat were spies and we were going to be taken to revolutionary headquarters. Off we went. I tried to explain to the rebels who I was. They couldn't care less, nor did they accept that these were just newspaper people.

We had been held at Raha Leo for several hours when Fritz showed up. He finally had found out where we were and what the problem was, and had talked to a minister in the

government. Karume was away. He had gone to Dar es Salaam that day. The minister said, “Well, sure. Let these people go.” Fritz told us the good news, and he and I drove the journalists to the Zanzibar Hotel, where they got rooms and then went off about their business.

But suspicions were high about these people. Some of them had U.S. Defense Department press cards, and they showed them when asked for an ID (identification) card. The name of one of the reporters was Conley, Robert Conley. That sounded like “colonel.” So the rebels had this Colonel Robert, and they had Defense Department ID cards. Spies, you know! It really rang a bell with some of these less-than-sophisticated rebels.

When Karume returned late that afternoon, or early that evening, he was told about the reporters and the suspicious about them. He was also given some of their notes, which had been taken from them and which were not too complimentary about the revolution. Karume was angry, and he went to the Zanzibar Hotel to confront them. Picard was with them. The minister who had allowed these fellows to go about their business happened to be a political enemy of Karume, even though he was in the cabinet. When Karume saw Picard with his political enemy and the correspondents, he was furious. Babu, who was with him, and another government official, who had no love for Fritz, egged Karume on. In essence they said, “You know, these people are up to no good. Picard has interfered.” Karume bought that and angrily ordered Picard, at gunpoint, to be taken to his house.

I was over at the embassy at that time, composing a long classified cable, using a primitive system of those days called a “one-time pad,” and as, Nick [laughter], you’d know, it was a very laborious task! It took me a couple of hours to encrypt the message. It was dark outside when I locked up, left the embassy, and started across the square - Kelele Square - to Cable and Wireless to deliver my telegram for transmission. In the darkness, in the middle of the square, I came upon Karume and a gaggle of fellows with weapons. Karume asked me what I was doing.

I said, “I’m taking a message over to be sent.”

He said, “No, I can’t allow that!” He told me what had happened. He said that he had arrested Picard, that Picard had done something bad and would be expelled from the island, and that I would have to be placed under arrest, too.

He ordered four of the armed men to get in my car, the VW, and accompany me. I drove toward my house with the barrel of a rifle in the back of my neck, not intentionally, but it was a bit disconcerting! They didn’t stop at my house, but instead took me to Picard’s. There I spent the night with Fritz, who was drinking heavily. The next day, a chartered plane came over from Dar. Fritz was placed on the airplane, along with some of his possessions and the Lillico’s dog, which had been left behind, and off he went. I was at the airport with him and breathed a sigh of relief when the plane left, because I had been worried that his behavior since the onset of revolution might lead to his harm. There were some Chinese at the airport taking pictures of Fritz’s expulsion. Babu and some of his

people were also present.

Now Babu was a factor to be reckoned with. He was not an African. He didn't belong to the Afro-Shirazi Party, but his followers, many of whom had been trained in Cuba or other Communist countries, had automatic weapons. They had more firepower than Okello's people, and therefore were a factor to be reckoned with. Babu was the Zanzibar government's foreign minister. I chatted with him, and we agreed we would talk later on. I was told to go back to my own house, which I did.

That began a period of five weeks, during which I was the only American in Zanzibar, pretty heady stuff, [laughter], a junior Foreign Service officer in charge of the embassy! In the course of those five weeks, I had a number of adventures in trying to protect American property, failing in some cases because looters had come, encountering looters at one property and chasing after them, foolishly, on my bicycle, and capturing one of them, only to find that he was just a kid. If I turned him in he would be executed, so I let him go, and warned him not to do that anymore.

I managed to communicate by telephone with the embassy in Dar es Salaam. I was not given diplomatic privileges. I could send nothing out by diplomatic pouch and could send cables only if they were not encrypted and were approved by a government censor at Cable and Wireless. Now and then, the censor didn't like my choice of words and refused to all the message to be transmitted.

I formed a relationship with Karume, and also with Babu, who was a very charming guy, a militant left-winger, to say the least, and very shrewd, very intelligent. Karume was a stolid man, not nearly as bright as Babu, but a man of very real native intelligence. I don't mean to use that term in a derogatory sense at all. He was a very able man in many ways, but impressionable and unsophisticated. As time would go by the results of that would be harmful to Zanzibar.

Occasionally I got a classified message out by taking it over to the British, who had been given the permission to use their classified pouch. Twice, at the airport I met American officials who were on a flight from Dar to Nairobi via Zanzibar. I was allowed to go out and talk to them. I slipped each of them an envelope with a message in it.

My time was largely taken up with looking after the American property, trying to find out what was going on, dealing with the revolutionary government, and reporting as well as I could. By mid-February, it was clear that the revolutionary government was getting fed up with the lack of recognition from the British and the Americans. Concern about Zanzibar in the American government reached the highest level, President Johnson, and in the British government at its highest level, Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home. This was extraordinary when you think about it. Zanzibar was seen as a precursor of revolution for Africa, as a Communist foothold could spread into the continent. The Chinese communists, the Soviets, and East Germans had established embassies (which grew to be quite large) and had begun arranging for military and economic aid. Communist diplomats, technicians, and military trainers began to come to Zanzibar in

relatively large numbers.

The British were dithering. They didn't want to recognize a government that had come to power by force of arms. Moreover, they didn't like this government's pro-Communist or apparent pro-Communist leanings. So the British waited despite the urgings of Tanganyikan Prime Minister Julius Nyerere that they grant recognition to the new government of Zanzibar. Washington followed the British lead. By a month or so after the revolution, the Zanzibaris were out of patience. On the 19th of February, I was summoned to revolutionary headquarters, where the British high commissioner had arrived just before me. Karume told us that because the U.S. and UK (United Kingdom) had not recognized his government, we would have to go; otherwise, the people might rise up and do harm to us or to the government. Well, that was an exaggeration, but we were given 24 hours to leave.

From the embassy, I called the American ambassador to Tanganyika, William Leonhart, in Dar es Salaam and informed him of what had happened. Then I went back to burning classified documents, which I had been doing for several days, using a small potbellied stove. Leonhart tried that day to convince Nyerere to influence Karume to postpone my expulsion, but without success. That evening, the ambassador called me. Passing a message from Washington, he said I should see Karume if I could and ask him to delay the expulsion for at least twenty-four hours. I should tell him that a U.S. official from Washington had just arrived in Dar and could come over the next day to talk to him about recognition. I managed to get through to Karume, who said I could come see him. He didn't agree to the proposal but left the door open. After another exchange between Leonhart and me, and a message from Washington for Karume, which arrived at seven o'clock the following morning, Karume agreed to receive Leonhart and the man from Washington.

At midmorning, Ambassador Leonhart and Frank Carlucci, a Foreign Service officer, came to Zanzibar in a small chartered aircraft. I met them and went with them to see Karume.

*Q: What was Carlucci doing in Dar?*

PETTERSON: Frank had been in the Congo, where he had acquired a reputation as an exceptionally able Foreign Service officer. He was the embassy's troubleshooter in the Congo. After the Congo and before coming to Zanzibar, he had a job in the State Department-

*Q: Well, when I saw him, he was assistant desk officer for the Congo under Charlie Whitehouse.*

PETTERSON: Okay.

*Q: That was '63.*

PETTERSON: Yes. Frank was well regarded by Joe Palmer, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and by Charlie Whitehouse, and by everybody else. It had been decided that Frank would be the new chargé d'affaires in Zanzibar. He came with a letter from President Johnson that indicated recognition would be coming soon. Frank and Leonhart tried to convince Karume that with recognition just around the corner, it would be much better if he didn't throw me off the island. By the way, the whole Revolutionary Council, which included all the wild men along with some of the more able and moderate Zanzibari Africans who were in the cabinet, were at this meeting. The discussion went on for a couple of hours, but in the end Karume and the Council rejected the American proposal. Karume, when he said goodbye, said, "If you come back, if recognition takes place, and you come back, Mr. Carlucci, we'll have a parade in your honor." So with that, Frank and Ambassador Leonhart returned to Dar es Salaam.

I went back to the embassy to finish burning the classified materials. I had just started when there was a pounding on the front door. Ali Mafoudh, the head of the newly created special police force, demanded to come into the embassy. When I refused him entry, he said he would have to take me in custody. He drove me to State House, the seat of the government. An official there told Mafoudh to take me back to the embassy and not interfere with me. After I did some burning, I went home for a quick lunch. When I returned, the officer in charge of the soldiers who had surrounded the building said I could not reenter it. When I argued with him, he told me a government official wanted to see me and he drove me to a government office. I was taken to the office of Abdul Azziz Twala, one of the more militant members of the cabinet. Unbeknownst to me, an argument had preceded my arrival. Some of the people there wanted to kill me. At least that's what a man named Mohammed Ali Foum, who was there at the time and later became a diplomat in Tanzanian diplomatic service, told me years afterward. We met at the United Nations one day, and he told me this. I don't know if it's true, but he swore it was. He said that after some argument, it was decided that killing me would cause too many problems. At any rate, when I got there, Twala simply told me to return to the embassy, then go home and get ready to leave later that day. This was-

*Q: You had been summoned over to the Revolutionary Council headquarters?*

PETTERSON: No, to an administrative office-

*Q: They'd asked you to come over?*

PETTERSON: Yes, right.

*Q: But once you got there, nothing much happened?*

PETTERSON: That's correct.

*Q: And then you went back home?*

PETTERSON: No, to the embassy. After using an ax to demolish the code machine,

which didn't work and we'd never used, I started burning papers again. I soon realized that I couldn't destroy all the classified papers using just the stove, so I got one of the two or three destruction kits that were stored on the same floor as the walk-in vault, where we kept the classified files. Each kit was a heavy cardboard cylindrical drum, about three and a half feet high and two feet in diameter, the size of a large garbage can. It contained a bag, or bags, I can't remember, of inflammable chemicals in granular form and a magnesium igniter. I put in papers, threw some of the chemical stuff on them, put in more papers, more chemicals, until all the papers were in the container. With everything now ready, I then dropped in the igniter. It worked like a hand grenade. You pull the pin, drop it in, and whoosh! A sheet of fire shot up. The heat of the fire was so intense that had I not kept the vault door open, I would have been incinerated. The pressure that resulted was so strong that to close the vault door, which I left open, I had to put my feet against of the opposite wall of the narrow hallway outside the vault and use my leg muscles to get the door closed. I began to wonder, "What the hell have I done?"

Knowing that the troops outside would see smoke coming through the small open barred space in the vault, I went outside and talked to the guy in charge. Sure enough, black smoke could be seen pouring through the opening. He asked me what I was doing. I said, "Oh, I'm just burning a few papers. It's normal for us to do that, you know." And he accepted it, and I went back inside. I really thought, "How am I going to explain [laughter] to Washington that I burned down the embassy? Luckily the vault was built of steel-reinforced concrete. Had it not been, the walls would have buckled, and the fire might well have spread. But it was contained in the vault, and I didn't burn down the embassy.

*Q: This is all very interesting because your evacuation certainly wasn't the last and won't be the last. But one of the lessons learned perhaps is that when you use these destruction kits, you should use them outdoors?*

PETTERSON: Absolutely!

*Q: Or on a roof, or something?*

PETTERSON: Absolutely! They didn't have directions on them. A couple of weeks or so later, I sent what we called an "operations memorandum" to Washington describing in detail what had happened and urging the Department to put a label on the destruction kits, "Do not use indoors under any circumstances!" I'm told that that memorandum made the rounds in the department and [laughter] got a lot of laughs.

I went home, packed a suitcase, and waited to be taken to the airport for the flight to Dar es Salaam.

*Q: On an East African Airways flight?*

PETTERSON: Yes, a regularly scheduled flight. I was met at the airport in Dar, taken to the embassy where I was debriefed. I wrote a report before I left the next day for Nairobi,

where Julie and the children were. They had been in Dar es Salaam but had been evacuated from there after a mutiny by the Tanganyikan army had almost toppled the government of Julius Nyerere and had brought considerable violence to Dar es Salaam. During that violence, Fritz began to relive the Zanzibar revolution, and he had to be medically evacuated. He'd been under great stress and was as tight as a drum. After medical treatment in the States, he was medically cleared and resumed his career. It had been damaged, however, and ended after his next overseas assignment had not given him the kind of efficiency report he needed for a promotion.

I flew to Nairobi and spent two or three days there. I had the flu, but didn't feel too bad. I got a call from Frank Carlucci in Dar telling me to come back, that recognition had been granted. He and I would be going over to Zanzibar right away. So I flew to Dar, and, with Ambassador Leonhart, Frank and I flew over to the island. There was no parade to welcome us. Karume, who was visibly pleased, received us at State House, and Frank read to him the formal note of recognition. Leonhart returned to Dar es Salaam. Frank and I opened the embassy. The first thing we did was clean up the vault, which was covered by a thick coating of slimy dark brown [laughter] soot. While Frank, his secretary, Lynne Derzo, and I were doing that, I almost passed out. I was done in by a bad case of flu, fatigue, and maybe weight loss. I had lost a lot of weight when I was alone on the island, cooking for myself or being fed by friends. Anyway, I was simply…

*Q: Exhausted!*

PETTERSON: Yes. So I went back to Nairobi, spent about a week with Julie and the children before going back to Zanzibar to resume my job working with my new boss, the chargé d'affaires of the American embassy, Frank Carlucci.

I began a very good year with Frank Carlucci, one of the most able, dedicated people I've known anywhere, certainly an outstanding Foreign Service Officer. Frank was very generous in giving me free rein to do whatever I wanted to do in the way of political reporting. Under Fritz I had been confined to lower-level officials and labor reporting. But Frank gave me, as I said, free rein.

I learned a lot from him by his example. He was an excellent reporter. He got out, beat the bushes, met people. He was charming. He got people to trust him. He dealt with people who were essentially hostile to us at that time, befriended them, and got a lot out of it. He knew what was going on in Zanzibar before he'd been there very long. A measure of his dedication is shown by the fact that whereas he spoke no Swahili when he got there, one year later, by taking tutoring from an Anglican nun and listening to tapes, Frank got a three-three in Swahili when he was tested at the Foreign Service Institute.

*Q: Let me just interrupt you there to say, you know, obviously, you have a lot of respect and admiration for Carlucci. But I think it might be interesting for researchers, as well as journalists and other people who are going to use this interview, for you to describe briefly what the characteristics are, in your opinion, of an outstanding American diplomat. What is it that Carlucci represented, in your opinion?*

PETTERSON: First of all, he had extraordinary intelligence, coupled with very good common sense, and an outgoing nature. He knew how to get along with Africans. He was sensitive to their culture. He had no false pretensions. He was an excellent writer, had superior analytical skills, and was a superb manager. He knew how to delegate.

*Q: What makes a good reporting officer, Don?*

PETTERSON: Somebody who's willing to get out of the office, travel around the country, to do whatever is necessary to get information, to establish a rapport with people so they will talk to you. You collect intelligence from people whom you meet and process it through whatever abilities you have. You learn to sift out good information from bad. I believe, too, that, like Frank, the best officers are very industrious and dedicated. Frank worked long, hard hours and gave a great deal of thought to his work. He also (maybe this isn't a quality of a great reporter or necessarily a successful Foreign Service officer, but to me it's something very important) cared about people, the people who worked with him, and he showed that. He got their loyalty, and he got a lot out of them. He had all the qualities that would later propel him to high offices in the U.S. government, including secretary of defense.

*Q: Okay, so there you are in Zanzibar?*

PETTERSON: That's right. We are behind the bamboo curtain, as we said in those days, or the clove curtain, as some joked, cloves being Zanzibar's principal export. Frank set out to meet and establish a relationship with as many people as possible in the government and other areas.

*Q: Yes, but this story is about you and not about Frank.*

PETTERSON: [Laughter] Yes, but-

*Q: So you were doing the same thing?*

PETTERSON: Yes, I was very happy to be able to start becoming a political reporter because it was what I had wanted to do, and I had not been able to do it either in Mexico or much in Zanzibar before the revolution. I now got out and about, established whatever contacts I could. It was very difficult because we were under suspicion. Sometimes we were under surveillance. People were afraid to see us. We could not entertain Zanzibaris; nobody would come to our house. So we didn't have the usual kind of social opportunities to meet people and get information.

But we could wander around and go to people's offices and other places where we could meet people who might give us information of the kind we needed in order to inform Washington what was happening in Zanzibar, which had become (in the eyes of Washington and London) a bastion of Communism. The Chinese brought in more people - military trainers, agriculturists, and embassy staff - as did the Soviets and the East

Germans. The East Germans were delighted to have a diplomatic establishment in Zanzibar. Before getting Zanzibar's recognition, they had not been recognized by any other countries except communist countries.

*Q: But those three countries are among the three most difficult countries for a Western diplomat to observe and gather information about.*

PETTERSON: True. We were we trying to report not only on what was happening in Zanzibar among the Zanzibaris, but, more important from Washington's standpoint, on what the Chinese, East Germans, and Soviets were doing. Other communist countries were also represented in Zanzibar. Cuba, for example, the Czechs, the Poles, North Vietnamese, Bulgarians, you name them; they were all there. It was a great place to be as a young reporting officer in the Cold War days.

We set about our work. As I said, I learned a lot from Frank and began doing political reporting. I was also the administrative officer and the consular officer. Our embassy began to grow. Suddenly we were in the front lines of the East-West struggle and a place, at least for some more months to come, considered to be very important in the eyes of the State Department and others in Washington.

*Q: When you say that you began to grow, for example, did the USIA (United States Information Agency), USIS send any people? Were there any CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) people there?*

PETTERSON: USIS reestablished their office, and an officer came to run it. The CIA did come in. This was the major factor in the growth of the embassy, as you can imagine. Zanzibar was very fertile ground for the CIA, the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, Committee for State Security, USSR), and other counterparts of these intelligence services.

So yes, we now a CIA presence. We had a station chief and his staff, which included communications personnel, an administrative person, and a secretary. The State Department side began to grow a little, too, as we got another secretary and an administrative assistant, who took the admin burden off of me. So from a four-person U.S. mission, we expanded to about a dozen.

*Q: Did the NASA tracking station people come back?*

PETTERSON: Momentarily. The Karume government decided in April that the tracking station would have to close down. The decision came despite a report that had been issued just before the revolution by a Swedish diplomat whom the previous government had asked to assess the station. He attested to the peaceful purposes of the manned space program (which indeed they were). Pressure to close the station decision had been building. It was being exerted by Communist diplomats, as well as by people within the government, including but not limited to Babu and other leftists. Whether they believed it or not, I don't know, but some continued to call the tracking station an American rocket

base. Karume summoned Frank and told him the tracking station would have to be dismantled. So a few of the Project Mercury people and the NASA representative came back and very quickly dismantled the station, much faster than Karume had thought it would take. He was pleased by the professional way they did this.

*Q: This would be about mid '64?*

PETTERSON: No, we're still in the early part of '64.

*Q: Early part of '64? Okay.*

PETTERSON: Yes. By this time, Okello had been eased out of power. He was simply not up to the skills of people like Babu and Karume. He had embarrassed them during the revolution. He had been on the radio giving very inflammatory announcements about who would be killed and who would be boiled in oil and all sorts of grisly comments, which embarrassed some Zanzibaris and terrified others. But as much as Karume and others in the Afro-Shirazi Party leadership and Babu and his followers feared Okello for a time, they must had known that they would be able to get rid of him at some point. He had no political base. All he had was some mainly very unsophisticated people with weapons. Okello was not clever enough to see that disarming these people, which Karume had inveigled him into doing, and putting them into new military units would remove his base of power. Sometime in March, he went over to the mainland, and when he came back to Zanzibar, Karume met him at the airport and said, "You can't get off the plane." Karume flew with him back to Dar es Salaam, where he stayed for a while before being ejected from Tanganyika.

*Q: Where had he come from originally?*

PETTERSON: He was a Ugandan-

*Q: Okay.*

PETTERSON: Who had gone to Kenya when he was a young man, worked as a laborer, then as a mason, and learned construction skills that he took with him to Pemba in 1959.

*Q: Pemba is a small island north of Zanzibar?*

PETTERSON: Yes. Zanzibar was composed of the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba.

*Q: So he went back to Uganda?*

PETTERSON: He ended up in Uganda. From Dar es Salaam, he went to Kenya, where he was expelled. Nobody wanted this man around. He had a fearsome reputation. People were afraid that wherever he went, he might foment a revolution. He had trouble with immigration authorities and was either expelled from places or put in jail. Finally he returned to Uganda, where he was imprisoned. In 1971, he was seen with Idi Amin

shortly after Amin came to power. Then John Okello disappeared from the face of the earth, no doubt killed by Amin.

In the meantime, Karume was concerned about Babu and his people, who had close relations with the Chinese and who were very well armed. Karume feared that they wanted to take over the revolution. So did Julius Nyerere on the mainland. Nyerere and Karume decided that they would unify their two countries to undercut Babu. This they did, telling only a very few trusted advisors. Their decision, when announced, came as a complete surprise. Babu was out of town. As Zanzibar's foreign minister, he was in Pakistan on an official visit. When he heard about the union, he was furious. He later denied that he was upset and said, untruthfully, that he knew in advance about the plan for union. When he came back, he found a new political dispensation. The government of Tanzania, the name chosen for the country later, was in the process of being formed. Babu was given a post in the Tanzanian government, which was located in Dar es Salaam, since it was the new country's capital. In time, other Zanzibaris who were deemed as possible security threats were transferred to mainland jobs or sent off as diplomats. Babu was effectively stripped of his political power. From then on, he was bitter toward Karume and, especially, Nyerere. With Babu's departure from Zanzibar, Karume's power increased.

The marriage between Tanganyika and Zanzibar was a marriage of convenience. It had strains from the very beginning. As time went on the relationship became more strained as Zanzibar wanted to run its own foreign affairs, have its own military, and control its own foreign exchange. But the union continued. Nyerere wanted it and Karume wanted it, if on his own terms.

*Q: Let me ask you, Don. In Tanganyika at the time of independence, there was a small Indian minority as well as a few Arabs. If there were also these minorities in Zanzibar, what happened to them?*

PETTERSON: The population, as I mentioned earlier, included about 250,000 Africans. A high percentage of them were them people from the mainland who had come over to pick cloves and then had stayed and had established their families in Zanzibar. Some of the Africans were longer-term inhabitants, many of whom, especially those living in Pemba, called themselves Shirazis, claiming that they were descended from the Shiraz people of Iran. In addition to the Africans, Zanzibar had 50,000 Arabs, and about 20,000 Asians of Pakistani and Indian origin. During the revolution, some 5,000 people were killed. Almost all of these were Arabs. That's one tenth of the Arab population. By the time I left the island near the end of 1965, the number of Arabs was less than 25,000. Those who remained had no place in the power structure whatsoever. The Asian population was also down by half or more by that time. As the government of Zanzibar became more and more repressive, Asians wanted out, and those who could, left.

Karume, despite a lot of good qualities, became increasingly dictatorial. I didn't see the worst of it during my time and I got along very well with him, as did Frank. But subsequent to our time there, he became more and more erratic, more and more

dictatorial. Eventually he was assassinated, and a more moderate man, Aboud Jumbe, whom I mentioned earlier, became Zanzibar's president.

Frank and I settled down for a long siege of working in the Cold War trenches. Julie and the children came back in March. In April, because of anti-American demonstrations, they went back to Dar for a short time, returning after the demonstrations were ended and any possible threat was over.

We had a wonderful life in Zanzibar when all the hullabaloo was over. We had a small circle of friends - small because we couldn't mix with Zanzibaris. The Revolutionary Council had become very anti-Western and prohibited Zanzibaris from having anything to do with the Americans and British. Even cabinet members were afraid to associate with us. So our social circle was limited to the small British community that remained, members of the British high commission, the Americans, and a few other foreigners, including some Africans. We had a tight-knit little community. We did a lot of socializing. The beaches were lovely. A number of us took our children to a beach just about every Sunday. Zanzibar was a nice place to be, from that standpoint, and a very fascinating place to be because of what was occurring there, as we watched the influx of Communists and observed how things were playing out. We tried to influence Karume and others in the government to take a more moderate stance, and to be more truly nonaligned. We finally succeeded in that. Frank made a lot of inroads and a lot of progress before he had to leave the island.

*Q: I wanted to ask. This is a good time. Were there any AID (United States Agency for International Development) or Peace Corps people on the island when you were there?*

PETTERSON: No Peace Corps or AID. But we had an AID project, and AID officers from Dar es Salaam came over occasionally, or I would go over there to confer with them. The project was the construction and equipping of a secondary manual arts school that would turn out artisans, technicians, which the island very much needed. Karume looked upon the project with great favor. A Zanzibari resident, a South African architect, designed the school to our specifications. The project, which cost about a million dollars, was appropriate to Zanzibar's needs and was not at all grandiose or ill conceived. Within a decade, however, it failed. After the school was turned over to the Zanzibari authorities to run by themselves, they didn't handle it well at all, and it deteriorated physically as well as academically.

*Q: While you were there, then, this AID project was one of the tools of American diplomacy. Were there any other tools that you had to try to influence the Zanzibari government?*

PETTERSON: Well, the tool of rational discourse with the Zanzibaris. The agency has its own way of making friends, and some money was passed around. Whether that that produced any lasting positive results, I don't know. Our USIS library was very popular with Zanzibaris, especially young people. But its very success as a tool of our diplomacy was its undoing. At different times in the coming year and a half, our opponents

succeeded in bringing trumped up charges against two USIS officers and getting them expelled.

Another thing we had going for us was the mistakes made by the communists themselves. The East Germans promised to build a massive housing projects, enough housing for all the Africans in Ng'ambo. We're talking about 40,000 or 50,000 people. In the end the Germans built some apartments that were unsuitable to the culture of the Zanzibari people, who didn't want to live in large blocks of flats. They wanted a house that would be their own. The Chinese imported a lot of commercial goods, some of which were shoddy. For example, they brought in some talcum powder, which sat in a warehouse and congealed in the heat and humidity. The Soviets didn't come through with the kind of aid they promised.

I don't want to give a picture that the Communists really blew it. Because of their mistakes, they may have lost some of the luster they had gained right after the revolution, but overall their aid was welcomed. The Chinese gave a cash grant of one million pounds, which the Zanzibar government sorely needed. Although the Chinese rice production of the communal farms was hardly bountiful, Zanzibar's leaders seemed favorably impressed by it. And the Chinese brought in medical personnel to work in the hospital. Soviet military advisors, as well as Chinese, continued to train Zanzibari soldiers. Both countries provided more arms, equipment and ammunition. And the East Germans brought in technicians of various kinds, and teachers as well. They also delivered an armed patrol boat and some fishing boats.

As for our AID project, we never promised what we couldn't deliver, and I think that set well with Karume. He was impressed by what we did. He wanted to have a balanced relationship with East and West - very hard to do in those days. He seemed to come to the conclusion that we were there not to do him in, but to work with him. Even though he had been very much angered and upset because of the delay of our recognition, in time we developed a good working relationship with him during those years before he became so erratic, eccentric, and dictatorial.

*Q: It sounds to me as though Karume, at least for a while, had the same sort of balance among foreigners and foreign interests as Julius Nyerere had in Tanzania with the Russians-*

PETTERSON: To a degree, yes.

*Q: And the Chinese that were in Tanzania, as well as the Scandinavians and the Germans and the Canadians.*

PETTERSON: Yes, but the West didn't have as many countries represented in Zanzibar, just the British, a one-man French consulate, and ourselves. So we were really outnumbered by the communist countries, and more so by the number of people they brought into Zanzibar. In the long run, it would not matter, as Zanzibar's importance in the Cold War diminished and both East and West lost interest in it. But that did not

happen while I was there.

*Q: Okay. So now we're up to '65?*

PETTERSON: Yes, let's put it at the very beginning of 1965. Frank was well in stride running the embassy. All of us were pretty productive. U.S. relations with Zanzibar had improved. So, things were definitely going well when, suddenly, there was an unexpected reverse. On January 15, Frank went to Dar es Salaam. While he was there, Bill Leonhart was summoned to Nyerere, who said that Frank and Leonhart's deputy chief of mission, Bob Gordon, had been involved in a plot to overthrow the government of Zanzibar.

Now this was totally idiotic. It stemmed from a telephone conversation that Frank and Bob had had earlier in the month, a telephone conversation in which they were trying to work out a way to get a high-level American official to attend the celebration of the first anniversary of the revolution. Ambassador Leonhart was against the idea, and there was opposition to it in the State Department. Frank and Bob were developing arguments in its favor. They were speaking guardedly, using code words, because they figured the phones were tapped. Among other things, one of them said something like, "This will give us ammunition to get the big gun," the big gun meaning [laughter] Assistant Secretary of State Soapy Williams, G. Mennen Williams, who they hoped would come for the celebration.

Whether the tape was doctored or not, it and some spurious intelligence reports that he had seen convinced Nyerere that Frank and Bob Gordon were concocting a plan to bring down the Zanzibar government. Nyerere foolishly believed it. His rush to judgement is all the more incredible considering that only two months earlier he had been burned by an equally unlikely fabrication that the American government, in league with Portugal, was plotting to overthrow the Tanzanian government. The allegation was based on documents that had been sent to Nyerere's foreign minister by the Tanzanian ambassador to the Congo Republic. The foreign minister, Oscar Kambona, had made them public and denounced the United States. This gave rise to a surge of anti-Americanism in the country. Subsequently, a document-authentication expert proved to the Tanzanians that the documents were crude forgeries. Kambona's and Nyerere's readiness to believe the worst of the United States had made them look foolish and must have been embarrassing to Nyerere. But here he was, once again acting precipitately.

Ambassador Leonhart urged him to reconsider, but Nyerere was adamant. Frank and Bob Gordon had to go. Frank was allowed to come back to Zanzibar to be able to pack before leaving. He went to Karume and told him the whole story. Karume was sympathetic, and said that he had no role in the affair. He and Frank parted on cordial terms. The next day, we said goodbye, and off he went. His wife, Jean, stayed on long enough to pack their household effects.

Nyerere, incidentally, finally came to realize, after receiving messages from President Johnson and from Secretary Rusk in which the entire story had been laid out to him, that he had made a mistake. He was contrite, but nothing could be done. In one talk he had

with Leonhart, he got so emotional that he wept, and he said, "This is one more damn period we've just got to get through."

*Q: But obviously it had no bad effect on Frank's career. So there you are in Zanzibar, again in charge?*

PETTERSON: Yes. There I was, once again, in charge of the embassy. I was acting consul. By the way, we were no longer an embassy because when Zanzibar and Tanganyika joined to become Tanzania, Zanzibar no longer was the capital, so we were reverted back to consular status. I was acting consul for a larger establishment than when I was acting chargé d'affaires, when I was the only one there. I now had, in some ways, a more challenging kind of a job, certainly from a management point of view. Before long, Washington, perhaps figuring that if once again they sent someone to be my boss again, he might get thrown out [laughter], decided to let me be consul for the rest of my tour of duty. This was done even though Frank's replacement would come out while I was still there and would be an officer who outranked me. The officer was Tom Pickering, and we worked together for the rest of my tour, which ended in November 1965.

*Q: Tom Pickering, another one of the shining stars of the United States Foreign Service!*

PETTERSON: Absolutely.

*Q: Yes, you worked with both Frank Carlucci and Tom Pickering.*

PETTERSON: Yes, I tell people that I made Tom's career.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I wrote an efficiency report [laughter] on him. I hope it was a good one! He was an extraordinary guy and a lot of fun to work with. He and Alice, and Julie and I had good times in the months that we were together in Zanzibar continuing to do the kind of work that Frank and I had done. We had some new difficulties. For example, the Zanzibaris accused Harry Radday, who was the USIS officer, of being up to no good. According to the charges against him, he was seeing the wrong kind of people, plotting, doing this or that. It was total nonsense. I went to Karume, and said, in effect, "This is not true; don't do this! He is a good officer, who has done nothing wrong."

But Karume was inflexible. He said the decision had been made by the Revolutionary Council and could not be changed. Harry, who was popular among the Zanzibaris, and, because he was so tall – at least six foot five – was called "Bwana Twiga" (Mister Giraffe), had gotten around town a lot, meeting a wide range of people in the course of doing his job as our cultural affairs and information officer. I'm convinced that either a hostile intelligence service or extreme radicals in the government, or the two working together, had fabricated the reports about Harry. And they had chosen him because he was being effective in countering the anti-American propaganda that was so prevalent and was providing Zanzibaris with information about the United States and the outside

world that otherwise was not available to them.

*Q: So he was good at his job?*

PETTERSON: He was good at his job.

*Q: And making friends for America?*

PETTERSON: Yes. Harry was expelled quietly, which was how Karume had proposed to handle the matter. Another USIS officer, a man named Barney Coleman, whose most recent assignment had been in Nigeria, replaced Harry. Barney eventually ran into the same problem. He was out seeing people and doing his job. Our enemies didn't like it, stories were circulated about him, nasty stories, and Karume said he had to go. Again, I remonstrated with him. Karume could be reasonable on some things, but he dug his heels in, and Barney Coleman had to go. So we didn't have complete easy sailing, to say the least. There was always some kind of battle going on.

*Q: So what it sounds then, Don, a little bit sort of like Stalin, you know. Karume is a man with great strengths, but also very deep suspicions, because this makes, I think, three American diplomats who have been quietly or otherwise pushed out of Zanzibar in a year!*

PETTERSON: That's right, and before that, of course, Fritz Picard. Karume did have definite weaknesses. He was a very suspicious man, and with reason as time went on because he had enemies within his own establishment. Some of those people came to grief later on and were executed. Othman Sharif was. He was the minister I mentioned when Fritz Picard got expelled, the one who had authorized the release of the American reporters and before the revolution had been a political enemy of Karume. After the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, he became a minister in the Tanzanian government, serving in Dar es Salaam. Later, he went to Washington as ambassador. On a return trip to Zanzibar, Karume imprisoned him. Nyerere got him out, and he went back to the mainland. But later on, the government of Zanzibar accused him treason. He was brought back to the island and was executed. Abdul Kassim Hanga, the vice president of Zanzibar, was also executed, along with some others.

*Q: More and more like Stalin?*

PETTERSON: Yes, he became, unfortunately, more and more-

*Q: Paranoid?*

PETTERSON: Paranoid, erratic and dictatorial as time went on. My own relationship with him, and again, this was before he really got bad, was quite good because of the friendship we had established when I was a vice consul, and because I continued to deal with him in his own language, and, of course, treated him with a proper measure of respect.

*Q: So, Don, in terms of the career Foreign Service, this is another really good argument for language training?*

PETTERSON: Oh, absolutely.

*Q: Would you say, in retrospect, that the Foreign Service should be doing more in terms of training officers in languages?*

PETTERSON: Yes! The Foreign Service at different times placed greater emphasis on foreign language training, but in general the focus was on training as many people as possible, but not training enough in depth. Many officers, as a result, would gain a superficial working knowledge of a language, but far short of excellence. The Service did not, and still does not, have enough officers possessing a grasp of languages approaching bilinguality, especially in difficult, important languages such as Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese. We have some, but not nearly enough.

*Q: So that sort of wraps up Zanzibar?*

PETTERSON: Zanzibar, almost. Our second and third children, Julianne and John, were born while we were in Zanzibar. Julianne was born on the island in 1963 and John in Dar es Salaam in 1965. Julie had gone to the mainland to have John because the hospital in Zanzibar had deteriorated so much by 1965. In September we had our first and only vacation while we were in Zanzibar. We spent four days in game parks at Ngorongoro Crater and Lake Manyara and had a wonderful time. She and the children left Zanzibar near the end of September, and I followed in November, ending my assignment in Zanzibar and turning the reins over to Tom Pickering.

Let me interject here, that if whoever reads this account would like more details on what happened in Zanzibar, I have written a book entitled *Revolution in Zanzibar* that will be published by Westview Press in April 2002.

*Q: Okay, so that's then-*

PETTERSON: The end of 1965. Julie had gone before me so she could spend several weeks with her parents and family in Mexico. After I rejoined her and the children there, we went to California. I had a lot of home leave, and we spent December in San Luis Obispo.

*Q: Sixty-five.*

PETTERSON: After New Year's Day, we went to Washington before going off on our next assignment. En route to Mexico from Zanzibar, I had stopped in Washington for consultations and to see about an assignment. My personnel officer was Charlie Whitehouse. He didn't think much of my request to go to the Congo or Vietnam, or some such interesting place. He said, "You know, Frank's example shows that if you stay with

your neck out on the block long enough, it's going to get chopped off." He thought a less volatile country would be in order and that I needed a political officer job in a large embassy, since I had had a consular job in Mexico and had just come from a tiny post. He said, "Nigeria would be a good assignment for you - Lagos, Nigeria."

So I was assigned as the number two officer in a three-person political section in Lagos. We left Washington in January 1966 and flew on a Pan Am flight to Lagos. Pan Am then had a flight from the U.S. to Africa. As we approached the airport in Lagos, announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry to tell you that there's been some trouble. The airport has been seized by army troops. The government has just been taken over by the military."

Let me give a little background. Nigeria had been independent for a several years. Its coalition government was led by Amadu Tafawa Balewa, a northerner and a very remarkable man. There was political friction in Nigeria, especially between the larger tribes, the Yoruba in the west, the Ibos in the south, and the Hausa-Fulani in the north. The northerners, the more numerous people in the country, were somewhat dominant. The frictions were causing unrest, and some violence had broken out.

Before I arrived in Nigeria, I knew there was some political turmoil, but I didn't know how bad it was. The embassy was not sending political officers out of town enough to comprehend the full scope of the violence that was taking place not all that far from Lagos. They really did not have a handle on the full extent of the dissension and violence.

*Q: Why was that? Why not send people out?*

PETTERSON: I don't know; I wasn't there. I just know that the State Department was annoyed by this failure of the embassy to really be on top of the situation. I don't believe, however, that the embassy could have foreseen that the military were suddenly going to take over.

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*Q: This is Nick Heyniger, Lambert Heyniger, and today is February 14, 2001. I am again interviewing Ambassador Don Petterson about his experiences in Africa. We are now starting Don's tour of duty in Lagos, Nigeria.*

*So, Don, then, you told me that as you and Julie were just arriving in Lagos, they had told the pilot of the plane that there had been some military activity. What…can you pick it up there?*

PETTERSON: Sure, let me go back to that. The plane landed, and the military attaché, or someone from his office, and an officer from the embassy's administrative section were there to meet us. We drove through the cordon of troops around the airport into Lagos, and I went to the embassy. The ambassador greeted me and joked that maybe I had brought the trouble with me. Somehow my Zanzibar reputation had preceded me.

*Q: Who was the ambassador then?*

PETTERSON: Burt Matthews, a very distinguished, gentlemanly man of the old school and a veteran Foreign Service officer.

The root cause of Nigeria's political instability and the military coup was the intense tribal feelings that had arisen from, or at the very least had been exacerbated by, the regional framework of government that the British had fashioned. It reflected their colonial policy of indirect rule through the strongest groups in the country, the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Ibo in the east, the Yoruba in the west. The country was divided into regions - those three regions and the mid-west, which was sort of a mixture of the east and the west.

The post-independence government was a coalition headed by Tafawa Balewa. He was honest, highly intelligent, and a moderate, unlike some of the other leaders of the country, especially the regional governor of the North, Ahmadou Bello, the Sardana of Sokoto, and the governor of the West, Samuel Akintole. There was widespread corruption, particularly in the Western Region. The corruption and Nigeria's serious economic problems gave rise to political unrest. Underlying all this were tribal tensions. The unrest and dissatisfaction infected the army.

In late 1965, with northern political backing, Akintole was victorious in a blatantly rigged election. This sparked a political explosion that resulted in extreme violence especially in the area between the capital, Lagos, and the capital of the western region, Ibadan. Law and order began to break down. Virtual anarchy reigned for a while.

The embassy tended to downplay the seriousness of the violence, in part because they really didn't know, at first hand, what it was like. In contrast, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* correspondents, respectively Lloyd Garrison and Donald Loucheim, were filing stories that painted an alarming picture. Washington was concerned, and the State Department began to have doubts about the acuity of embassy reporting and analysis. I was unaware of all this.

The rigged election, ensuing violence, and continued corruption finally pushed southern mid-grade army officers, most of them Ibos, to mount a coup attempt, which took place early in the morning of January 15, 1966, the day that we arrived.

In Lagos, the dissident officers killed Balewa and senior military officers, almost all of them northerners. In Ibadan, they killed Akintole and senior military officers. The same occurred in Kaduna, the capital of the Northern Region. The army commander himself, General Aguiyi Ironsi, escaped death, although he had been marked for death. He managed in the course of the morning hours to rally loyal troops and put down the rebellion in time. He then formed a military government. The surviving civilian leaders responded to the unsettling events by readily agreeing to the army takeover. The overthrow of the government was met with great joy on the part of southerners. In the

north, there was some approval, but a subdued reaction and only lukewarm support. Within a few months, support throughout the country for the military government waned.

Julie and I and our children got settled into our house. I began pulling my weight in the political section.

*Q: Yes, let me interrupt you here, Don, just to ask you how many officers in the political section? What were your duties? What were you supposed to be working on?*

PETTERSON: It was a three- person political section. I was the second officer. My duties were to report on Nigeria's foreign relations and to assist the political counselor in following internal affairs in the Lagos area. Later I was given the responsibility to travel to the North to work with the consulate there during my stay and to report on what I had observed. In addition, I traveled to the East and did the same thing there. So I had a variety of reporting responsibilities.

For me it was an adjustment after having been in charge of the consulate in Zanzibar and not having to have my messages cleared, now, in Lagos, to have to submit everything I wrote through the political counselor. He was a man who, whenever I handed him a report, would pick up his blue pencil even before starting to read the report. He was an inveterate nit picker.

*Q: Sounds like many Foreign Service officers that we both know!*

PETTERSON: [Laughter] Well, I got used to it. I began reporting. I recall an airgram I wrote in April noting that the federal military government, as it was called, had failed to curb urban unrest, that corruption had resumed within the government, and that public support for the government was decreasing. More important, I noted, were indications of unrest or instability in the army. Later that month I made a driving trip with Julie and our youngest child, John, to the north, along with economic officer Bob Rackmales and his wife Mary. We drove to several northern towns and saw many examples of the great diversity of the northern people. An army officer in Kaduna told me about the serious split that now existed in the army.

In late May, General Ironsi, the supreme military commander, the head of government, decreed that henceforth Nigeria would have a centralized form of government rather than a federation. This act contributed to the belief of many northerners that the Ibos were bent on dominating the whole country.

Many Ibos lived and worked in the north, where they had skills and the education that the poorly educated northerners did not have. The Ibos tended to be very aggressive, sometimes arrogant, as well as extremely able. Northerners, by and large, hated them. Thousands of Ibos lived in sections of northern cities called Sabon Garis. Following Ironsi's announcement, riots broke out in the north. Several hundred Ibos were killed, and thousands fled back to their homeland in the East. Based on talks I had with Consul Bernie Stokes and his staff and others in Kaduna, I wrote a cable highlighting that

northern traditional leaders in civil service had actually organized these riots. I reported that hatred of the Ibos and fears of Ibo domination were intense. Ironsi tried to cool down the situation and backed away from his centralization decree, saying that he meant only to provide for a unified command within the army. This did not wash with northern military officers and military personnel in general. In July, young officers rose up, killed Ibo officers, and seized the government. Ironsi was assassinated.

The northern officers took over the government and chose a young 32-year-old officer, a well-liked moderate named Yakubu Gowon, who was called Jack Gowon, to head the government. For a time, the northern military were inclined to pull out of the southern area, return to the north, and establish a separate country. But Gowon resisted this successfully, and the new military government was in business. He convened a constitutional conference in September that tried to work out a new acceptable framework for governing Nigeria, but its deliberations were cut short when northerners started killing Ibos in northern towns. At first the violence was limited to two cities, but it spread, and several thousand peoples were killed. The survivors left for the East. All told, about a million Ibos from outside their homeland came back to the east.

The military governor of the East, Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, refused to recognize Gowon as supreme military commander. The embassy had foreseen the possibility of the northern coup but mistakenly did not believe secession was likely in the foreseeable future. This was communicated to Washington. The estrangement of the East from the rest of the country intensified. Young eastern intellectuals, in particular, were agitating for separation. In October the State Department and Ambassador Matthews had come to disagree on the prospects for a breakup of Nigeria and on possible danger to foreigners in the country. The ambassador did not believe that Nigeria was heading for a breakup. In stating, as he did, that war between regions in the near future was only a remote possibility, the ambassador was wrong. He was right, though, in telling Washington that foreigners would not be the targets of violence. Soon, however, the ambassador and the embassy realized that Eastern secession was close to taking place. The reporting from our consul in Enugu, Bob Barnard, was excellent and painted a picture of a breakup coming soon.

The ambassador and Washington also differed on Nigerian unity. He, reflecting American policy as it had been previously stated, thought that the maintenance of Nigerian unity was of utmost importance and recommended that to help keep the country together, the United States government should apply threats or sanctions against the East. He ran into disagreement from Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Rusk said that the United States should, and I quote, “be very careful about nominating ourselves as a supervisor of Nigerian unity.” Rusk felt it should be up to the British and fellow Commonwealth countries to take the lead in applying any measures to keep the East from seceding.

In late October of that year, 1966, Tom Smith and I drove to the North. Tom was about my age. He was my counterpart in the economic section. The number two officer in the four- or five-person economic section, Tom was a very able officer who one day would be ambassador to Nigeria. We took a 17-day trip by car, a Chevy van, throughout the

northern region. It was a great adventure. We found that life for the vast majority of northerners seemed to be largely unaffected by the crisis in the country. But what we saw in the Sabon Garis were stark reminders of what had happened and how serious it had been, and how this must have deeply affected the Ibos who survived. The Sabon Garis were ghost towns, deserted, with the detritus of people who had fled rapidly left behind. Most northerners we talked to had no apologies for what had happened to the Ibos, for the pogrom that had killed so many. There were exceptions, but in general there was no remorse, and the feeling was one of good riddance.

Tom and I drove as far east as Lake Chad. Because of the gas shortage in the country that existed as a result of all the turmoil, we carried big jerry cans of gasoline with us. Every night we would take the cans out of the vehicle and carry them inside our sleeping quarters. We generally stayed in government guesthouses. Sometimes the accommodations were pretty Spartan. Other times, they weren't bad at all. We did a long report on our trip when we got back, and it was well received in the embassy and in Washington.

In Lagos our Ibo friends were departing, fearing for their lives. I had met some in my work. One was a close friend in the ministry of foreign affairs. Julie and I got to know him and his family, but they were among those who left. One day, our Hausa gardener attacked and tried to beat up our Ibo cook. We fired the gardener, but not long afterwards the cook left for the east.

From April 1967 onward, Ibo secession was expected at any time. Some time before that, air travel between Lagos and the East had suspended. Embassy officers periodically would travel by car to the East carrying the diplomatic pouch. It was, I think, in mid-April that my turn came. I was driven in a van through the Mid-West Region to the Niger River. There I got into a canoe, carried the pouch across, was met on the other side by a consulate employee in a van, and drove to Enugu.

*Q: Don, can I interrupt us there?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Is that normally the way it would happen or had there been a bridge that had been blown up?*

PETTERSON: There was a bridge across the Niger at Onitsha, but the Eastern Region military government had blocked it to all traffic. Later, during the Biafran war, it was partially destroyed by retreating Biafran soldiers but was repaired and reopened in 1970.

*Q: But was this not evidence that the Ibos in the east were cutting themselves off from the rest of the country, the fact that you had to take a canoe?*

PETTERSON: Yes. By this time, Easterners wanted nothing more to do with the rest of the country and were sliding toward secession. At any rate, a canoe I took. [Laughter]

In Enugu the sentiment for secession was very high. I reported that one night at a popular, crowded bar (I recall the name was the Progress Bar), young men were vocal in expressing their bitterness and their hatred of northerners. They said they were ready to go to war, and I reported that sentiment back to Lagos. There was a feeling in the embassy that Bob Barnard was showing too much sympathy for the East, or was getting too far out in front in indicating that secession was right around the corner. The embassy's leadership came to think that his reporting was colored by his sympathy, and that was unfortunate for Bob.

*Q: Is this another instance, in your opinion, of officers who report things that Washington doesn't want to hear sometimes have a hard time.*

PETTERSON: Yes, although in this case it was the embassy, not Washington. The situation within the U.S. mission had become difficult for some officers. Let me explain. The ambassador's emphasis on supporting Nigerian unity and, by that, supporting the federal military government, and his view that Washington should try to deter the East from seceding caused some in the embassy, led by the DCM, the military attaché, and my boss (the political counselor), to view Bob Barnard, as I said, as being sympathetic to the Eastern cause. This, in my view, unfair criticism severely damaged Bob Barnard's career later on.

Ray Wach was the most junior officer in our political section. He and I fell under some suspicion of being less than foursquare supporters of Nigerian unity. At least one report I had made from the East had caused some annoyance in the embassy because it didn't square with the embassy hierarchy's judgment of what was really happening. This, even though I was just reporting what I was seeing and hearing and not venturing opinions. In addition to the annoyance with my reporting from the East, I was criticized for continuing to see New York Times correspondent Lloyd Garrison and Washington Post correspondent Don Loucheim, who were in disfavor with the embassy brass. They didn't like their reporting, and embassy reporting officers were advised to steer clear of them. However, I liked them, and I found it useful to trade information with them. We had a symbiotic relationship. They had sources of useful information that the embassy didn't have, and I saw no reason not to tell them things that were not sensitive, that belonged in the public domain. Nevertheless my association with them didn't do my reputation any good, I suppose, with certain of the embassy officers. I don't want to say that the DCM and political counselor were angry with me. We had a good relationship, despite the fact that from time to time something I did annoyed them. When word got around that I had been awarded a fellowship at Stanford and would be transferred in July of '67, Garrison and Loucheim thought my bosses had engineered my transfer. [Laughter] This of course, was not true, and I told them so.

As I said, I was not really in deep hot water at all and had good relations with the DCM and certainly with the ambassador, who was a wonderful man. I would fault him only for not having taken firmer control of the DCM, the military attaché, and the political counselor and thereby avoided the antagonisms that became a serious problem within the

embassy.

Not long after I left Nigeria, Ray Wach, who wore his sentiments on his sleeve, so to speak, in that he didn't hide his sympathy for the plight of southerners, was castigated for his views, and his efficiency report was so bad that his career was fatally damaged. This was in a way similar to what was taking place in Vietnam, where Foreign Service officers (many of them junior officers) were reporting truthfully on the situation they were covering. When their reports were inconsistent with the embassy's party line, they got into trouble. There was really a kind of censorship. It wasn't that bad in Nigeria, but it was bad enough, and I was lucky to leave when I did.

On one of my last trips to the East, I was in Enugu. I borrowed a USAID (United States Agency for International Development) van and drove north across the border between the Eastern and Northern regions. The war between the East, which soon would be called Biafra, and the North had not yet started, and I was able to get across the border. However, further up the road, not far from Makurdi, soldiers examined my passport, didn't know what to make of it, took me into custody, and drove me to the chief of police of Makurdi, who was a British civil servant. He laughed at the incident and let me go about my business. Well, one of my objectives there was to see what military dispositions might be, see whether troops had moved down from the north into Makurdi. I nosed around a little bit and made the mistake of talking to a couple of British civil servants (including the police chief), who I assumed would be forthright with me. Well, they weren't, and they reported what I was doing. The federal authorities in Makurdi in turn sent a report to Lagos, and a complaint about me was conveyed to the embassy. The DCM, who handled the case, told me when I returned to Lagos that he had resisted the call for my expulsion from Nigeria.

*Q: I'm not quite clear. I mean you were a political officer in the embassy.*

PETTERSON: Right.

*Q: Political officers are supposed to go out and talk to lots of people, ask questions, and try to find out not only what's going on, but also the attitudes of various people towards that! This is exactly what you were doing. Who was concerned? I mean, did the people think that you were spying?*

PETTERSON: Yes, the Nigerian federal government authorities, whoever they were in Makurdi, didn't like what I was doing. Their state of mind was an indication of the tension within the country, of the great suspicion about spies, subversion, saboteurs, you name it. So with that kind of atmosphere, the Federal government authorities in Makurdi did not react rationally to what I was doing and they blew the whistle back to Lagos. Someone in the Federal Military Government had the same kind of attitude and sought my expulsion. But Clint Olson, the DCM, talked them out of it.

On another trip, my last trip to the East, I participated with consulate officers and a couple of other people from our embassy in helping with the evacuation of American

citizens from the region. A chartered DC-8 aircraft made shuttle flights to Lagos to take all of the American civilians out who wanted to go, and most did.

*Q: Of Enugu?*

PETTERSON: The entire Eastern Region. On May 30, Ojukwu, the military governor of the East, announced the East's independence and the formation of the Republic of Biafra. In July the civil war began. There were signs around town warning of possible air raids. I remember walking in town one day with Barry Watchorn, an officer of the Australian embassy and a close friend. We were reading a sign that said, "In case of an air raid, jump into the nearest ditch." Well, the ditches in town were open sewers. [Laughter] We resolved that if an air raid came, we would stand [laughter] and watch instead of jumping into the ditch.

Near the end of July, Julie, our children, and I left Nigeria. Incidentally, it was ironic that the officer who replaced me in Lagos as the second man in the political section was Fritz Picard.

*Q: Who had been your boss in Zanzibar?*

PETTERSON: He'd been my boss in Zanzibar.

*Q: One thing I wanted to ask you before we leave Nigeria. Are we about to leave Nigeria? Don, you got there in '66?*

PETTERSON: January 15, 1966, the day of the coup.

*Q: Sixty-six, and you left in sixty-seven.*

PETTERSON: July of '67.

*Q: So you did about a year and a half?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Which is a rather abbreviated tour.*

PETTERSON: Yes, a normal tour of duty for most officers was two years. But I had applied for and received a fellowship and was transferred after only a year and a half so that I could enroll at Stanford at the beginning of September.

*Q: As far as you know, that was just happenstance?*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes, sure.

*Q: There wasn't any effort on the part of either the Department or the embassy to shorten*

*your tour?*

PETTERSON: Oh, no. I know that I was well regarded in the Department. Certainly the officers in charge of Nigerian affairs had conveyed that to me on a trip they'd made to Lagos and later when I went back to Washington on my way to Stanford. And, as I have said, I wasn't in such bad order with the embassy brass that they would have tried to get me out. No, I was very fortunate to get the fellowship!

Let me explain. This was a National Institute of Public Affairs Fellowship that I had been awarded. NIPA awarded fellowships to middle-grade civil servants to go to various universities that participated in the program - Princeton, Harvard, USC, University of Indiana, several others, including Stanford. I was given a choice, and I chose Stanford, and got it.

*Q: So Don, you have now left Nigeria and started your fellowship at Stanford.*

PETTERSON: We flew from Lagos to Switzerland, where we picked the Mercedes 230 that I'd ordered. With the diplomatic discount, the car cost just under $3,000. It was really a bargain!

*Q: Wow!*

PETTERSON: We drove across France and took a ferry across the channel to London, where I shipped the car to San Francisco. Before going to Stanford, we went to Mexico-

*Q: To see Julie's parents?*

PETTERSON: To see her family, and then to California, where we visited my parents, relatives, and some friends of ours, and drove up the coast to Stanford. We lived in Escondido Village (which was married-students' housing) and had a great year. The NIPA Fellowship did not require any particular course for its recipients, except a core seminar on issues and problems of the United States. The ten or so other NIPA fellows at Stanford and I studied race relations, poverty, Appalachia and so forth. It was an excellent course, especially for a Foreign Service officer who'd been living overseas. I took courses for credit (which I didn't have to do) and audited others. I took Russian history, American diplomatic history, Southeast Asian history, a seminar on administrative decision-making in government, and French, as I recall. I learned, and this was probably one of the most important things that happened to me in that academic year, I learned what Vietnam was all about. When I was in Nigeria, I was among the embassy officers who agreed to go secondary schools and gave a canned presentation prepared by the U.S. Information Service on Vietnam, on the rightness of the American cause, on the evils of the Communist warfare there. I didn't know the true, complex nature of the issue or have much of an understanding about the opposition in America to the war. At Stanford, as at other campuses throughout the country, there was a lot of ferment about the Vietnam War. I got a good taste of this ferment from students, from demonstrations, and from classroom discussions about Vietnam. The course I took on Southeast Asian

history was also useful. When I left Stanford, I had a much better understanding of Vietnam and why our course of action there, our policy, was mistaken.

In the summer of '67, we drove across the United States to Washington.

*Q: Wait. Before you get there, would you recommend that mid career officers (you were by this time a three or a four)-?*

PETTERSON: I was an FSO (Foreign Service Officer) four.

*Q: Would you recommend this kind of, sort of, sabbatical year-*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Or mid-career training or something like this is a good idea?*

PETTERSON: Oh, absolutely! To the Department's great credit, it provides some kind training break for many officers. Some take specialized courses, in economics, for example. Several friends of mine got master's degrees in economics. The NIPA fellowship was one of various fellowships, including Woodrow Wilson fellowships, that FSOs could compete for. Each year, only one Foreign Service Officer got a NIPA fellowship. It was a wonderful experience and an opportunity to get back in touch with what was happening not only in the universities, but also in the United States outside the beltway, outside of Washington, DC. You got an appreciation of what the American people were interested in and thinking about.

*Q: Yes, sounds good.*

PETTERSON: It was a great year.

*Q: So, now you've been reassigned to Washington?*

PETTERSON: Yes. I was given an assignment for a two-year period following Stanford as a personnel officer in the State Department. I counseled political officers and worked on their assignments. In those days, career development personnel officers both counseled the officers who came under their jurisdiction (in my case, O-4 and O-3 political officers) and worked with the regional bureaus and functional bureaus to assign those officers. The real power for assignments lay with the bureaus, but Personnel at least had some input in the matter. Our concern was to try to find the best assignment for the career development of the officer. But we often ran into the reality of the bureau wanting somebody other than our suggested candidate. So there was a lot of horse-trading that went on.

*Q: You say that those differences occurred frequently, and I'm sure they did. How did those issues get resolved, and who did the resolving?*

PETTERSON: Well, it was a matter of the skill of the career development and counseling officer and maybe his or her boss, working with the geographic or functional bureau personnel officers, who had a lot of authority on the assignments. Again, the bureau had the last word. They could veto whatever suggestions you made, so you had to use your diplomatic skills [laughter], negotiating skills, if you had any, to try to get as good an assignment as possible for your charges.

*Q: With a job like that, I'm sure that you met a large number of your colleagues, got to know many of your, political officer colleagues during that two-year period.*

PETTERSON: Yes, I did. That was a good part of the job. I remember one day, a young officer, he was younger than I, came in to see me. He was an O-4 and a rising star in the Foreign Service. I was his personnel counselor. He told me he was thinking of resigning. His name was Tony Lake, and he worked for Henry Kissinger in the National Security Council. He, along with others, like Richard Moose, broke with Kissinger over the Cambodian invasion. Tony simply couldn't work any longer for Kissinger because of his, Tony's, opposition to the Nixon administration's policies regarding Vietnam and Cambodia. I don't know what I told him; but I think in essence I said, "Tony, this is your decision. It's a tough one. You'll just have to be guided by your conscience."

And he left.

*Q: He resigned?*

PETTERSON: He did resign, yes. This was in 1970. He came back into the State Department in 1977 as a high ranking official, much higher that he had been before. He was the head of the Policy Planning Staff. Of course, later on, in the Clinton administration, he headed the National Security Council.

*Q: But this was the time during that period, during the Vietnam War when there was a great deal of stress in the Foreign Service as a whole.*

PETTERSON: Sure. I saw young officers coming back from Vietnam. Occasionally, when one of my colleagues went on leave, I would counsel his clients, FSO-5s, relatively junior officers. I remember a couple of cases of young idealistic officers. Their first tour of duty was with the program called CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) in Vietnam. This was part of the pacification program. Right after they had come into the Service, taken the Basic Officer's orientation course, and maybe had gotten some language training, they were sent to Vietnam and went out into the provinces. Some of them ran into the problem of reporting the truth and getting dinged for it. Some of them came back bitter, some of them stayed in the Service, some of them didn't.

It was a tough time. I was lucky; I don't know if I mentioned earlier that at one point I had volunteered to go to Vietnam. I thought this would be an exciting thing to do. I was talked out of it, and I'm very thankful [laughter] that I was.

*Q: Just one last thing before we move on. This is oral history. Do you have any suggestions as to how the personnel process in the State Department and the Foreign Service could be improved?*

PETTERSON: Well, I've been away from the Service for the past two years, since I left Liberia in 1999, and I'm not quite sure just how it works now. But what I saw later in my career convinced me that the system they have now of people bidding on assignments, of negotiating with Personnel, is very cumbersome, very time-consuming. It is no more fair than the earlier system, in which assignments which were made without a lot of input from the officer.

*Q: And even the officers aren't that much more satisfied.*

PETTERSON: They aren't, and a lot of negotiating outside the personnel system goes on. An officer goes to somebody, a patron, or a matron, if you will, and tries to get backing for a particular assignment. Another thing that I don't like about today's Foreign Service is the lack of service discipline. No assignment system will be free of flaws. But we should have one that, while having safeguards for the individual officer's well being, has the authority to make assignments stick. Once an assignment is made, the officer should have to accept it unless there is a clear, reasonable, compelling reason against it. We were quasi- military when you and I joined the Foreign Service. To me, that's the way it should be.

*Q: Yes, it is a career service.*

PETTERSON: Exactly, and the needs of the service should predominate. As it is now, the Department has a difficult time getting people to accept assignments to hardship posts

*Q: Okay. So now it is 1970?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: You had three years in State?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Where are we going now?*

PETTERSON: Near the end of my tour in Personnel, I chose an assignment to La Paz, Bolivia. This is one of the perks of being in the personnel business. You had an inside track for an assignment. I had hoped to get out of Africa and spend part of my career in Latin America. I saw that a political officer slot at La Paz was open, and the Bureau of Latin American Affairs had no problem with my candidacy. However, the ambassador in La Paz wanted a friend, or somebody he knew, to take that job.

*Q: Sure. Would you have been the chief of the political section?*

PETTERSON: I can't recall for sure, but I think so. It was not a big section. At any rate, I didn't get the job. So I asked for and got an assignment to Freetown, Sierra Leone, as the DCM. It turned out, I believe, to be a lot better assignment for me, from a career standpoint.

*Q: Yes. Are you still a class four officer?*

PETTERSON: I was still a class four officer, so I was junior for that job, but the ambassador had no problem with grade, even though the incumbent was an O-2.

*Q: [Laughter] Well, I think you really got a plum because DCM jobs are very much in demand all over the world. This would be an opportunity for you to acquire some supervisory and management skills?*

PETTERSON: Sure. I didn't realize how important that was and how useful it could be for a career. As it turned out, I got the job. We left Washington for Freetown in July 1970. The two girls went to the International School, and John attended the Cotton Tree pre-school, which was located in the embassy building. Susan was eight, Julianne seven, and John five. We lived in a large apartment of a four-story building which was perched on a rock cliff of a high ridge about 500 feet above the flatland down below on the edge of the sea. We had a great view of the beaches and the ocean. It was a very, very nice place to live, but Julie and I were in mortal fear every time the kids came out on the balcony, and we never let them out there alone. One of the advantages of being in this place, with its sheer fall down to rocks below, was that the famous "tiefmen" of Sierra Leone wouldn't be able to get into our apartment. The "tiefmen" were thieves. Sierra Leone, like Liberia, was noted for having very astute, very able thieves who were called-

*Q: Thiefmen?*

PETTERSON: Tiefmen.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: So we didn't have to worry about the tiefmen. We worried about our kids occasionally, but not about the tiefmen.

I replaced Bill De Pree, who was an O-2 and who later became a close friend. The ambassador was Robert Miner. Bob Miner was an exceptionally able officer, an expert in Greek and Turkish affairs, a man who should have been ambassador to Greece or Turkey. But he tended to be outspoken. Because of that he didn't go as high in the service as he should have. He got an ambassadorship-

*Q: Still, being an ambassador is not bad!*

PETTERSON: That's right, but Sierra Leone was not Turkey. [Laughter] Actually, he

had been ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago before coming to Sierra Leone. He had a very relaxed attitude about how the embassy should run and gave his DCM wide authority. He didn't see that what was occurring in Sierra Leone was vital to U.S. national interests, and this was reflected somewhat in the way he reported on what was happening there.

*Q: Incidentally, let me interrupt again here just to ask you, I believe there is a course, a short course for DCMs?*

PETTERSON: It did not exist then.

*Q: All right. So you went out there without very much briefing about how to do your job?*

PETTERSON: No. I briefed myself, of course, on important aspects of Sierra Leone. I always did as much as I could to inform myself before I went to a post. I steeped myself in whatever material I could get on the country, its politics, economics, history, current events, everything. So I knew a lot about Sierra Leone when I got there, but I didn't know beans about managing an embassy. I had to learn on the job. That's the way the Service did it, and in some cases, it turned out to be a disaster. I hope it didn't in my case. But you're right that I had no training, as such, for being a DCM.

So back we were in tropical Africa, in this little country, Sierra Leone, which was bordered by Guinea and Liberia. Sierra Leone had considerable mineral wealth. There were iron mines and a rutile mine. Diamond mining was the big money maker, however. Sierra Leone was formerly a British colony. It had been founded in 1787 with guidance from British anti-slavery elements, abolitionists. Most of the settlers in Sierra Leone were captives who had been brought there after being released from slave ships captured by the British navy. One group of settlers were former slaves from America who had been living in Nova Scotia. They had sided with the British during the American Revolution in exchange for their freedom. After the American victory, they had ended up in Nova Scotia, where they had a tough life. Freed slaves from West Indies, Jamaica, in particular, were also part of the nucleus of the new colony.

Sierra Leone became independent in 1961. In the 1967 national elections, the All People's Congress, which was led by a labor leader named Siaka Stevens, gained a parliamentary majority, but was prevented from taking power by a military coup. I won't go into detail, but tribalism was involved, with Stevens and his party being supported by the Temne tribe and the Limba tribe. The opposition, the Sierra Leone People's Party, was supported mainly by the Mende, another large tribe. The officers pulled off a coup, but enlisted men who favored Stevens and who were disgruntled for other reasons overthrew the officers and turned the government over to Stevens, who became the prime minister and who would be the strong man of Sierra Leone for years afterward, for 18 years to be precise.

*Q: This is about the same time as Biafra, or maybe a year later?*

PETTERSON: Yes, 1967, same time.

*Q: Do you think that the events or people in Sierra Leone were influenced by what was going on in Nigeria?*

PETTERSON: Hard to say. Nothing has been written to that effect. I think that in Sierra Leone it was mainly the local conditions, the political unrest, the tribalism, and disgruntlement within the military that led to 1967 coup. At any rate, Stevens's corrupt misrule of that country laid the foundation for the political strife and violence that still exists in Sierra Leone, and which has taken the country to the brink of total ruin.

About two months after I started work, the ambassador and Mrs. Miner went on leave. She was in poor health, and they stayed away longer than might otherwise have been the case.

Thus it was that I was in charge of the embassy when a political crisis occurred. Some cabinet members who were fed up with Stevens's dictatorial ways and the rampant corruption in the government, resigned and formed a new opposition party. An internationally respected Sierra Leonean, a UN official named John Karifa Smart, led it. Stevens, who was in London, hurried home and declared a state of emergency. This was in September. In October he banned the new party and put its leaders in prison. Pro-Stevens and anti-Stevens groups clashed in outbreaks of violence at political rallies. Stevens got wind that some dissatisfaction with him had surfaced in the army.

On October 11 he summoned me to his residence. He told me that embassy officer Mark Colby, who was our CIA station chief, had met the previous morning with a dissident army officer. He asked me to have Colby leave the country. I protested. I asked him, how Colby could have known that Stevens considered this particular army officer disloyal. I told him that the liaison between Colby and army officers and others was declared and that he and his government had approved this. So there was no reason for Colby not to see an army officer. I got Stevens to agree to meet with Colby and me. That evening we went to his residence. Colby explained the situation, and noted that he really hadn't met with the officer in question, a man named Sesay. That morning he had gone to the barracks, but he didn't find him, and left. So there was no meeting. Stevens listened, didn't declare himself, but said he would have to discuss it with his cabinet. The next day he informed me that Colby had to go. He said it would be done quietly, kept confidential, but the expulsion order was revealed in the Freetown press. There was a spate of anti-American stories in the press and one editorial declaring that I should be expelled too. I had a clipping of this. It said: "There is another element in the United States Embassy who should be sent off immediately. We have it as a matter of fact that there was revolution with bloody effects in the last two countries he was assigned. A man of this type must not spend a day longer in this country."

*Q: [Laughter] Zanzibar is coming back to haunt you again.*

PETTERSON: Yes, and Nigeria too. Julie and I wondered whether we should start

packing. The anti-American campaign, which was now in full swing, became intense. The next day a mob of Steven's party faithful demonstrated in front of the embassy. They pulled down the American flag from its flagpole and tore it up. That same day, six soldiers were arrested and charged with involvement in an alleged coup attempt. We received a threat by telephone that I was going to be kidnaped. At noontime on my way home for lunch the next day, several men chased my car and threw bottles at it. When I went to Stevens and told him about all this, he expressed regret for the demonstration and other occurrences and gave me assurances for the safety of Americans. He also told me that he'd put no stock whatsoever in the editorial that had called for my expulsion. In time, the press vilification came to a halt, and so too did the political crisis.

But an undercurrent of political unrest and uneasiness in the army persisted. Stevens distrusted the army commander, Brigadier General John Bangura. In late November Ambassador Miner returned, and in January 1971 Stevens released most of his political opponents from jail. But he was worried. In March he went to Conakry, Guinea. There his friend, President Sékou Touré, loaned him a contingent of Guinean troops who accompanied him back to Freetown. This infuriated most army officers and certainly Bangura.

On March 23 Bangura launched what proved to be a very poorly conceived coup attempt. An effort was made to kill Stevens at his residence, but it failed. The coup attempt petered out when officers loyal to Stevens resisted and arrested Bangura. In June, Bangura and two other army officers were executed. These were the first executions out of all these political crises in Sierra Leone, and it changed the whole tenor of subsequent political events. There had been a kind of a comic opera quality to the 1967 coups, but now it was a very serious business indeed, and later there were other executions. Stevens now had a clear road to achieve his goal of making Sierra Leone into a republic and becoming its executive president. This was done in April 1971.

After the March coup attempt, the U.S. was once again accused of interference in Sierra Leone's internal affairs. There was again a media campaign and a lot of hostility. Some months later, however, the anti-American campaign abated. Stevens himself, I believe, retained some suspicion that the U.S. government had it in for him.

*Q: Let me ask, had Ambassador Miner come back by this time?*

PETTERSON: Yes, I said earlier that he had returned.

*Q: Okay.*

PETTERSON: This was in November.

*Q: Okay. Well, this took some of the pressure off of you. Do you think that Ambassador Miner was successful in disabusing Stevens of his suspicions?*

PETTERSON: I would say not. Neither the ambassador nor I was able to erase some

residue, at least, of suspicion from Steven's mind. This suspicion was occasionally manifested in sometimes-bizarre ways. Once, when I was chargé d'affaires again, he told me that an American submarine had been sighted in Freetown harbor and was obviously up to no good. He wanted Washington to explain it. Well, the explanation was that there wasn't a submarine within thousands of miles [laughter] of Sierra Leone. It was just an idiotic idea. This was nonsense, and I told him so, diplomatically of course. Another time, he summoned me to his office. I walked in, and he plunked down a .45 pistol (a U.S. Colt .45) on his desk, and demanded to know why U.S. arms were coming into Sierra Leone. I explained that American arms cold be found all over the world, and that one .45 pistol was hardly something to get exercised about. At his request I asked the State Department to obtain whatever information might be obtainable from pistol's serial number. This was done, and that was the end of the matter.

In late 1971, Stevens called me in to complain that embassy general services officer Bernie Nolan had taken his mid-assignment leave in Sierra Leone instead of going to Europe or someplace, that he was staying home a lot, and that he was seen changing the license plates on his car [laughter]. Stevens somehow thought this meant that Nolan was up to no good.

I told him that an American employee of the embassy could take leave in the local country if he or she wanted to, and that Nolan had chosen to do that. As for changing his license plates, the minister of foreign affairs had instructed all embassies to change their vehicles' license plates to newly issued ones, and that's why Nolan was doing that.

*Q: So what you're describing, as I hear it, is a really sort of hyper feeling on the part of the host government about really relatively minor, unimportant details of international light. General Service's officers are not usually the subject of observation and supervision by host governments. The whole atmosphere of Freetown sounds really sort of nervous and hypertense!*

PETTERSON: Nervous, hypertense, and unsophisticated. Stevens was not a well-educated man. There was a certain insularity about him and about his government, and they tended to pick up these stories and believe them without really thinking them through or considering that there could be a logical explanation. Their nervousness also manifested their underlying suspicion that the United States was so interested in Sierra Leone that it would do just about anything to skew events there in its favor. Ambassador Miner tried to make it clear to Stevens and others that the United States simply did not care much at all about what was going on in Sierra Leone's internal affairs.

*Q: [Laughter] That must have been rather awkward! [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Well, it had to be done. Stevens was considered to be left wing. He assumed that this didn't sit well with the United States government.

*Q: You would presume though, that the leader of a former British colony would be much more interested in and much more concerned about what was going on with the British*

*High Commission. Did you have a chance to talk with your British counterpart or your French counterpart?*

PETTERSON: Oh, sure.

*Q: And see if they were also subject to this attention?*

PETTERSON: No, it was focused on us. The British didn't have the problem that we did. There was some antagonism towards the British, but it didn't amount to much. The animosity wasn't directed against the British government, but instead against British-based commercial firm: DIMINCO, a diamond mining company, and the Sierra Leone's Selection trust, which was also involved in the diamond business. Despite commercial agreements with those companies that had been favorable to Sierra Leone, Stevens and his cronies suspected that they were ripping off Sierra Leone. This was ironic because Stevens and others were enriching themselves in illegal deals involving diamonds.

Another example of Stevens' frame of mind occurred in January 1972. I was chargé d'affaires again at the time. Stevens called me in, this time to complain that Bob Luneburg, the deputy director of CARE - (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc.), which was helping provide assistance to Sierra Leone - had been seen outside the army barracks examining weapons and taking notes. Soldiers detained him briefly. Stevens said that this behavior could not be countenanced, and he was inclined to deport Luneburg.

I asked him to hold off and let me talk to Luneburg, which I did. Bob told me that, after a party at one of their houses, he and a group of friends went on a treasure hunt. One of the requirements was to estimate the weight of the brass machine gun in front of the gate at Wilberforce barracks. So Luneburg went there, looked at this thing, and while he was writing down what he thought it might weigh, was detained. Phil Johnston, the director of the CARE operation in Sierra Leone, and I wrote a report on what had happened and delivered it to Stevens. We then met with Steven's press officer, and got him to agree not to publish an account that was about to be released to the media, which would have made the government of Sierra Leone look silly. He (the press officer) saw this and pulled back the story. Luneburg was not thrown out. Phil Johnston, incidentally, become executive director of CARE USA in 1980 and its president in 1989, and I would see him later on in my career

Despite this kind nonsense, relations between the U.S. and Sierra Leone were generally improving. We gained a lot of credit and good will from our self-help program. We didn't have a formal USAID program for Sierra Leone, but we had a well-funded self-help program. The embassy would evaluate proposed self-help projects and provide funds for those we approved. Some proposals came from Peace Corps volunteers who, working with villagers, devised projects.

*Q: How come no AID program?*

PETTERSON: In those days, USAID was phasing out its operations in a number of African countries in conformance with congressional legislation that limited the number of countries receiving U.S. economic aid to forty worldwide. Only ten of these were in Africa. Sierra Leone was one of those countries that lost out. There was a residual USAID program, projects which had been started and whose funding was not exhausted. The U.S. was, for example, helping the WHO (World Health Organization) eradicate smallpox. A Center for Disease Control doctor was attached to the embassy for this program. The last known case of smallpox in the world was in Sierra Leone.

One of our most successful self-help projects involved providing piped water to villages. CARE had the plastic water pipes, Peace Corps volunteers in the villages designed the projects, village leaders approved the design, and the embassy provided money for transporting the pipes and for necessary supplies and equipment. We helped villages get, for the first time, piped water. This meant that the women would not have to walk, sometimes for miles, to get water from a stream and carry it back to the village. Piped water revolutionized their lives, and our program was immensely popular. Through the self-help program, we also helped build schools and feeder roads linking a village to a main road. These kinds of projects were also very popular.

I enjoyed working with CARE and certainly with Peace Corps staff and volunteers. Julie and I traveled a lot in Sierra Leone, often with the children. We met and stayed with volunteers when we went up-country. The villages we visited in connection with self-help projects received us like royalty. Often native dances would be organized. Sierra Leone had some of the most exciting, vibrant dancers in all of Africa. In this and in other ways, we had a very good life in Sierra Leone. Freetown was on a peninsula, and on that peninsula were some of the nicest beaches I've ever seen. Along the west coast of Africa, the surf generally comes pounding in, making it unsafe for swimming. But because of the way the peninsula was situated, there was no heavy surf along its beaches. So just about every Sunday, we and friends and our respective children would go to one of several different beaches and have a great day.

Ambassador Miner turned 60 in the summer of 1971. That was mandatory retirement age in those days, and he left Sierra Leone. It would turn out that I would be in charge of the embassy for almost a year thereafter.

We expected the arrival of a new ambassador, Howard Mace, the director of Personnel, who had been nominated to replace Ambassador Miner. The Senate, however, did not confirm Mr. Mace. At his hearing he was opposed by the widow of a Foreign Service officer who had committed suicide. Charles Thomas had been selected out. He was a class four officer and under 50 years of age. Because of the existing policy, he did not get a pension. That is, if you were not an O-3 or you were not 50 years of age, if you were…

*Q: Neither of those…*

PETTERSON: Yes, right. Then you didn't get a pension.

*Q: Then you got nothing.*

PETTERSON: Not until you turned 60. Thomas was despondent and committed suicide. His wife, at the hearing, testified against Mace, blaming him as a head of Personnel for a policy that led to the death of her husband. The Senate did not reject Mace, but they never him voted him out of committee. After six months the administration pulled his name back.

The next nominee was Clint Olson, who'd been DCM in Nigeria when I was there. He too ran into flack. At Olson's hearing, Ray Wach, who had been selected out of the Foreign Service because of the very negative report he had received on his performance in his last year at Lagos, testified against Olson. Roger Morris, a former FSO and a writer who had been strongly critical of the embassy's actions during the crisis leading up to Biafra and during the war, also testified against Olson. Despite the negative testimony, the Senate, after a few months, confirmed him.

All this time I had to explain to Stevens why the new American ambassador didn't show up. He simply could not believe that somehow it wasn't a manifestation of U.S. hostility toward him. The rest of the time I was in Sierra Leone (that last year), I saw Stevens grow increasingly autocratic and repressive. For example, another execution took place, this one of a political opponent. It was sad to see a country of promise, like Sierra Leone, be slowly but surely robbed of its diamond riches by Stevens and his cronies. When I was in Sierra Leone, one of the residual AID programs was aimed at improving agricultural production. The university experts there from Michigan State believed that Sierra Leone had the potential to become self-sufficient in rice production and, as well, an exporter of rice. But this never happened because of the corruption and mismanagement that just pervaded the whole government, thanks to the corruption and misrule of Stevens. Under Stevens, Sierra Leone began a downward spiral that has yet to end.

*Q: We're what, 20, 25 years later?*

PETTERSON: It's close to 30 years now. We left in '72, twenty-nine years ago.

*Q: How tragic!*

PETTERSON: Let me parenthetically ask, "Why do we have an embassy in this place, all this bizarre stuff going on and the country of little interest to the United States?"

Well, the U.S. government had adopted the policy of universality. We would be represented in every country in the world. There was some American economic interest. In Sierra Leone, inasmuch as a U.S. company owned the rutile mine. But Sierra Leone was really not of major importance to the United States, obviously. It wouldn't have made a lot of difference if we didn't have an embassy there, but universality was the name of the game.

*Q: I believe this was under President John F. Kennedy?*

PETTERSON: That we started the universality?

*Q: Yes, I think that that was part of the Kennedy approach to foreign policy - that we would go anywhere, do anything, so we should have an embassy everywhere.*

PETTERSON: We certainly didn't have universality in the prewar years. But in the post-war world, in the Cold War, it was seen as important that we be represented everywhere, and we were and still are.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Except for the Comoros. We finally closed our embassy in Comoros. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: In the spring of 1972 I got a cable from African Bureau Assistant Secretary of State David Newsom asking me to accept an assignment as political counselor in Pretoria. I was unsure what to do.

John Hurd was the ambassador. He was a political appointee who was said to be close the government of South Africa, whose apartheid policies, were, of course, despised throughout the world. Hurd had gone hunting with a minister of the white government on Robin Island where Nelson Mandela was among the political prisoners. I was unsure how it would be to work for this ambassador. Moreover, I detested apartheid and preferred not to see it at first hand. So I called or cabled some friends, seeking advice. They told me to take the job. I remember that Beverly Carter, an African-American USIS (United States Information Agency) officer who had been a friend of mine in Nigeria and was now one of Newsome's deputies in AF, a very capable guy whom I liked and admired, told me that I really needed to see apartheid to understand it.

*Q: Don, had you by this time, sort of, [laughter] more or less resigned yourself to being a permanent African specialist? I mean, you weren't interested in broadening yourself through service in another geographic area?*

PETTERSON: No, no. I wanted to go to Latin America.

*Q: Yes, still?*

PETTERSON: In fact in '72, before I had gotten the call from Dave Newsom, I had put in for an assignment as Peace Corps Director in Chile. Some Foreign Service officers had been Peace Corps directors. What I didn't know, however, was that by 1972 the Nixon administration was not going to give any of those directorships to an undeserving Foreign Service officer. They were political plums. I was not really in the running. I thought I was, so did Personnel, but the assignment never came about. Nat Davis, the director

general of the Foreign Service, discovered why and let me know.

Then the Newsom offer came. I really wasn't in a position to say no, even though I wasn't keen on the idea.

*Q: You were of two minds about it?*

PETTERSON: Right, and sought advice. I think I was just looking for reassurance. Once I had heard from my friends, of course I accepted the assignment.

*Q: South Africa is an entirely different situation than Sierra Leone. You're moving from a sort of small and rather back-watered, African-ruled country into a large, relatively sophisticated, white-run country. Tell us about that transition.*

PETTERSON: You're quite right. It was an entirely different situation. It was a contrast also from working in a small embassy to a relatively large one. And instead of running the embassy, I would be political counselor, which meant supervising the reporting coming from the embassy and coordinating the reporting from the consulates in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town.

The assignment gave me a fine opportunity for political reporting. There was a lot of interest in what was happening in South Africa. It was a very complex, challenging kind of an environment. People would be paying attention to what was reported. I was also told, by the way, that Ambassador Hurd did not interfere in the political reporting, whatever his views might have been. I would find when I got there that John Hurd was a very nice man. He might have sympathized to a certain extent with the white government, but he let the professionals do their job.

*Q: You mentioned that he was not a career officer?*

PETTERSON: No-

*Q: He was a political appointee?*

PETTERSON: Yes, a political appointee. He was a Californian who'd made his money in Texas in oil and ranching.

*Q: So, he might have believed that his job as ambassador was to have cordial relations with the government in power, whatever government that might be.*

PETTERSON: Well, sure. No matter who was ambassador, that would be part of his or her job. But Ambassador Hurd did not exercise the best of judgment in some of the things he did, such as going to Robin Island, the story of which ended up in Time magazine and other publications. Still, he was a very decent guy in many ways, and he was certainly easy to work for. The job of a DCM in Pretoria was extremely important because the DCM had to guide the ambassador, keep him out of trouble, as well as oversee the

running of an embassy.

*Q: And who was that?*

PETTERSON: When I arrived, it was Robert P. Smith, Bob Smith. The ambassador, as political appointee, didn't know the Foreign Service, didn't know how to run an embassy necessarily. He had some skills, but he depended on his DCM to run the embassy, and also, in this case, to give him guidance on the political situation and oversee to it the reporting and analyses.

We left Freetown in July of '72 for home leave. Once again, our children and we said goodbye to our friends. It seemed to us that the kids took these moves in stride. They didn't complain, they didn't weep, but years later they told us that it was, in reality, far from easy for them to leave friends behind, go to a new place, fit into the new culture, the new school, the new environment, and then after a time, go somewhere else. They really didn't like it. When they were grown up, they looked back upon it in a different light. They saw that they had had a very rich experience that kids who grew up in the same town in the United States would never have. So they looked back with some nostalgia, but it wasn't easy for them when they were little.

On our way back to Africa, after home leave, we stopped in Scotland, England, Romania, Turkey, and Egypt. In each place, except Egypt, we visited with friends. This is one of the advantages that we got from serving in Africa. As we traveled to and from, we always went through Europe, except the first time when we flew on Pan Am. Later, Pan Am ended its service to Africa, and there were no other American airlines flying there. Consequently, we had to go through Europe. And we always stopped off in some part of Europe, going or coming.

*Q: So now you're arriving, and it isn't even Cape Town-*

PETTERSON: No.

*Q: Or Johannesburg, which are the two biggest cities in South Africa. It's Pretoria?*

PETTERSON: Pretoria, yes.

*Q: Which struck me as a bit provincial.*

PETTERSON: Well, in many ways, it was, but it was the executive capital of the government of South Africa. Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State was the judicial capital, and Cape Town the legislative capital. These divisions were made when the two former Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, were joined with the British colonies of Natal and the Cape to form the Union of South Africa in 1910. Because Pretoria was the seat of the government, the embassies were located there.

We arrived there in September of…

*Q: Nineteen seventy-two?*

PETTERSON: Seventy-two. Prime Minister John Vorster, [pronounced "fôr'stur,"] and his Afrikaner party, the National party, ruled South Africa, and ruled it with an iron hand. In the three years that we were there, South Africa become increasingly isolated in the world, and movement for reform grew, even within the Afrikaner community itself. But the essential features of apartheid remained in place and in force. Laws, such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act, the Terrorism Act, the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Education Act, all of these laws regimented how and where blacks could live and work and kept them in a state of subjugation. They were by far the majority population. South Africa's population in those days was something like 30 million, of which 25 plus million were Africans. You had about a million coloreds, half a million or so Asians, and the white population was around three million, but the whites ruled the country and controlled the economy.

Living in South Africa was a major contrast to our experiences in Zanzibar, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. For one thing, the climate was temperate, not tropical. Being in South Africa was like being in a western European country, having all the material advantages that one could want - restaurants, theaters, cinemas, bookstores, shopping centers. Juxtaposed with this bright affluence was the abject living conditions of the Africans, who were prohibited from living in the white areas. They would come into the white areas and work as domestics or in various menial jobs for the most part, but then go back to townships (black townships around the bigger cities where they lived) at the end of the working day. We enjoyed the creature comforts. It would be hypocritical to say otherwise. But it was not easy living in the apartheid society because of what we saw on a daily basis, and what we knew what was happening.

*Q: I assume also, Don, that other than your international friends with other embassies to the extent that you socialized with white South Africans, they were always a little bit after you to agree with them and to tell them that the way they were living was not that bad. There's a lot of stress in this when you're trying to live with people and get along with them on the one hand, but you totally disagree with their opinions and their outlook. Were Julie and you able to find the modus vivendi?*

PETTERSON: Yes. The topic of apartheid came up in every conversation. White South Africans, especially the Afrikaners, wanted to explain to you, to convince you that system was right. They were looking for some kind of sympathy. They thought their system was right and that they could explain to you and you would accept that. That wasn't the case, however. For three straight years, we heard about apartheid and we observed its effects day in and day out. After the end of the three years, as much as we had enjoyed many aspects of our life in South Africa, we were ready to leave. We had no home leave, only local leave, during those three years. South Africa was not considered a hardship post, and in non-hardship posts home leave was granted only if the assignment was for four or more years. We traveled a lot in South Africa and also visited Lesotho and Swaziland.

*Q: I don't want to interrupt your train of thought. You're the political counselor.*

PETTERSON: Right.

*Q: You're doing a lot of talking with people and reporting back to Washington on what's going on politically in South Africa?*

PETTERSON: Yes. In the political section, we followed white politics, race relations, the manifestations of apartheid, and other internal matters, South Africa's foreign affairs, and also political developments in the trust territory of South West Africa, as Namibia was called then. We had contacts with Afrikaners, people in the government, people outside the government, opponents of the government, South Africans of English stock (whose main political home was the United party in opposition to the government), and the ultraliberal Progressive party. We had contact with blacks from various walks of life and, when we were in Cape Province, with Coloreds and Asians. We reached out, as any good embassy should do, to all segments of the population so that we could understand what was going on and report accurately, and have a solid basis for our analyses of what was going on in South Africa.

South West Africa was a fascinating place. Because the United Nations and the United States did not recognize South Africa's claim to administer this trust territory of South West Africa, Washington did not allow embassy officers to go there. However, when in 1972 there was a high-profile treason trial of several Africans in Windhoek, the capital of South West Africa, an embassy officer was sent there. After the trial was over, we made a decision to keep covering events within the territory. Only one officer was permitted to do that, and I took that portfolio (maybe a little selfishly, but I took it anyway).

*Q: Well, it's interesting. It gives you a chance to travel.*

PETTERSON: Yes. I went there several times a year, roamed around the territory, talked to people, and met with, for example, leaders of the various tribal components of South West Africa, including some who were outspoken critics of the South African government. I met with white opposition figures as well, and with government officials, journalists, and business people. I had a great time and saw a lot of the fascinating territory, including the Namib Desert (which is one of the few pure deserts of the world), the barren Skeleton Coast along the Atlantic, the salt pans of the north, and the massive sand dunes at Swakopmund. It was fascinating to be able to go there and associate with the people, and report on what was occurring.

*Q: Let me take you back just a second. You said that on your trips to Windhoek you were able to talk with people in the opposition?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Or that is to say the part of the independence people, but I gather not then, the main independence movement. But my question is, the South Africans did not object to your*

*doing that?*

PETTERSON: They didn't like it, but they were not in a position to object or to restrict my travel. They did, however, when I first started going down there, put a tail on me. Everywhere I went somebody was behind me. It was very clumsily done. One day I'd gone out to the township just outside Windhoek for a meeting with an important African. On the way back I saw that I was being tailed, and I stopped my car and got out. The car following me stopped too, and in it was sitting this guy who was intently reading a newspaper [laughter]. I went up to him and said, "What are you doing? This is so ridiculous!" I told him, "I'm going to tell your superiors about this!" So I did. I went to someone in the South African administrative authority and told him what had happened. I said that they really ought to call this whole thing off; it was silly. Well, whether they did or not, whether they removed the surveillance or not, I'm not sure, but I never saw anybody tailing me again. I took pains to be able to know whether anybody was searching my room in the hotel, and I never found any evidence of that.

As I said, living in South Africa was very comfortable. In Pretoria we had a very comfortable, large house in a section of town called Waterkloof. For the first time in our lives, we had a swimming pool, which the kids loved, of course.

*Q: Good schools for your children?*

PETTERSON: We put the kids into schools. They had to go to separate schools, because the white schools were not coeducational.

*Q: Day school?*

PETTERSON: Day school, yes. John went to a school called Witwatersrand Preparatory School and the girls went to Loreto Convent.

*Q: They all had uniforms?*

PETTERSON: They all had uniforms. We had arrived in September, and in January it was time to move to Cape Town. The children had to be taken out of school, after these very few months, and go down to Cape Town. Every January the government moved to Cape Town, where the legislature had its six-month session.

*Q: You went as well?*

PETTERSON: Embassies varied in how they covered this. For some of them, only one person would go, the ambassador in some cases, another officer in others. Other embassies would send more personnel. For our part, the ambassador, the DCM, the political section, three secretaries, and a communicator went to Cape Town every year. This meant packing up, moving, getting into our new house, and getting the kids into schools. It was a bit disruptive.

*Q: Yes, that's tough.*

PETTERSON: But I tell you, living in Cape Town, which is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, was a definite bonus. Our house and surroundings in Cape Town were even better than in Pretoria. We lived in a large old house called Tembane (pronounced Timbonnie) in Claremont, a lovely suburb of the city. It was than a half-hour by train into the city. I commuted by train every day.

The political section covered the parliamentary session and race relations in Cape Province, where most of South African's Coloreds and Asians lived. The children seemed happy in their new schools. We all enjoyed the magnificent scenery - Table Mountain and the ocean.

In June of 1973, the parliamentary session ended, and we moved back to Pretoria. This time, however, we left Susan, our eldest, in boarding school in Cape Town. She didn't want to leave her school. After the next move, we would leave all three children in Cape Town. It was just too hard on them, moving back and forth, and they liked their schools in Cape Town better than the schools in Pretoria.

*Q: The State Department was okay with that?*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes, sure. Most children, certainly the older children, did stay in Cape Town - Bob Smith's kids, for example. We had an allowance to cover this. It was hard for Julie and me because, unlike the British, we were not accustomed to sending our children off to boarding school from time they were six, seven, or eight years of age. But it turned out that the separation wasn't for six months at a stretch because they could come back to Pretoria on school holidays. We saw them every couple of months during the separation.

*Q: But that's interesting, you know. It must be one of the few situations in the world where Foreign Service people can send their children to private boarding school in the same country?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

I mentioned earlier that an important part of our work in South Africa was reaching out to the African community as well as to other communities and promoting black-white association. Julie and I gave dinner parties to which we invited whites and non-whites. This could have been awkward, but invariably our guests seemed to be fascinated rather than angered or repelled or even uncomfortable. One time the wife of an Afrikaner cabinet minister told us, as she was leaving the house after a dinner, that it was the first time that she had ever sat down for a dinner with blacks, and she thanked us for arranging the dinner.

*Q: That's interesting!*

PETTERSON: Yes. It had been standard practice for embassy officers to visit black townships. The DCM - Bob Smith - and I decided to stop getting prior permission from the government. This had been SOP, standard operating procedure. But we decided, "Look, we have a right to roam around the country as diplomats, just as South African diplomats can roam around the country in the United States. We don't need to get this permission." So we stopped doing it. The South African government may not have been happy, but they didn't interfere.

One night Julie and I took the children with us when we went to the home of an African family in a township outside Pretoria, Guguleatu. The husband was a personnel officer of a large, white-owned company. Certainly he could be considered upper middle class in many ways. Our visit gave our children a chance to see what kind of living conditions a middle class black family had to accept under apartheid. The house, which had hardly any space for a yard, was tiny and there was no running water.

*Q: Wow! I would like to ask you, you know... One of the responsibilities of the American embassy in South Africa at that time was to have as much contact as possible with blacks. Of course, there wasn't any black opposition. There were just the independence movements outside. But as political counselor, you're in charge of managing these contacts. Tell us a little bit about how you did that, and particularly whether it was easier to do it in Cape Town than it was in Pretoria.*

PETTERSON: No, it wasn't easier in Cape Town than in Pretoria, as I recall. As far as managing the contacts, there was nothing for me to do, for we had capable people in our consulates who knew what to do and how to do it. This was particularly true in Johannesburg. Soweto, just outside the city, was the most populous and most important black township. The consulate had a very good program of mixing with blacks and reaching out to them, of having cultural and social affairs to bring blacks and whites together. All three consulates and the embassy did a tremendous job in this regard.

*Q: It's just that my image is that Pretoria is a smaller town with somewhat stricter rules and customs, whereas Cape Town with the Cape colored population, race relations always sort of seemed easier in Cape Town.*

PETTERSON: They were in a sense, but recall that not long before this time, the government had forced the Cape Coloreds out of District Six, their traditional living space in Cape Town, and moved them out to the sandy, barren Cape flats, which was very hard on them. So the government wasn't any easier on non-whites there than they were in Pretoria. There was a more liberal attitude on the part of many Cape whites toward race and toward other things, and there was a lot of criticism of the government. We enjoyed going to theaters where comedians would lampoon the government. Some of this occurred in Pretoria and Johannesburg as well, but Cape Town was a bit easier. Still the basic problem of apartheid existed there, as it existed throughout the country.

One of the things I remember was a tendency on the part of political pundits and other observers of South Africa to predict that Armageddon was just around the corner. Some

people in the State Department shared this theory. We in the embassy periodically shot that down. It fell on me as the political counselor to articulate the reasons why Armageddon wasn't imminent. Which wasn't saying that apartheid would not end some day, just that we didn't believe that it would end soon and in a cataclysm of violence.

We went back to Cape Town for the next session of Parliament in January 1974. Because of the country's extreme gasoline shortage, we traveled on the Blue Train from Pretoria down to Cape Town. The Blue Train was one of the world's last luxury trains. It was a wonderful one-day trip that we were able to enjoy because there was no alternative and the Department paid our way.

*Q: How come a gas shortage?*

PETTERSON: We're talking about 1974. There was the widespread OPEC-induced shortage of gasoline that affected many countries, the U.S. included.

*Q: Okay.*

PETTERSON: Along with the overall shortage, South Africa was particularly hard hit because oil producers were blacklisting it.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: There were going to be parliamentary elections later that year, which meant that the parliament would reconvene again earlier then in January of '75, so we and the others from the embassy who went to Cape Town stayed there after the end of the parliamentary session in June. It was nice for us, for my family, for Julie and me to have the kids under our roof for most of that year.

In the elections the Progressive Party - which was the party of white liberals, whose only member of Parliament had been Helen Suzman - gained a significant number of seats. The Afrikaners' National Party retained its heavy majority, but the Progressives now had a bigger voice for speaking out against government policies. By contrast, the old-line opposition United Party lost seats, which foreshadowed its later demise.

An event of seminal importance to South Africa took place in 1974. In Portugal, the dictatorship of Antonio Salazar was overthrown, and soon afterward the Portuguese territories in Africa were decolonized. This removed the buffer states of Mozambique and Angola, which had provided a kind of protection for the white regimes in Southern Africa, and gave stimulus to black liberation movements. That year and the next, the international and domestic pressures for change in South Africa increased. It was becoming more isolated. Apartheid was a long ways from finished, but it was unraveling.

*Q: You've finished up with three years in Pretoria. What happens now?*

PETTERSON: Well, the system of bidding on assignments was still unknown in the

Foreign Service. In the spring of 1975, I waited to hear what my next assignment was going to be. One day I got a phone call from Winston Lord, whom I didn't know. He told me he wanted me to join the Policy Planning Staff.

*Q: What was he, at that time?*

PETTERSON: Winston Lord was the director of the Policy Planning Staff. I knew next to nothing about the Policy Planning Staff and its work. I told him that I was a field hand and preferred working overseas. I indicated that I wasn't much of a conceptualizer and didn't think I was the person for a job in policy planning.

Well, he disagreed with me. He said he knew about my work and he wanted me to be the African specialist on the Policy Planning Staff. Had I known how prestigious the Policy Planning Staff was, as I learned soon afterward, instead of being nonplused, I would have been very flattered by Win's call.

We left Cape Town early that summer, stopping in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar and in Europe on our way home.

*Q: But you were going back without any ongoing assignment?*

PETTERSON: Oh, no. I was assigned to the Policy Planning Staff.

*Q: You were? Okay.*

PETTERSON: Yes. Once again, I was in no position to say, "No, I won't take it." I began my job in Washington as the African specialist on the Policy Planning Staff in late July. For the second time, I replaced Bill De Pree, who had been my predecessor at Sierra Leone. Actually, in Policy Planning I replaced both Bill De Pree and Herbert Spiro, a civilian African specialist from academia.

Under Henry Kissinger, who by then was Secretary of State, the Policy Planning Staff was an exciting place to work in. He used it as a think tank, as an instrument for shaping foreign policies, and he drew on the people in Policy Planning for policy ideas and to articulate them in his speeches. The work was interesting and challenging, and after a while I enjoyed it. At first, though, I was apprehensive, not at all used to an unstructured kind of job, which it was. It was up to me to generate ideas for consideration. I remember sitting at my desk, with nothing on it and staring at the wall [laughter] for a long, long time. But I got used to the new scene, and I found it to be invigorating. Particularly enjoyable was the collegiality that Win Lord encouraged.

Winston had come from the outside; he was not a career Foreign Service officer. He was extremely bright, extremely able, and was the buffer between the very difficult Dr. Kissinger and the rest of us.

I did my first paper on the Transkei, which was one of the large "Bantustans," creations

of the South African government as separate enclaves for black South Africans. Even those Africans who worked in the white areas and lived in townships were forced to be citizens of a Bantustan, or "homeland, which the South Africans were now calling them. Within the Ford administration, some consideration was being given to doing something, I can't recall just what, that might be construed as giving some legitimacy to the Transkei. The South Africans were pushing for this. I urged Secretary Kissinger to reject any such move.

*Q: Or other Bantustans?*

PETTERSON: Correct. South Africans were actively promoting the idea that the Bantustans would become more and more autonomous - the Ciskei, the Transkei, KwaZulu, and the others. The South African government had embarked on a campaign trying to win international acceptance of the Bantustan concept. They used compliant African tribal leaders in South Africa to help sell the idea.

Kissinger either had no intention of going in that direction in any event or he agreed with my paper, for in the end, the U.S. did nothing to be of assistance to the South Africans on that score. You have to remember, Kissinger's decision was not all that cut and dried. This was during the Cold War and South Africa was regarded as an ally. The United States government did not have an antagonistic relationship with South Africa in the years of the Nixon and Ford administrations. U.S. policy toward South Africa was called "communication without acceptance." Communication without acceptance was much the same as the "constructive engagement" of the Reagan administration. Nevertheless, the administration was wise enough to know that it was not in the interest of the U.S. government to be seen as embracing the South Africans. We had to consider our relations with black African countries. Furthermore, the administration had to be sensitive to the feelings and opinions of African Americans, who would have been angered by any action that could be taken as acquiescence in an apartheid.

I made a point of keeping in close touch with the African Bureau. Kissinger let it be known that he didn't have confidence in the bureau. He looked to the Policy Planning Staff for policy ideas rather than to the bureau. This put me in a ticklish position because my home bureau was the African Bureau.

*Q: When you say that Kissinger didn't have confidence in the African Bureau, could you explain that a little bit more fully?*

PETTERSON: It's hard for me to say, for I was not at all privy to his thinking. But apparently he had concluded that the bureau was not giving him the kind of judgments and thinking that he wanted, that he needed. At any rate, I was in the middle and it was, as I said, an uncomfortable situation for me now and then. I kept in close touch with the bureau all the time, conferred with the assistant secretary, his deputies, and office directors. I attended the assistant secretary's weekly staff meeting, for example.

Writing a speech for Secretary Kissinger was an experience. He used speeches as a

method of articulating a new policy or modifying an old policy, so his speeches were extremely important. He looked to the Policy Planning Staff to produce at least the first draft containing the basic ideas for a policy speech. My first attempt at writing a speech for him came that year. He ordered a draft for the remarks he would give to a gathering of African ambassadors to the United Nations in New York. So I sat down, wrote a draft, and gave it to Winston for presentation to Kissinger. The next morning Win called me in. With him was Sam Lewis, who was the principal deputy in Policy Planning. They told me that my draft was a disaster. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Kissinger had panned the draft. It had marginal comments such as, "My 12-year-old son could do better!" or "This is pap!"

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I was taken aback. But they said I shouldn't worry about it. This was standard procedure. Kissinger always, or almost always, did not accept a first draft and would make nasty comments about it.

I had 24 hours to come up with another draft. I remember working late into the night, and it wasn't until after midnight that I completed writing the draft. Sometime during the course of the day, Win and Sam told me that Kissinger had liked the draft!

Kissinger was a very difficult man to work for, which was too bad. He had many good qualities. Here he was secretary of state, and for the first time in some years, the secretary of state had clout with the President. William Rogers had had none. The Department had welcomed Kissinger. He could have gotten so much more out of his subordinates if he had treated them halfway decently, but that wasn't his way. He seemed to delight in chewing out subordinates, and he was often incredibly scathing in his criticism.

Winston acted as a buffer between Policy Planning Staff members and Kissinger. After approving what had been written on an issue, Win present it to Kissinger, arguing, when necessary, it its favor. Win was one of three people in the Department who could stand up to the Secretary, argue with him, and not be bothered by his flak. Larry Eagleburger and Helmut Sonnenfeldt were the other two. He respected them and needed them, and he knew it.

I once attended a meeting in which he heaped scorn on an under secretary of state and an assistant secretary of state or two. I was by far the most junior person at the meeting and was sitting at the other end of the table. He yelled at them. At one point he got up, threw his pencil down on the table, and stalked out of the room. [Laughter]

He was enormously talented, as I said, but he was not beloved of his troops, and he could have been, if he had used the charm that he was known for and that he turned on for presidents and prime ministers and others. He would have gotten great respect and loyalty

and, I believe, better results from his subordinates.

In 1976, as the end of his tenure drew near, Kissinger decided to go to Africa for the first time. He told Winston that he did not want to make just a ceremonial visit. He wanted ideas for a major foreign policy speech. Many of my colleagues in the African Bureau and I had long disagreed with the Nixon-Ford policy for southern Africa - a policy that kept the United States away from involvement in the Rhodesian conflict, for example. I sketched out some ideas on changes to the policy and worked with Winston and his two deputies at that time, Nick Veliotes and Reginald Bartholomew, to figure out how-

*Q: Sam Lewis had moved on?*

PETTERSON: Sam had moved on. The idea was to figure out how to convince Kissinger to buy the idea of changing the current policy to one that would favor eventual majority rule in South Africa, independence and black majority rule in Rhodesia, and a true road to independence for Namibia. The core of the argument that we used, and which prevailed with Kissinger, was that attempts whites in southern Africa to maintain the status quo in South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia, would be to the benefit of the Soviet Union. I argued that the Soviets would…or we argued, I should say, because Nick and Reggie worked a lot with me to produce this paper. We argued that the Soviet Union would capitalize on the turmoil that would come from increased armed resistance to the white regimes. Kissinger agreed that this made sense, and it fell to me to draft a policy speech, which I did. To my surprise, and to Win's also, Kissinger was pleased with my first draft. It eventually would undergo modifications, including polishing by Kissinger's principal speechwriters, but the essence of what I wrote remained in the speech, which he delivered in Lusaka, Zambia in late April of 1976.

As I mentioned to you, the United States had viewed South Africa somewhat benignly during the Nixon and Ford presidencies. And Washington neither gave support to southern African liberation movements nor publicly endorsed majority rule for the region. Therefore, Kissinger made quite a splash when, in Lusaka, he made a ringing declaration of an unequivocal U.S. commitment to majority rule and equal rights for all the people of southern Africa. He declared U.S. support for a rapid, negotiated settlement leading to majority rule in Rhodesia. He outlined ten steps to achieve that in two or three years and he called upon South Africa to take steps to move Namibia down the road to self-determination. This was a real departure from existing U.S. policy. Kissinger's speech electrified his audience in Lusaka and won praise from a number of African leaders.

*Q: You must have been very pleased!*

PETTERSON: I was, and I got some credit for the speech among people in Washington who followed African affairs. This turned out to do me no harm when the new administration came in. When President Carter took office in 1977-

*Q: Now, just a second.*

PETTERSON: Oh, sure.

*Q: May I just ask you, did you ever have any contact with Kissinger? Did he ever say anything to you about this speech?*

PETTERSON: I had attended a meeting or two that he chaired, but had only a couple of one-on-one encounters with him. When he came back from his African trip, he ran into some flak on the Capitol Hill from conservative Republicans who felt he had been too hard on the Rhodesian government. Among other things that he said in Lusaka, he had stated the intention of the Ford Administration to call for repeal of the Byrd Amendment, which allowed the importation of chrome from Rhodesia, an exception to the embargo against Rhodesian products. His prepared statement for his hearing included, as I recall, an indication that he was backing down from that. I was unhappy with the draft and I said so to Win Lord. Win passed this on to Kissinger and, to my surprise, he summoned me to his office. He showed some new draft language for his remarks and asked me how this would sell in Africa.

I started out by saying it would have some negative repercussions in the United States. He said, "I don't want to hear from you about American politics. I want to know how the Africans will react."

So I told him that it would have a very negative effect in Africa.

He chewed on this for a moment, thanked me, and that was the end of it.

The only other time that we spoke directly was when the Policy Planning Staff gave him a farewell party when he was leaving office. All of us members were there. Some of us admired Kissinger; some of us despised him. I was sort of neutral, I guess. At any rate, he said goodbye to each of us individually. He came up to me, and said, "And what are you going to do?" I replied, "Mr. Secretary, I'm going to become a missionary in Africa." Deadpan, he said, "That would be appropriate." [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter] Well, it's too bad that he didn't have any graceful words for you after that speech, which I remember was really a surprise. We really made an impression.*

PETTERSON: I did get a fair amount of credit for it, and, as I started to say earlier, it didn't do me any harm when the Carter people came in. Tony Lake became the head of Policy Planning. This was in early 1977. He asked me to stay on, which I did. The priority that Carter gave to Africa was shown in the fact that the third foreign policy decision memorandum of the new administration was devoted to Southern Africa. I guess it was a sign of the confidence that they had in me that I was asked to draft this memorandum. The norm was that a policy paper of this kind would be a joint product with input from various parties. But I drafted the whole thing myself, and it stayed largely intact.

Tony wanted to keep me in Policy Planning, but that spring I was asked to become the director of the Office of Southern African Affairs, which was the busiest office in the African Bureau, and one of the busiest in all the State Department. The countries for which we had responsibility in AF/S were Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, South Africa, Mozambique, Rhodesia, and Namibia. South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia were all big issues, and all demanded a lot of work and a lot of time. I was fortunate to have very able desk officers, people like Jeffrey Davidow, who had worked in my political section in South Africa, and who was an enormously - [laughter] he was an enormous guy, about six foot six or so - enormously talented officer, with great personal and intellectual skills. He went on to become, eventually, assistant secretary of state for Latin America Affairs, and he is now ambassador to Mexico. My deputy was Dennis Keogh, who also was very able and who later would be killed in a terrorist bombing in Namibia.

The Carter administration took up on South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia where Kissinger had left off. But it took a more aggressive stance toward South Africa. That year, 1977, Vice President Mondale went to South Africa to talk to John Vorster. I spent some time with the Vice President, briefing him. While he was in South Africa, he was asked by a reporter whether he supported the idea of "one man, one vote." He had not gone to South Africa intending to talk about "one man, one vote" explicitly, for that would have made it impossible for him to have any kind of useful interaction with the South Africans. He had, of course, expressed the American policy of support for majority rule. "One man, one vote" was a dirty phrase to white South Africans, and it even turned off some liberals. But Mondale, faced directly with the question, answered forthrightly. "Yes, we support 'one man, one vote'." U.S. relations with South Africa remained pretty frosty throughout the years of the Carter administration, not because of the Mondale response, but because of the administration's strong position against apartheid. Aspects of that position were initially framed in AF/S, which gave me and others in the office considerable scope for working on policy issues.

The administration actively pursued and negotiated settlements for Rhodesia and Namibia. I became closely associated with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Moose. He had started out in the administration as under secretary for management, but moved over to take the African portfolio. Wayne Fredericks, who had been a deputy assistant secretary in the African bureau during the Kennedy administration and had worked in Africa for the Ford Foundation, had been offered the position. But he was hit by a car while crossing a street in London. In the hospital, he felt too incapacitated to accept the assistant secretary job. He later regretted his decision because he fully recovered.

*Q: I was a desk officer in the African Bureau several years before, when Soapy Williams was Assistant Secretary, and Wayne Fredericks was his principal Deputy-*

PETTERSON: Yes. Wayne was a very able person. Because of the immediacy and prominence of African issues, especially southern African issues, the administration wanted a replacement for Fredericks right away, and Dick Moose was chosen.

Moose and I traveled to London a number of times for talks with British Foreign

Secretary David Owen on the Rhodesia question. I also traveled a great deal with

Ambassador Donald McHenry. The United States and the other Western members of the UN Security Council, which then were West Germany, Britain, France, and Canada, joined together in an effort to negotiate with South Africa for Namibia's independence. Don McHenry, who was the deputy U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, was another extraordinarily capable person from whom I learned a lot. He was a superb negotiator. We traveled together several times to Africa, participating in talks in various eastern and southern African capitals, talking to government leaders, getting ideas, enlisting support for the efforts of the "Gang of Five" (as the Security Council negotiating team was called). Because McHenry was so able, and hard working as well, by tacit agreement of the other members of the Gang of Five (who recognized his abilities), he was our lead negotiator. It was interesting to see him in talks with John Vorster, the very gruff Afrikaner prime minister. Strangely enough, the two learned to appreciate each other. It was obvious that Vorster came to admire McHenry. And Don told me one day, "You know, I kind of like the old son of a bitch!" [Laughter]

*Q: I think we ought to interject, just for those who are not that familiar with foreign affairs, that Don McHenry was black. Meetings between Vorster and him had these racial undertones, right?*

PETTERSON: Yes, and it's again a measure of McHenry's abilities that he won the respect of, not only the prime minister, but also the foreign minister and everyone else he came in contact with, even though they didn't like what he said. He was a tough negotiator, and they respected him. I believe, and so do some others who were involved in those negotiations, that the effort of the Gang of Five would have produced an agreement for Namibian independence. But near the end of the Carter administration, the South Africans stalled, waiting to see what the outcome of the American election would be, figuring that they could get a better deal from a Republican administration. And so Namibia did not move to independence before the end of the Carter administration.

*Q: The opportunity passed?*

PETTERSON: It took several years for Chester Crocker, who became the assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Reagan years, to accomplish it. He finally won the kind of independence that the Namibians and the rest of the world were seeking for South West Africa.

In 1978, Dick Moose asked me to replace Bill Edmondson, one of the Africa Bureau's deputy assistant secretaries of state. Bill had been named ambassador to South Africa. So it was that I was elevated from AF/S to become a deputy assistant secretary. Much of my time in that job was still taken up with the southern African issues, which were so paramount in the foreign policy priorities of the Carter administration in those years. I had been a DAS (deputy assistant secretary) for only a short time when, for family reasons, it became important to Julie and me to try to go back overseas. One day while flying to London with Dick Moose, I talked to him about this. He readily agreed that

family came first, and we talked about possible overseas jobs. By that time I had been immersed in southern African affairs for six years, and I wanted a change. When Dick noted that our ambassador to Somalia would soon be ending his assignment and said that might be a possibility, I said that I would definitely be interested. When we returned to Washington, he talked to Secretary Vance, and my candidacy for the ambassadorship to Somalia was launched.

Let me say that Mr. Vance was a breath of fresh air after the prickliness of Henry Kissinger. Not only was Cyrus Vance an extremely able man, but also he was someone who treated others with decency and respect, and who listened to the views of his subordinates. He was very accessible. I was enormously pleased to get to know him and to be associated with him, to travel with him on one or two occasions. Those of us who worked for Cy Vance were totally loyal to him.

My nomination to become ambassador to Somalia did not have clear sailing. First, Senators Hayakawa of California, Garn and Hatch of Utah, and Jesse Helms of North Carolina held it up in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

*Q: Hayakawa? I mean California's your home state!*

PETTERSON: Right! [Laughter]

*Q: What's going on here?*

PETTERSON: The senators and other conservatives were displeased that the administration was not keen to issue a visa to Ian Smith, who was the white prime minister of Rhodesia and who wanted to visit the United States at that time. So the four senators put a hold on my nomination and that of two other Foreign Service officers who were waiting to get confirmed. However, before long, the administration decided to give Smith a visa, not because of this holdup on the nominations, but for other reasons. Hayakawa, Garn, and Hatch lifted their holds on all three nominations, but Jesse Helms kept his hold on mine. It seems that he and his staff had concluded that I was the architect of the Carter administration's southern African policy, which they did not like. So I went up on the Hill to meet with Helms' staff aides and try to disabuse them, and through them Helms, of that notion. During our talk, Helms' principal staffer on the committee, John Carbo, he said that I seemed like a nice guy, that he was sure I had a nice family, that I had a nice suit on, but [laughter] they didn't like the southern African policy, and I was the guy who had made that policy.

I said, "Wait a minute!"

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I said, "What about Secretary Vance? What about Andy Young, (who was then UN ambassador and who very much was involved in policy making)?" I said, "What about Don McHenry? Tony Lake? Dick Moose?"

Their response was, "Nope, you."

So I left the Hill with a hold still on my nomination, very upset. My parents were coming out from California, and Julie and I had begun to make arrangements for the move to Somalia, and there I was, stuck!

Well, fortunately for me, Vice President Mondale, with whom I had worked with a bit and who seemed to like me, and Secretary Vance came to my rescue and managed to get Helms to back off.

*Q: Did you call Mondale?*

PETTERSON: No. I went back and talked to Moose, and we talked to Secretary Vance.

*Q: Oh!*

PETTERSON: Both Mondale and Vance were angered by what Helms was doing. I don't know what they did, but they got Helms to back off! [Laughter]

*Q: So Vance talked with Mondale about your nomination?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Yes. And Jesse Helms backed off?*

PETTERSON: And I was confirmed.

*Q: And it all remains a mystery? [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: You mean how they got him to back off?

*Q: Yes, or what-*

PETTERSON: Yes, I never knew exactly what they did.

*Q: Because, I mean, Senator Jesse Helms has later on put holds on ambassadorial nominations that lasted for months and months and months.*

PETTERSON: Yes, right, and he killed some of them.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Well, anyway, I now belonged to the list of distinguished people whose nominations were held up by Jesse Helms.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: In November 1978 Julie, John and I left for Mogadishu. Because the international school there only went through the eighth grade, Susan and Julianne went to boarding schools in New England.

I presented my credentials to Somali President Mohamed Siad Barre a week after our arrival. Siad had ruled Somalia since he seized power in a military coup in 1969. He had aligned Somalia closely with the Soviet Union. Life for American diplomats in Sudan in the ensuing years was not easy, given the often hostile environment set by Siad and his government. The Soviets poured in massive military aid, and the Somali army became one of the largest and best equipped in all of Africa.

Somalia had always claimed that the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia was Somali territory. In 1977, Ethiopia had become very much weakened by internal political upheaval. Siad saw this as an opportunity and he invaded the Ogaden. The Soviets were not happy. They had been angling for closer ties with the Marxist military regime in Addis Ababa. They saw that Ethiopia was more important in Africa than Somalia. So Siad and they had a falling out, and he threw out the Soviet military advisory team and did other things to make life a bit tough for the Soviets. Their embassy staff was scaled back considerably.

Soon the Ethiopian military got the upper hand. The Soviets had, by then, been providing the Ethiopians with military equipment. The Cubans intervened militarily and actually had people on the ground helping the Ethiopian army fight the Somalis. All this turned the tide against the Somali army. It was defeated and withdrew most of its forces from the Ogaden in early 1978. Later that year, President Carter agreed in principle to forge closer ties with Somalia, if Siad Barre would get the rest of his army of the Ogaden. With the Soviets firmly ensconced in Ethiopia, the Carter administration wanted to prevent them from extending their influence further in the Horn of Africa. The administration was wary of the duplicitous Siad Barre, but the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: The United States had no economic stake in Somalia. This was, after all, a country mainly of herdsmen and whose major export was live animals – camels, goats, and sheep. It had no mineral wealth and no commercial ties of any significance with the United States. Its importance, or perceived importance, stemmed entirely from a Cold War context, the concern about Soviet designs for the Horn. In 1979, Soviet aggression in Afghanistan gave rise to fears that it would expand its military presence into the northwest Indian Ocean area. As a result, Somalia took on additional importance because of the American need for Middle Eastern oil and Somalia's position at the entrance of the Red Sea and along the two sea-lanes to the Persian Gulf.

When I got to Mogadishu, the years of Somalis' distrust of and hostility toward the United States had given way to friendly relations. However, as I have said, Washington

was wary of Siad, who had shown time and again that he was not a man to be trusted. The administration agreed to give him a modest amount of non-lethal military aid if he would withdraw all of his forces from the Ogaden. He said he would do it. Well, for almost the next three years, the leitmotif of my talks with Siad was U.S. insistence that the Somalis had to get out of the Ogaden and Siad's insistence that they had nobody there. So it was a standoff, and we did not provide him with the military assistance he wanted or, for that matter, any military assistance at all for some time.

*Q: I would suppose that from overhead photography and intelligence we had a fairly good idea of whether Siad had any assets there or not. When you pointed out to him that he had assets there, and we knew that he did, what did he say? [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Well, that is precisely it. We had intelligence from overhead imagery and from other means to know that there were Somali army personnel fighting with the Western Somali Liberation Front in the Ogaden, no question about it. So I would say, "Mr. President, you must get out of the Ogaden."

He would say, "I'm not in the Ogaden."

"We know you're in the Ogaden!"

"How do you know?"

"I can't tell you that, but we know you're in the Ogaden."

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: And so it went. He would invariably deny our allegation and ask for proof. Since proof was based on sensitive intelligence information, we never gave it to him.

*Q: He wasn't getting any aid.*

PETTERSON: He wasn't getting the aid he wanted. Siad was very accessible, and I met with him a lot. He liked to meet with ambassadors, certainly with the American ambassador. He was a night owl, so our meetings would generally take place late at night. I never quite got used to the way my car would be greeted at the gate of Siad's quarters. Armed soldiers would, as the car approached the gate to the compound where Siad worked, suddenly leap forward out of the darkness and level their weapons in our direction, yelling the Somali equivalent of "Halt!" Once, I took some American journalists to see him about midnight. I knew what was going to happen, but they didn't. When the guards pulled their usual routine, the journalists in my car literally almost hit the roof.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I mean, they *[laughter]* were really shocked. My meetings with Siad were just about always very informal. We often would sit in a gazebo during the warm nights and drink lemonade or beer and talk for hours. This was clearly designed to woo me to his side, and I took great pains not to develop a case of "clientitis," as can happen to an ambassador. And I was always candid with him. One night he asked me why Washington didn't like him.

I said, "Mr. President, do you really want to know?"

"Yes, he replied."

"Well," I said, "It's because you lie so much to us."

*Q: How long would these sessions last?*

PETTERSON: Oh, sometimes two or three hours.

*Q: Wow!*

PETTERSON: There were times when, after a conversation, I would come home at two or three o'clock in the morning. I would sit down while everything was fresh in my mind and write my cable. I'd finish it maybe at the break of day or maybe it was still dark, go out for a run, and then come back [laughter], have a shower, eat breakfast, and go to work.

*Q: [Laughter] Hwooh!*

PETTERSON: I remember one night I went out for a run. Incidentally, I had no security guards in Somalia. I wasn't a fanatic about running, not by any means, but I had begun to run a fair amount. That night, I ran from my house, through town, out to the Marine house and back again. I think the whole thing was maybe six miles. At any rate, I was chugging along and went past the army air force barracks, which is right near the international airport. It's pitch dark, I'm running by, and I hear a voice. "Good evening, Mr. Ambassador."

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: So they knew what I was doing. Maybe that was good.

*Q: It wasn't Siad driving alongside you?*

PETTERSON: No!

Siad warned that if we didn't give him help, the Ethiopians might overrun his country. He was always telling me about this or that air raid in northern Somalia. He would claim that the Ethiopians were on the verge of attacking, and admonished Washington for not

helping him. He also played the Soviet card, stating that we had to help him in the effort to withstand Soviet expansionism.

But Washington held firm to the demand that he get out of the Ogaden. Siad's untrustworthiness and his unwillingness to get his military out of the Ogaden did not, however, preclude an expansion of U.S. economic assistance and humanitarian assistance to Somalia. One of my major efforts there was to keep the proliferating U.S. presence from getting too large. We'd had enough examples of too large an American presence and how it could redound to our detriment. Iran, for example.

*Q: What did we have there? Did we have a tracking station there, or did we have a-*

PETTERSON: No, we had a-

*Q: Navy presence?*

PETTERSON: No, no. We had a growing USAID presence, with an AID staff and American contractors for the various AID projects. The embassy staff wasn't all that large, but it was expanding too. The mission had, as well, a USIS office and a CIA station. And later, after a military aid agreement had been concluded, we would have a military assistance team. But it was the AID component that was the biggest element of the U.S. mission. Somalia became for a time the largest recipient of U.S. aid in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of this was humanitarian aid because of a huge refugee problem and drought. But our economic aid was growing year by year. I tried to keep our AID mission focused on the core of our program, which was in agriculture and primary health care. But AID had a tendency to want to get into new things and to need more people to do those new things. I opposed this.

*Q: Did you have a good AID director?*

PETTERSON: He seemed to be a good AID director, I thought. He knew his business. But he and I disagreed about the scope of the AID program. That was a professional disagreement, and it wasn't serious.

Another disagreement I with him and with AID in Washington was over the formation of a Joint Administrative Operation, called a JAO. The African Bureau, certainly Dick Moose, was championing the idea of Joint Administrative Operations, which would be more cost effective, require fewer personnel, and make sense from a management standpoint. AID/Washington was dead set against it. They wanted to continue to administer their own administration, to manage their own programs. We're not talking about the AID projects. We're talking about the administration of the entire U.S. mission program, of providing administrative support – maintenance, repairs, equipment, vehicles, supplies, all the administrative needs. Having two separate administrative systems, one for AID and another for the rest of the mission, was wasteful. I took up the cudgels on this and fought the battle, which eventually was lost in Washington.

My differences with the USAID director regarding the JAO question and the growth of the AID program were not a matter of serious discord between us. The problem arose when he began openly voicing to Somalis harsh criticism of the U.S. policy of not providing any military assistance as long as the Somali military were still in the Ogaden. He sympathized with Somalis' viewpoint. Fair enough. But it was not his place to tell the Somalis that American policy was ridiculous and to make ad hominem remarks about Assistant Secretary Moose and Secretary Vance. When I learned of this, I advised him to stop. He persisted. So, after a time I had no choice, in my mind, but to have him removed from the country. If there was a set bureaucratic procedure for doing this, I did not know it. I believed that I was properly exercising my authority as ambassador. Before I informed the AID director, I let the African bureau leadership know what I intended to do. They voiced no objection. I called the AID director in, told him he had to leave, notified Washington in a cable to State and to AID, and it was done. AID/Washington was not happy. Perhaps I should have done it differently, but the situation was intolerable.

*Q: I don't know, but my experience has been that the ambassador is Mr. America abroad. He's the personal representative of the President.*

PETTERSON: That's true.

*Q: And he can send home anybody he wants.*

PETTERSON: Yes, but in this day and age of grievances and lawsuits, I believe the authority of the ambassador has been reduced. Today it might not possible for an ambassador to do what I did.

AID was furious, and they sent out an emissary, Roy Stacy, to deal with me on this. Roy was a well regarded officer who later became a deputy assistant secretary of state in the African Bureau. In the course of our conversation, referring to the AID director, Roy told me, "You know, Don, this happened to him once before in a southern African post, and he got bounced out."

I was incredulous. AID had known that and yet had made him a director again. They had done so because he was part of the AID "old boy net." Then, when he pulled the same thing again, they got on their high horse when I expelled him. Well, in any event, my decision stuck. I got a new AID director, Mike Adler, one of AID's best officers, who had been AID director in Nigeria and elsewhere. Mike was a wonderful man, and we quickly developed an excellent, cooperative working relationship.

So, 1979…impelled by the crises in Afghanistan Iran, in December the Carter administration decided to seek military access to Somali, Kenyan, and Omani ports and airfields. In Somalia, the Soviet-built airfield at Berbera, in the northern part of the country along the Red Sea, was the longest and best landing strip in the region. Washington believed it would be desirable to have access to it, and negotiations ensued.

They turned out to be protracted. We got what we wanted from the Kenyans and the Omanis relatively quickly, but for two reasons it took longer in Somalia. First, during the negotiations, it became clear again that Siad was still mucking around in the Ogaden. That held things up. Then negotiations almost broke down completely when Siad began making outlandish demands for billions of dollars of offensive American military weaponry. When the cooling of U.S. ardor for an agreement became apparent to Siad through his talks with me, he dropped his demands and accepted the U.S. proposal for a modest amount of Foreign Military Sales credits and economic support funds.

In August 1980 an agreement was signed. But then we detected that the Somalis were back in the Ogaden. The deal was off until a definitive Somali withdrawal from the Ogaden, which finally was verified at the end of the year.

*Q: This is all before Diego Garcia?*

PETTERSON: No, about the same time.

Siad would never get the amount or the kind of military aid that he wanted from us.

On the other hand, we never got what we were hoping for. We tried to talk him into reforming Somalia's state-run economy, which featured large, corrupt, inefficient state corporations. I tried to convince Siad to move toward a more market-oriented economy. But he was married to the old ideas, and he didn't do it, even though many of his advisors were urging him to do so. Those who urged too much found themselves in trouble, and some left the country. I was naive to think that we could convince Siad to do good things for the economic health of Somalia. I was even more naive to think that he would begin to open his country to a more democratic system. I thought we could convince him to do the right thing, but he remained a dictator and persisted in squelching the rise of democratic freedoms.

In the cold war ethos of those days, however, those kinds of sins did not override what Washington regarded as the need for an anti-Soviet friend. The relationship was never that close, never what Siad wanted, and we never achieved what we wanted, but we had reasonably good relationship for some years. The bloom began to be off the rose in U.S.-Somali relations by the time I left, as the initial enthusiasm on both sides had begun to pall.

The fighting in the Ogaden and a severe drought in 1979 and 1980 produced a massive refugee population, as tens of thousands of people flocked into camps in northern Somalia. For a time, Somalia had the largest refugee population in the world. The U.S. humanitarian aid program grew, and we were the largest single donor to the substantial international aid effort. In 1981 the problem was made even worse by massive flooding. Rains broke the drought but were so heavy that they swelled the Shabeellee River to the point that thousands of people were isolated and rendered homeless by the flooding.

I spent a lot of my time on the AID problem and traveled to the refugee areas on a

number of occasions. A major difficulty arose when Somali officials tried to dictate to the donors how the food aid would be delivered. If we had done what they wanted, a lot of the food and other humanitarian supplies would have been diverted. We wanted a system that would both relieve the growing congestion at the port and expedite the delivery of food. We also wanted monitors in place at the port, along the distribution route, and at the refugee camps. The Somalis fought against this. Phil Johnston, my friend from Sierra Leone who was now the executive director of CARE USA, came to Mogadishu to participate in talks. At one point, with the talks going nowhere, he was on the verge of leaving the country without an agreement. But we finally got the Somalis to agree that CARE would be the NGO that would provide the expertise needed both for the port operations and for delivery of the food supplies up-country. We also won the battle for sufficient monitoring. We regarded this as a major accomplishment. The new system wasn't perfect in its implementation, but it went a long way to improve the situation a great deal.

In 1981, President Reagan telephoned me and asked me to stay on as ambassador.

*Q: That's nice!*

PETTERSON: Yes, it was nice touch. Of course, I agreed, and Julie and I ended up staying there for a total of four years.

*Q: Don't say "of course" so fast because, I mean, Mogadishu is really a tough post, and you'd been there for three years! Average temperature 110!*

PETTERSON: Yes, it was tough, but we liked it. You know, we had lived in Africa most of our married life.

*Q: Long time, yes.*

PETTERSON: Three of our children were born there!

*Q: You were used to warm weather. I understand it's really very hot in Somalia.*

PETTERSON: Very hot, but not so bad along the coast. Mogadishu had coastal breezes that cooled the temperature. Sometimes the winds were a problem. Mogadishu is built on sand, and when the winds were strong, the sand was blown everywhere. But, again, we liked our life in Somalia.

*Q: What did you do for fun out there? Are you a golfer or a tennis player?*

PETTERSON: Tennis. I played tennis and I ran. In Mogadishu I ran for the first time with a group called the Hash House Harriers, which is internationally known. There are Hash groups in places as disparate as Somalia and Washington D.C. Hashing is less about serious running than it is about having a good time. A trail is laid, you run the trail, you're given misleading signals, and you circle back until you find the right trail again. In

this way, the slowest runners or those who choose to walk will catch up with the people who are running hard. The idea is for everyone to finish the course at about the same time. When you finish this nonsense, you have some food, drink beer if you're in a country where beer is available, and sing silly songs. It was good harmless fun and a welcome diversion.

*Q: [Laughter] Yes.*

PETTERSON: Because Mogadishu lacked the amenities and diversions of a prosperous city, entertaining at home and being entertained by friends was the primary social outlet for the diplomats there. Our Western community, as we styled it, included ourselves, the British, French, Yugoslavs, and the [laughter] Chinese. By then, as you know, our relationship with China had changed enormously. My colleagues and I and our wives loved going to the Chinese because they served great Chinese food!

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: There were no restaurants that we could go to in town.

*Q: My image of Somalia is of a place sort of where opportunities for travel are not too good and opportunities for cultural diversion are not too good-*

PETTERSON: That's true. You didn't travel for fun in Somalia. There were no accommodations to speak of, or they were very rudimentary. The roads were bad. The weather was bad. But my work dictated that I travel a lot, and I did by car and sometimes by air. It was never a pleasure.

But let me say again that we enjoyed being in Somalia. We had our friends and we had such things as tennis, the Hash, taking the children to the beach - to a beach that was safe. We couldn't go to the Lido beach in Mogadishu, right by our house, because the sharks posed an extreme danger. People were killed by sharks along Lido beach several times while we were there.

Occasionally we would go to Nairobi, where we would stay with our friends Bill and Ann Harrop. Bill was ambassador to Kenya at the time. Julie and I-

Oh, I didn't mention that in July 1979, Julie gave birth to our fourth child, who was-

*Q: In Somalia?*

PETTERSON: Well, no. She wanted to have the baby in Mogadishu, but her doctor there said, "Don't do it, because if you have any problems, there are no facilities here." Which was true. The hospital was in deplorable shape. So she went to Nairobi and had our fourth child, Brian, there.

*Q: Wow!*

PETTERSON: And then they came back, and Brian began his life in Somalia. He was the apple of everybody's eye, this little boy.

*Q: He was a little younger than your three others, also.*

PETTERSON: He was 14 years younger than the youngest of my others, 14 years younger than John.

Julie was teaching in the American school, teaching kindergarten. She would take Brian in a basket or in a carry-cot to school and do her teaching, which she loved.

By the end of 1982 it was time to move on.

*Q: Let me interrupt you to ask you one quick question just before we go on.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: My impression is that the Somalis are a charming people, very attractive, very good looking, and probably lots of fun to get to know. But, you know, 10 years after you left, the United States is going in there because there's a really chaotic situation. Why is it that these people are so bad at governing themselves?*

PETTERSON: Let me explain why Somalia fell apart. First of all, there is a tribal problem in Somalia. They don't call the tribes "tribes." They call them "clans," but it's the same thing. Somalis have a common ancestry, speak the same language, and have the same culture. But they were divided into clans, just as the Scots were centuries ago, and fought each other for water rights, for example. When Siad came to power, he played the clans off against each other to keep them divided and help maintain himself in power. By exacerbating clan rivalries, raising discontent by his autocratic ways, mishandling the economy, giving no outlet for political expression, and holding on to power long after he should have left, Siad laid the foundation for the chaos that came later. When he was finally ousted, there ensued a battle for supremacy among these various groups, all well armed and headed by men whose major aim was to seize power. All this in a country where drought could strike at any time and cause more disaster for the people. The fighting went on and on, as none of the warlords was able to gain absolute ascendancy.

*Q: Okay.*

PETTERSON: When the drought of the early 1990s came, international aid poured in, but the fighting continue to rage. Eventually, as you know, the United States intervened militarily, initially to help keep people alive, to stop the appalling starvation.

I had been told that I had done a good job in Somalia, and when we left there, I was hoping to get another ambassadorship. But when I got back to Washington, I found that I really no such prospect. With the change of administration and consequent changes in the

higher levels of the State Department, I was an unknown quantity. To become an ambassador you need the blessing of the people who comprise the "D Committee," which is the deputy secretary's committee that selects candidates for ambassadorships. If you've been overseas, as I had been, or for any other reason are not personally known to any of the people who are on the D Committee, and if you don't have the strong backing of your home bureau, your prospects are not good. And I also found that the leading lights in Personnel at that time couldn't have cared less about making me an ambassador again. They had many other people, as well as their own careers, to worry about. No one had even gone to the trouble to work on an alternative assignment for me. I was in limbo.

*Q: And you didn't know the Reagan nominees to the D Committee?*

PETTERSON: No, I didn't know the secretary of state, who was not on the D Committee, but who approved their recommendations or turned them down. I didn't know the deputy secretary, the under secretary for management, the under secretary for political affairs, or any other member of the committee. Nor was I close to the assistant secretary for African affairs. So, again, when I got back to Washington, I found there was nothing for me. The director of personnel told me, "Well, if you can arrange something with a university, why don't you do that!"

So, I did. I called a friend, Michael Lochie, a professor at UCLA who was head of the African studies program there. He said he would be delighted if I could come out there. The Department paid my family's and my way to California and paid my salary while I was there. I was a "visiting distinguished scholar" at UCLA. I told people, "Well, at least the first adjective is correct."

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: It turned out to be a good year. I lectured a bit, but not much. There was no place for me in the political science department for lecturing that year. I did a lot of research at UCLA's wonderful library.

*Q: On what?*

PETTERSON: On African affairs. I wrote an article, which was published by an international journal, on U.S. policy toward Ethiopia during the change from Haile Selassie to Mengistu. I wrote a chapter for a book, African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy. So I did research, wrote, gave a few lectures, and counseled students from time to time.

*Q: Were you working mostly, Don, with undergraduates or with graduate students?*

PETTERSON: Both, but not a lot of students. It didn't take a lot of my time.

*Q: You didn't have large lecture courses?*

PETTERSON: No. I lectured to a class that was studying African agriculture and food scarcity problems. I drew on my experiences for that lecture and, in part, for two lectures I gave to another class, which was looking at Africa in general. But I spent the bulk of my time at UCLA doing research and writing.

*Q: Okay.*

PETTERSON: I also trained for a marathon and ran in the 1983 San Francisco marathon, which was-

*Q: How old are you at this point?*

PETTERSON: I was 52.

*Q: 52? And you're running marathons?*

PETTERSON: Yes. Why not? [Laughter]

*Q: Good for you!*

PETTERSON: It was something that's not everybody's cup of tea, but it was one of those things that, once you do it, gives you a feeling of accomplishment.

*Q: True.*

PETTERSON: It turned out to be a lot of fun because I ran with my cousin, her husband, and my daughter Julianne. I didn't run with them precisely, because I was in better shape than they were and ran ahead of them.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Julie, Brian, and I had arrived at UCLA in March 1983. Part of the enjoyment of being there was that Julianne and Susan both spent a good amount of time with us. Our son John was in school in Texas. When he finished the eighth grade while we were in Somalia, John had to go to boarding school. He chose the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen, Texas, and he was now finishing his junior year there. We were to leave UCLA in June 1984. I had a call from Bill De Pree, who asked me to be his deputy in State's Office of Management Operations, which was sort of a management think tank for the Under Secretary of Management, Ambassador Ron Spiers, a career FSO. I held that job until 1986.

By that time, I had become a known commodity again and had backing for an ambassadorship by Ron Spiers, the African Bureau, and the undersecretary for political affairs, Mike Armacost. I became the State Department's candidate for an opening in Tanzania. Ron Spiers, as under secretary for management, went to the White House to negotiate with the White House Personnel Office for filling upcoming ambassadorial

vacancies. The White House had a candidate for Tanzania, a state Senator from Ohio, but evidently he didn't have much clout because Ron Spiers was able to prevail. Perhaps White House bought the argument that I had served in Tanzania before, I spoke Swahili, I had been an ambassador, and I had extensive service in Africa.

*Q: I would hope so!*

PETTERSON: [Laughter] Well, you never know. Luckily for me, he didn't have high-powered political backing.

*Q: The state Senator from Ohio?*

PETTERSON: Yes. I presented my credentials to the president of Tanzania, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, in December 1986. Julius Nyerere, who had been the president of that country for many years, had stepped down voluntarily when his term of office was over, and Mwinyi had been elected.

*Q: Am I mistaken, or is Ali Hassan Mwinyi Zanzibari?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Did he remember you? Did you remember him?* [Laughter]

PETTERSON: Yes. I didn't know him well in Zanzibar, but he had been a high-level civil servant in the ministry of education. I knew him, although not as well as I knew some other Zanzibaris. When I-

*Q: But the fact that you had lived and worked in Zanzibar must have counted for a good bit with him.*

PETTERSON: I suppose it did. And it didn't hurt that I was the first American ambassador who spoke Swahili.

When I said, "Mwinyi was elected," it was an in open, honest election. But there was only one party. Tanzania was still living the fiction that a one-party state could be democratic. This is what Nyerere believed, but he was wrong. Not only was it undemocratic, it led to a great deal of corruption, as the party ossified over the years. Nyerere's economic vision for Tanzania included a heavy dose of state controls, which inevitably had led to an economic decline. The country was an economic basket case by the time I got there. It was beginning to climb out of the deep pit it had fallen into by late 1986, but it had a long way to go.

That year the United States and some other Western countries, the World Bank, and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) were urging the Tanzanians to change from the state run economy to a free-market oriented system. A lot of work that I did in Tanzania centered on assisting the government to make that change. We also helped facilitate

American investment. In addition, I spent considerable time on our economic and humanitarian AID programs. One project involved providing locomotives, made by General Motors, to help in the rehabilitation of the TanZam Railroad.

*Q: Which had been built by the Chinese.*

PETTERSON: Yes. This was somewhat ironic because in the 1960s the United States had refused to build the railroad and then strongly opposed the Tanzanian decision to accept the Chinese offer to do the job. So there I was meeting with the Chinese and the Tanzanians, toasting each other, and hoping to get that railroad back on track. Pardon the pun.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Julie, Brian, and I traveled up-country whenever we could. Our daughter Susan had finished college while we were in Tanzania, and she came out and lived with us for our last year there. Tanzania's game areas were some of the most spectacular in the world. We visited as many of them as we could in the three years we were there. It was sad to see how much they had deteriorated - that is, the infrastructure, the roads leading to them, the lodges at them, and so forth. But they still were well worth seeing, and we didn't mind the sometimes-rudimentary accommodations.

*Q: Some of the resort lodges were terrific.*

PETTERSON: They had been, but they had fallen into disrepair. You had to bring your own light bulbs, your own toilet paper.

*Q: Really? How come?*

PETTERSON: The country was economically ruined and was strapped for foreign exchange. Imported items, and that meant things like light bulbs, were hard to find and very expensive. The lodges had been taken over by the Tanzanian government, which devoted next to no resources to their upkeep. In their current rundown condition, the lodges did not attract tourists, and tourism had gone way down in Tanzania.

*Q: Really?*

PETTERSON: Yes. People preferred to go to Kenya, where there were good lodges and no shortage of amenities, as there was in Tanzania.

*Q: So this is a big change from when you were in Zanzibar?*

PETTERSON: Yes. We also traveled for other reasons, besides going to the game areas. For example, the first trip that Julie, Brian, and I made was to Bukoba. We drove to Mwanza and took a night steamer across Lake Victoria to Bukoba, which was ravaged by AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) even then. It got much worse later on.

We went there to see the coffee production, to meet with American citizens, missionaries who lived in the area. We did this sort of travel to other parts of Tanzania too, during our tour. Julie and I became good friends of Jane Goodall, who lived near us in Dar es Salaam.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Julie organized some events to raise money for Jane's work. One highlight of our time in Tanzania was a trip to visit Jane at Gombe Stream on Lake Tanganyika, the site where he did her work with the chimpanzees. We stayed in tents in her camp on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, a place of striking beauty. On the second day we were there, Julie, Brian, and I had the great good fortune to be with Jane when we encountered in a forest clearing some of the chimps she had been working with for years. It was incredible to watch them interact with her, a wonderful experience for the three of us.

Julie and I traveled to Zanzibar as often as we could. It was and, and remains, her favorite place in the world.

*Q: Really? [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Yes. [Laughter] It was our first assignment in Africa, two of our children were born while we were there, and we had an adventure and many good times.

It wasn't just the memories. It was the Zanzibaris themselves. It was the setting. Everything about Zanzibar made it her favorite place.

With the end of my tour of duty, at the end of 1989, once again I found myself with no onward assignment.

*Q: Before you quite get to there, I'd like to ask you, you were in Tanzania for three years when the country had been going down quite badly economically.*

PETTERSON: Yes, it had reached its lowest point just before we got there.

*Q: The "Ujamaa" (program of rural development that involved the creation of cooperative farm villages) movement was over.*

PETTERSON: Yes. It had failed.

*Q: What were you and the United States government doing to try to work with Tanzania during the time you were there?*

PETTERSON: We, as you would expect, endeavored to get the Tanzanians to agree with us on international issues. I remember talking with Foreign Minister Ben Mkapa a lot about southern Africa. At that time the new prime minister of South Africa was F. W. de

Klerk. I knew him from my South African days, and I knew that he was, in South African terms, a "verligte" or moderate Afrikaner, instead of a "verkramte," a conservative hard-liner on apartheid. I believed he was sincere in what he was doing to eliminate apartheid. Mkapa was skeptical, but I was right, as history has shown. But you have to remember that the Tanzanians were distinctly suspicious of South Africa, which, after all, had mounted intelligence operations within Tanzania. They had assassinated…

*Q: Eduardo Mondlane.*

PETTERSON: …Eduardo Mondlane in Dar es Salaam. So the Tanzanians had no reason to trust the white South Africans. But change was taking place in South Africa, and De Klerk was playing a very important role in that.

*Q: Okay. So now you've been lucky enough to be ambassador twice, and you're still in the game here sir!*

PETTERSON: Yes, and I was still learning the business.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I think it's a mistake to train Foreign Service officers, raise them to leadership positions, make them ambassadors, get them into policy formulation, and then not continue to move them up, or at least sideways, instead of sidelining them, which happens so often.

At the end of my tour of my duty in 1989, I once again found that I had no onward assignment. Once again, I had no friends in high places. When I got back to Washington and surveyed the dismal dregs of jobs that were available then, I decided that I might as well retire. I took the Department's retirement course, which turned out to be very good. Those who gave the course did a fine job of teaching Foreign Service personnel who were retiring how to find a job. The course was highly lauded by private sector industry representatives who knew about it. In addition, the Department gave those who did retire assistance in finding jobs by letting them use facilities to send their resumes out, do research on jobs, and so forth. It was very beneficial program.

*Q: Yes, I took that course myself in 1980. It was being conducted by a retired Foreign Service officer who had been in Personnel, Art somebody. It helped me a great deal.*

PETTERSON: While I was in the course, the new assistant secretary of the African Bureau, Hank Cohen, asked me to become a DAS temporarily, until a political appointee could be brought on board. I agreed. While I in that job, Liberia exploded and an interagency task force was formed to handle such problems as the evacuation of hundreds of American citizens. The American military went to Liberia to protect our embassy and to help out in the evacuation. In July of that year, 1990, the head of the task force, deputy assistant secretary Jim Bishop, left to become ambassador to Somalia, and I took his place. With crisis following crisis in Liberia that summer, I could spend little time at

home. The task force job turned out to be long hours, seven days a week, but it was certainly fascinating.

In October I was sent to West Africa to try to arrange for a cease-fire in Liberia. I traveled to Guinea, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Liberia. I met with heads of state, trying to get their support for a cease-fire. I went into northern Liberia where I met with Charles Taylor, who was the leader of the rebel forces, and turned out to be a thoroughly, disagreeable person, as I would find again eight years later.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Taylor and the other warlords who had emerged during the long civil war in Liberia were interested only in power and not in the slightest in the well being of the people. They engaged in very brutal acts of war, killed many, many civilians. The cease-fire did not occur, even though I got the backing of President Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, who called a meeting of the regional heads of states, which, in the event, didn't take place.

When I returned to Washington, Hank Cohen asked me if I would go to Zimbabwe. The American ambassador in Harare, a political appointee, had had to leave there abruptly. Because of the nature of his personal problem…

*Q: [Laughter] We'll have to go into this a little bit more.*

PETTERSON: I really can't-

*Q: Okay. Wasn't Carlos Baker, was it?*

PETTERSON: No. This man's name was, of all things, Rhodes. He was an African-American lawyer from California who, because of the nature of his personal difficulty, was recalled by the State Department and had to go back to private life.

The embassy had gotten used to this flamboyant character, and suddenly he left, and nobody was told why, which left some perplexed and others irate. The DCM, who took over, did not have good leadership qualities. Embassy morale was very low. The president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, believed that the ambassador had been removed because he was too well disposed toward the Zimbabwean government. I was asked to go to Harare to restore morale in the embassy and do what I could to repair the relationship with Mugabe. The assignment was for an unspecified time but, I was told, could be as long as a year, until the Foreign Service officer who was in the pipeline to become ambassador could complete the nomination and confirmation process and get out there.

*Q: Did Julie go with you?*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes. She and Brian went with me.

*Q: Okay. So this is Zimbabwe in 1990-*

PETTERSON: November 1990, and we stayed there until the late summer of '91.

*Q: Ninety-one. Well, there's two aspects to this. One is the internal aspect of getting the embassy back on an even keel, and the other one is establishing a more correct relationship with Mugabe?*

PETTERSON: Yes. It turned out to be easy to achieve both objectives. First, all that the embassy needed was an experienced officer to give them leadership, which I was able to do. I made it a point to meet everyone individually. And I brought them together as a group to tell them as much as I could, without revealing the exact circumstances, about why the ambassador had left. This seemed to work. I formed a close association with the AID director and worked very cooperatively with him on the large AID program, doing what I could to avoid the kind of "we, they" situation that sometimes exists between AID missions and the embassy. I just did the things that anybody with common sense would do. I believed it important to show people that you appreciate what they're doing and that you care about their welfare. Anyway, morale, by all accounts I was told, improved, and-

*Q: Don, it's kind of a funny situation because you don't think of Zimbabwe as a place for a political appointee, particularly. In the second place, normally when you send out a political appointee to a fairly small, remote country, you usually also have there a DCM who really is a strong officer.*

PETTERSON: I can't account for what happened. Incidentally, Zimbabwe was a plum assignment. Most FSO Africanists would give their right arm to be ambassador to Zimbabwe. Or at least they would have in the days before the current mess got so bad. Harare has one of the most delightful climates in the world. It is a modern city with good infrastructure and all the things that make up good city life. It was an African post that was attractive to political appointees, and in 1991, three of the four American ambassadors to Zimbabwe since it became independent in 1980 had been political appointees.

I met with Mugabe and gave him a letter from President Bush, explained as much as I could about what had happened, and assured him that the ambassador's departure had no political motivation.

*Q: Or U.S. relations with Zimbabwe?*

PETTERSON: Yes, and he accepted that. Coincidentally, at about this time, the Gulf crisis was in full flower and the war was soon to start. Mugabe was one Africa leader who agreed with us enthusiastically, without reservation, that something had to be done to stop Saddam Hussein. In a meeting I had with Mugabe, he commented to me that Saddam was, in his view, insane.

So, things were going well, and it was a pleasant assignment. Before the nine months or

so that we were in Zimbabwe ended, I had a phone call for deputy assistant secretary Jeff Davidow of the African Bureau. He asked me if I would like to have my name placed on the list of candidates for ambassador to Sudan.

*Q: Okay, before we get to that-*

PETTERSON: Yes?

*Q: I'd like to ask you a question. Zimbabwe now, what, 10 years later, is going through some extremely difficult times. Mugabe, for reasons that you're going to explain to us, has allowed this movement of, sort of, African veterans taking over the white farms. There's a great deal of tension and strain.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: How did all that happen? Is this Mugabe clinging to power?*

PETTERSON: Yes. There was a lot of hope for Zimbabwe. Many whites had stayed on. They were a distinct minority in the country, but they had a lot of economic power, and some of them were in the political system. Zimbabwe's multiraciality was far from perfect, but in many ways it was working. There were, though, underlying tensions. One problem was that there was rapidly growing African population, comprised mainly of subsistence farmers, and not enough good land to go around. The best farms in the country were in the hands of whites, who had created them and made them into the most productive farms perhaps in all of Africa, certainly in most of Africa. With growing pressures for land redistribution, while I was there the some people in the parliament and in the government began agitating for expropriating whites' farms, taking them away without providing adequate, if any, compensation. At that time, though, Mugabe didn't want to move too fast because he knew that this would have a devastating effect on the economy. So the call for seizing the lands was not heeded at that time, but the beginning of a growing movement for that was definitely underway. Mugabe now has given in to the extremists of this effort, has allowed the veterans, so-called, to seize farms, has allowed white farmers to be murdered, and not punished the murderers. Why? He wants to stay in power. His grip on power has been weakened by corruption in the government, by his dictatorial ways, by the growing poverty arising in part from his disastrous economic policies, and by the desire of many Zimbabweans for a true democracy and consequent growth of a strong political opposition to him. He's using demagogic tactics land strong-arm measures to stay in power, pure and simple. It's a shame.

*Q: In effect, he's, to some extent, damaging the economy of his own country in order to preserve his personal position?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Okay, thank you.*

*So now we're at the end of 1991?*

PETTERSON: Yes. I had this offer to go to Sudan. Julie and I talked it over. Khartoum was not a place that one would call an ideal assignment. I remember I went to Khartoum on a trip in 1977 with Andy Young. After a day or so there, I said, to myself, "This is one place I would not like to serve in!"

*Q: It's also a place where a previous American ambassador had been assassinated!*

PETTERSON: In 1973 Cleo Noel, our ambassador, and George Curtis Moore, the DCM, and Guy Eid, a Belgian diplomat, were assassinated. They were seized by terrorists at a party given by the Saudi ambassador, and, the next day, they were murdered. In 1985 one of the embassy's American employees was shot by a terrorist and severely wounded. Also in the '80s, a British couple and their children were killed in a terrorist bombing in a Khartoum hotel where foreigners congregated.

Living conditions in Khartoum were far from ideal. It was a hot, dusty place and lacked many amenities. But this didn't really bother us because we'd lived in tough places before.

*Q: You were saying that Julie and you-*

PETTERSON: We weighed the pros and cons of the assignment. We weren't ready to leave the Service, and we were hoping to go back to Africa. Sudan had a fascinating history. Khartoum, situated at the confluence of the Blue and White Nile rivers, was rich in history and culturally extremely interesting. So we decided we wanted to go, but we wouldn't accept the offer unless there was a good school for our son Brian, who by this time was twelve years old. Well, we learned that there was an international school there, called the American School, although there weren't many American kids attending it. I called Jeff and said, "Sure, put my name in the hopper." Strangely enough, there were no White House candidates [laughter] for the job.

*Q: Not surprised.*

PETTERSON: My name went forward, and the slow process of getting nominated and confirmed began. We were back in Washington from Zimbabwe by the fall of 1991. I took an FSI area studies course on the Middle East, had meetings in the Department on Sudan, delved into Sudan's history and culture, and began to study Arabic. I had a reasonably good aptitude for languages and had learned to speak Swahili and Spanish with some fluency. But Arabic is a very difficult language to learn, and the several months that I was able to study it were not nearly enough to give me a good working knowledge of it. But at least I gained some familiarity with Arabic, which was somewhat useful to me when I got to Khartoum.

*Q: This is while you're in the nomination process?*

PETTERSON: Yes, I'm waiting. The wait came to an end in the summer of 1992. After I was sworn in, Julie, Brian and I flew to Khartoum. This was not a happy land we were coming to. The country was riven by a civil war that had started in 1956, ended in 1972, resumed in 1983, and was still being waged. In the nineteen years since 1983, almost two million people had died as a result of the conflict.

*Q: Before you get into talking about U.S.-Sudanese relations, as opposed to the embassies in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, what was the American embassy in Khartoum like? How big? What kinds of things going on? What were your marching orders from Washington?*

PETTERSON: Before I get into that, let me give some more background on the situation in Sudan. Since becoming independent, Sudan had fluctuated between democratically elected governments and dictatorships. The military seized power in 1958, civilian government was restored in 1965, a military dictatorship under General Gaafar al-Nimeiri was in control from 1969 until 1985. In 1986, after democratic elections, a new civilian government took office. It was overthrown in 1989. Political instability arose from the fact that Sudan's largest political parties were religiously based, and none was able to win a majority of votes, so coalition governments were formed. The coalitions spent much of their energy trying to survive politically and were unable to deal effectively with Sudan's major national economic and social problems. Added to this weakness of the political system, the war in southern Sudan was a constant drain on the resources of the country and a factor of political disunity.

All the governments of Sudan, military as well as civilian, had had an Islamic flavor. From the outset of independence, the two largest political parties advocated a central role for Islam in Sudan's governing process. They favored eventual establishment of an Islamic republic with the *sharia*, or Islamic law, as the basis of legislation. But it took a military dictator, Nimeiri, to actually impose the *sharia* as state law, as he did in September 1983. Later, when heading the coalition government that began ruling in 1986, Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi did not believe that he had an option to overturn the *sharia* laws. However, Sadiq promised to introduce new, less stringent, Islamic laws or revise them in a manner to protect Sudan's non-Muslim minority. His government was overthrown before any changes were instituted.

The National Islamic Front, an Islamist political party, was formed in 1985. It was headed by Sadiq al-Mahdi's brother-in-law and political opponent, Hassan al-Turabi, an Islamic scholar and consummate politician. Turabi and his NIF opposed the negotiating path that the Sadiq government was finally taking to end the war. Working together, the NIF and Islamist military officers led by Brigadier General Omar al-Bashir overthrew the government in June 1989. Since then, the Islamists have done everything necessary to remain in power.

The Bashir government wasted no time in moving against possible opponents. Hundreds of people were detained and many were tortured. In early 1990 twenty-eight army officers were summarily executed. A purge of the civil service, military, police, and

judiciary was carried out. Over the years, the Bashir government systematically did away with democratic institutions and civil rights.

As prescribed by U.S. law, in 1989 Washington suspended all but humanitarian aid to Sudan because a democratically elected government had been forcibly overthrown. The U.S. condemned the summary execution of the military officers. It deplored the detentions of hundreds of people and other gross violations of human rights. Sudan's harboring of international terrorists was another bone of contention. . Sudan had become a haven for Islamic terrorist organizations. In 1991, the United States warned the Sudanese that there would be consequences if they did not stop abetting terrorism. The Sudanese said our accusations were baseless. To add to the problem in the relationship, Sudan had supported Iraq during the Gulf War.

In 1992, when I arrived, the continued detention of political prisoners and their mistreatment, including torture, and other gross violations of human right remained as obstacles to any improvement in U.S.-Sudanese relations. The prosecution of the war in southern Sudan and the excessive use of force against civilians in the course of that war were another serious problem. So too was the Sudanese government's interference with the delivery of humanitarian aid to some places in southern Sudan. Another issue that accounted for the differences that the United States had with Sudan was the Sudanese government's treatment of tens of thousands of southern Sudanese who had come from the south to Khartoum and were living in the city. They were forcibly removed to outlying areas that were barren and lacking basic facilities. There was no water, inadequate shelter, and so forth. These people became totally dependent on international assistance to stay alive.

So we had a number of quarrels about the Sudanese.

When people found out I was going to be ambassador to Sudan, they didn't know whether to congratulate me [laughter] or to console me.

The Sudanese government regarded my arrival in Sudan in the summer of 1992 as an opening for improved relations. In the months and years ahead I would find that the Bashir government tended to misread certain events – like my arrival, or a visit by an official from Washington, or the election of a new U.S. president – to misread these as signs that relations between Sudan and the United States were on the verge of an upswing. On such occasions, I made it a point to caution Bashir, Turabi and others that although Washington did want better relations with Sudan, unless Sudan began to take steps to meet U.S. concerns, relations would not improve.

When I presented my credentials to Bashir, after an exchange of formal remarks, we sat down and had a frank talk. In it, I told him that relations were poor and would not get any better unless his government improved its human rights record, eased restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid, and stopped harboring terrorists. Bashir pretty much dismissed those concerns as baseless but indicated that he believed relations could be improved.

The chief of protocol was ecstatic afterwards, saying to me that Bashir had not before given so much time to talk to a new ambassador at a credentials presentation ceremony. I told Washington that this was well and good but that the talk with Bashir had broken no new ground. I said it indicated that the Sudanese government did not understand the depth of our differences and that they were not prepared to do anything to meet our concerns.

I made my rounds, meeting with Sudanese leaders and others, spreading the gospel, so to speak, of what was needed if relations were to improve. I said that Sudan had to stop providing refuge and support to terrorists, it had to move toward a restoration of democracy, it had to improve its abysmal human rights record, it had to stop impeding the flow of humanitarian aid to those who needed it, and it had to make a good faith effort to end the war. Despite a real desire on the part of at least some of the government's leaders for closer ties with Washington, they were not willing to admit to any faults, much less change their policies and practices. To do so, they must have believed, would be to jeopardize their hold on political power.

Still, at that time perhaps we could have made some progress in bettering relations had there not been an incident that made things even worse.

Shortly before I arrived in Sudan, Sudanese security forces in Juba, a large city in the far south of the country, entered the USAID compound there and detained the thirteen Africans who were working there. AID had ended its operations in the South, but it had kept the compound open under the care of these thirteen employees to symbolize to the southern Sudanese that we cared about them and to indicate that we hoped to come back. At least that seemed to be the rational. I never saw it in writing.

*Q: Was it doing anything?*

PETTERSON: No.

*Q: It wasn't distributing food or anything?*

PETTERSON: No. The employees were simply acting as caretakers. The regular radio transmissions from the Juba compound to Khartoum had stopped. Our AID director, Carol Becker, told me that she was deeply concerned. I took the matter up with, first, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking them to look into it. Nothing came of this. I went to see Nafi Ali Nafi. Nafi, who had a Ph.D. in botany from the University of California at Riverside, was a top official in the government's security apparatus and a member of the Bashir-Turabi inner circle. He said that Andrew Tombe, the senior employee at the USAID compound, had been conspiring with the rebels and was going to be tried for treason. Worried about that, I went to other officials. I talked to a man named Ghazi Salaheddine Atabani, who was a junior minister and very influential. A few days after we met, Ghazi told me that the employees were unharmed. Actually, as I would find out later, Andrew Tombe and three others were already dead, having been executed. We

didn't know this.

*Q: Did Ghazi know it?*

PETTERSON: I don't know. After I left had Ghazi's office, I wrote a letter to the president saying I was very concerned that about Tombe and asking Bashir to exercise leniency if Tombe had been tried.

On September 18, Julie, Brian, and I were at the embassy commissary helping others to clean up after a fire there, when I was told I should go to the embassy. Once there, I learned that Bashir had responded to my letter orally through an army officer. Bashir's message was that it had been too late for him to do anything, for the sentence had already been carried out. Tombe had been executed. A few days later, we learned that another USAID employee had been executed. Much later, we deduced that two others had also been executed. None of this came directly from the government. And of course we were never notified that all thirteen men in the compound had been detained and tortured. All this came to light when, in late October, I went to Juba. It took me that long to get there because the government kept delaying permission for a trip to Juba in a UN aircraft, the only way I could get there. Finally, after I threatened to close the embassy's consular section, the necessary permission was granted.

The charge that Tombe was using the USAID radio to communicate with the rebels was utter nonsense. Tombe knew that the radio was being monitored. In fact, sometimes when he made a radio broadcast, he had security people with him. It would have been suicidal for him to have used the radio to talk to rebels. Confronting the head security officer in Juba, I said I did not believe the charges against Tombe. In response, he made the incredible assertion that Tombe had gone to a market with the radio and, accompanied by a UN African employee (who also was executed), began broadcasting, in full view of people there. This was so ludicrous that it just underlined the falsity of all the charges.

When the AID employees in Juba had been detained, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the main rebel force, had advanced close to the town. Suspecting that townspeople were in league with the SPLA, the security forces there embarked on a campaign of terror. There were widespread arrests, and many people were murdered, as was testified to by priests and other witnesses who were in Juba at the time. What happened to the USAID employees was a part of the hysteria of the security forces.

Washington was outraged. The State Department issued a statement condemning the execution of Tombe (the only one we knew of at that time) and noting that there had been credible reports of widespread killing of civilians in Juba by government security forces. Khartoum made an angry response. Relations, already sour, got much worse.

So, this was our introduction to Sudan.

*Q: Wow! How many people were there in the embassy? What agencies were represented?*

PETTERSON: Well before the Bashir government came to power, the U.S. mission in Sudan was one of our largest in Africa. For a time, beginning in 1982, Sudan was the largest recipient of U.S. economic and military aid in all of sub-Saharan Africa. We had a military assistance group, a huge AID program, a large embassy staff, a USIS office, agriculture attaché office, and, of course, CIA station. All this changed, especially after the suspension of economic and military assistance in 1982. By the time I arrived in 1992, the total number of U.S. mission employees had been reduced to 53.

*Q: That still is substantial!*

PETTERSON: Yes, but the number would diminish even more. In 1992, the embassy had a political section, economic section, administrative staff, security office, USIS office, and CIA station. For the first time in my career, I had a full-time security detail. Whenever I traveled anywhere, to work, around town, or out of town, I was accompanied by armed security people. The bulk of these were Sudanese ex-policemen who were armed with automatic weapons. I had an armored van, and an American security officer traveled in the car with me.

*Q: I'm sure Julie loved this!*

PETTERSON: Both of us had to get used to it, and of course one can get accustomed to just about anything. I really didn't like it, and thought about asking Washington to do away with the security detail. They would not have agreed, of course. I remember once telling a Sudanese friend that I would prefer not to have the detail. He replied, "Look, this place being what it is, that would be madness!"

I kicked over the traces twice. We had brought a Honda Accord with us. It sat, unused, inside the wall of the residence. Twice, on weekends, when my security people were off…

*Q: No security on the weekends! [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: They didn't stay at the residence when I had no travel plans. Of course, there was plenty of security at the house, not only our security guards, but also Sudanese police - the British embassy was just down the street from our residence.

*Q: Oh, okay. So you zoomed out of residence in your car and went jogging.*

PETTERSON: I said, "Open the gate. I'm going-" [Laughter]

No, I didn't go jogging. I just drove the car around town for a few minutes, came back, parked the car, didn't tell anybody. The second time I did that, the security guys heard about it, and they said, "Mr. Ambassador, please."

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: It was unfair to them, I know, and I didn't do it again.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: I ran fairly often and played tennis occasionally. In Khartoum, you ran early in the morning because it would be too hot otherwise. I remember running some afternoons when, even late in the day, the temperature was well over 100 degrees. I had joined with a group of serious runners, who did a six or seven mile run at a location outside Khartoum. In trying to keep up with them in that heat, I found that it was no fun at all - my pulse rate went up much too high - and I gave that up. What was fun, though, was participating once again with Hash House Harriers. We ran once a week. Whenever I hosted the after-run festivities, the attendance was very good. The government banned the use of alcoholic beverages, but diplomats could serve them on diplomatic property. So, I had beer for the hashers, most of whom did not have diplomatic privileges, and they were very appreciative.

But, again, except for the Hash runs, I generally did my running in the early morning, when it was cooler.

*Q: A balmy 85!*

PETTERSON: I would go out with a car in front and a car behind and run for 45 minutes, an hour, hour and a half, sometimes, on a weekend, longer.

*Q: Anybody else in the embassy go with you?*

PETTERSON: When I arrived in Khartoum, my security bodyguards were Delta Force members. These guys were really fit, and they ran with me. They were so tough. I remember running down Nile Road one morning. It was early, as usual, and the traffic was light. But a car coming toward us looked as if it would pass somewhat close. The Delta Force guy who was running alongside me ran directly at that car [laughter], by his action saying, "Get out of the way!" It veered off. The State Department security officers who succeeded them as my bodyguards were not nearly as fit. Some of them ran once or twice and gave it up. But others did well. One was a marathoner, and he delighted in going out with me. The marines would come over sometimes in the morning, and occasionally someone else who was into running joined me. My running was, of course, was well known to the Sudanese security and to the Sudanese government. Hassan al-Turabi used to make fun of me. "If Sudan is such a place of terrorism and danger and you have to have all those security guards, why are you out running around in the morning?"

*Q: You could say, "Well, you'll notice that I have cars in front and behind me."*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Aside from the heavy security, our personal life in Khartoum was similar to our life at other African posts. We had friends from among the Americans, the diplomatic community, and the local community. But many Sudanese felt they could not come to our house. They were fearful of what the government might do to them. Our next door neighbors, for example, never came to see us. I made it a point of regularly inviting to dinner NGO representatives, with whom we worked on the humanitarian assistance program..

*Q: Did you have a USIS operation there?*

PETTERSON: We did at the beginning.

*Q: Sometimes you can get people to come for dinner and a film.*

PETTERSON: Sure, and we did this. There were times, especially later in my assignment, when Americans could with justification feel a bit beleaguered in Khartoum, as relations with the government spiraled further downward. But we had an active social life and were enjoying our existence there.

In early 1993, I began travels to the south. Outside of a few ambassadors who had gone to Juba under government auspices, I was the first ambassador since the Bashir government came to power to travel into southern Sudan. I don't know why others hadn't done this, but I regarded the entire country as my parish, so to speak. I was ambassador to all of Sudan, south as well as north. I went to the foreign ministry and said that I was going on such and such a date. They told me, "We will get back to you."

But they did not, so off I went. I flew to Nairobi. From Nairobi I went by UN aircraft to Lokichokkio, which is in the area where the extreme tip of northwestern Kenya juts into southeastern Sudan. The base camp of the international humanitarian relief program for southern Sudan is located at Lokichokkio. From there I would fly into the south of-

*Q: To Juba?*

PETTERSON: Not to Juba, no. I had already gone to Juba from the north. In all I made about ten trips into southern Sudan displaced persons camps and many towns and villages in Eastern Equatoria, Western Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr el-Ghazal over the course of the next two and a half years.

*Q: Were these by yourself, or did you take NGO people with you?*

PETTERSON: I often flew with somebody from the United Nations. I had become very closely professionally associated with Phillip O'Brien, an Irishman who headed UNICEF's office in Nairobi and also the Operation Lifeline Sudan humanitarian assistance program. Someone from our AID mission in Nairobi who had responsibility for southern Africa would frequently go with me. Sometimes an official of the

humanitarian relief organization of the rebel movement accompanied us, because we were going into their territory.

*Q: The foreign ministry never really gave you a hard time about this?*

PETTERSON: On occasion, after I got back to Khartoum. But, as much as they were unhappy about my trips into the south, they didn't try to prevent me from going.

*Q: And you were going into rebel held areas?*

PETTERSON: Yes, but not exclusively. At times we tried to give balance to the trips by going to government-held areas too. I made the trips into southern Sudan to see what the situation was in the areas were displaced people were congregated, to see what their needs were, to see what could be done to improve the flow of relief supplies. In the bush, NGO and UN personnel would take us around, and we would stay with them at their camps. I was always impressed by the selflessness of relief workers, most of whom worked in very difficult conditions. In either Nairobi or when I got back to Khartoum, I reported to Washington on what I had observed and heard regarding the relief situation and the war. We got very close to the war zone on more than one occasion.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: To fly we needed to have clearance from the authorities, both the southern Sudanese and the northern Sudanese, which we managed to get. If there were fighting in an area or it was getting close, the UN security officer in Lokichokkio might say, "We can't chance it." Once or twice, after we got into the south, a trip to a specific location was scrubbed.

We generally flew in Twin Otters or one or another variety of Cessna, often a Cessna Caravan. The Otters had a pilot and co-pilot, but the other aircraft had only one pilot. In those, I would usually sit up in the cockpit with the pilot. It was more fun to do it that way, and occasionally the pilot would let me take the controls, much to the excitement of the passengers in back.

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I remember talking to the pilots one day during a trip. I asked, "How high do we have to be to not be hit by a missile?"

*Q: To be out of range! [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: Yes. Both sides had hand-held Stinger missiles. And he said, "Well, 12,000 feet should be okay." So, seeing that the altimeter read 12,000 feet, I was reassured. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: When we would get to a place where we were going and where at that time enemy troops were close by, the pilot would very quickly spiral down and land in a hurry on the airstrip.

What I saw at some of the places that I visited remains indelibly imprinted in my mind. Extreme suffering, of the kind that I saw in Somalia, but even worse. Men, women, and children starving, some of them dying right at our feet. I remember once, when I was talking to a rebel commander in a clearing, we were ringed by emaciated, desperate people. Several of them, carrying something, were edging forward. As they got closer, I saw that their bundle was a body. They held it up, in mute supplication, showing us how bad things were.

When I started flying into the south, almost all of the fighting was taking place between to two major rebel factions, not between the government forces and the rebels. One faction, then called the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Mainstream, was led by John Garang, a former Sudanese army officer who had been educated, got a Ph.D., at Iowa State University. The other, the Sudan People's Liberation Army/United, was headed by a former lieutenant of Garang, Riek Machar. The worst effect of the fighting was that relief operations were interrupted, and thousands of people were at risk of starvation. The death toll was high and rising. After visiting the area in March and April, in May I met in Nairobi with representatives of the two rebel factions and after a couple of days of difficult negotiations, got them to agree to a cease-fire in the area that had come to be called, "the starvation triangle." Garang gave his okay, but I had to go up-country to see Riek Machar to get his approval, which I did. The cease-fire held only for a short time. It failed because there was no way to enforce it through international monitoring. No government, nor the UN, would provide the necessary monitors. But at least during the days that the cease-fire held, relief operations went forward and some lives were saved.

My reporting cables after a trip sometimes pointed to the need for more food supplies or for other needed improvements to the relief operations. Often, the number of aircraft for delivering the supplies was inadequate. In one cable I sent regarding the need to add to the airlift capability of the Operation Lifeline Sudan, I put it in pretty stark terms. I said, "Either we get more transport, or a lot of people will die." By and large when I asked for something, I got it because there was a great amount of sympathy for the suffering people of southern Sudanese.

When I would come out of the south and fly from Lokichokkio to Nairobi en route to Khartoum, I frequently met with journalists and told them what I had encountered during the trip. I did this to try to draw attention to the terrible plight of the southern Sudanese. I had little success, for the media, certainly the U.S. media, were not much interested in Sudan. But occasionally there was some coverage. The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) always did an interview and broadcast it. This was good, in that it called some attention to the southern Sudan issue, but it also got me in trouble with Khartoum. On at least on two occasions when I got back, I was in hot water for having said things that the Sudanese government did not like to hear.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: But when I met with government officials, described my trip, and explained what I had actually said, which was not the same as the BBC reported it, the

Sudanese seemed mollified, and took no action against me, which some were advocating. There were some front-page articles in newspapers saying that I had committed unfriendly acts and should be thrown out of the country. But, again, nothing came of all this.

I don't want to give a picture that I was locked into acrimonious exchanges with the Sudanese officials. Although I paint a picture of a ruthless government, which it was, its members were typically Sudanese. The Sudanese are well known to be among the warmest, nicest people in Africa. I had cordial relationships, by and large, even with those with whom I had sometimes-sharp disagreements. On a personal level, for example, I always got along well with Bashir.

My relationship with Turabi was different. He was an intellectual who liked to joust with anybody who came to see him, who liked to show how smart he was, who held many, and I'm sure I was included among them, in contempt. Turabi was a very interesting man. He was a lawyer and a world-renowned Islamic scholar. He saw himself at the center of an Islamic revival that would make profound changes throughout the Muslim world. Some believed that he was not the man he used to be. In May 1992, just before I went to Sudan, he was on a tour of the United Nations and Canada. While he was in Canada at an airport, a Sudanese attacked him, beat him, and almost killed him. He had a severe head injury, and he was in a coma for a while. People who saw him later said that he was mentally impaired. Be that as it may, I found him to be formidable and quite incisive generally.

*Q: What was he? Was he the foreign minister?*

PETTERSON: No. He did not have a government position at this time. He was the head of the National Islamic Front, the Islamist political party that he had founded in 1985. Turabi was the power behind the throne, the architect of Sudanese policy. He had many followers. His disciples were in key places in the government and the security apparatus.

My talks with Turabi brought out very clearly in the remarks he'd made - which I transcribed (I took notes) and which I reported to Washington - how deep his anti-Semitism was, how ignorant he was of the United States, although he professed to know more about the United States than I did. He was a supremely arrogant, fascinating, complex man whose aim was not only to control the government and to spread Islam in Sudan, but also to be in the vanguard of an Islamic movement that would sweep the world. Many believed that he aimed to displace Bashir one day and become the head of government. But later on, in 1999, he overreached himself, alienated some his followers who had become high officials in the government, and lost a struggle with Bashir, who

turned out to be tougher and more astute than many had given him credit for.

In Khartoum, we in the embassy met with people from the government, with southerners living in the city, with businessmen and professional people, educators, clergymen, with people from many walks of life to keep abreast of what was going on. I had an exceptionally capable political counselor, Lucien Vandenbroudke. I was fortunate, too, to have a good DCM, Larry Benedict. In fact, the staff of the American mission was composed by and large of highly able people. Unfortunately, that staff would soon be cut way back.

Julie, Brian, and I went on home leave in the summer of 1993. When we passed through Washington on our way back to Khartoum, I was told by the State Department that the U.S. government was on the verge of putting Sudan on the American list of state sponsors of terrorism. The Secretary of State would announce his decision imminently. I asked that this not be done until I got back to Sudan. I thought it would be unfair to have my deputy take that message to the government. I felt it was my job to do that and take the flak that would ensue. The State Department agreed, and back to Khartoum we went. On August 15, the cable with the message came in. The Sudanese got wind of what was about to happen - ABC television news had the story - and I was not given an appointment to see President Bashir. Instead, I delivered the message to Omar Berido, the foreign ministry's first under secretary. Putting a country on the list of state sponsors of terrorism invokes certain sanctions, but it meant little to Sudan because American sanctions were already in force. So it really didn't make much difference in terms of putting screws on Sudan, but it was psychologically and politically damaging to the Sudanese, to their international reputation, if nothing else. They reacted furiously. The government organized some demonstrations, the first of which took place at the residence, the others at the embassy. They were nothing to worry about – I was sure that the government wouldn't let them get out of hand. But a problem arose when we received intelligence information that the government was planning to engineer an assassination of embassy people.

*Q: Good grief!*

PETTERSON: Washington reacted to this message in the belief that the CIA source was legitimate. He had provided some good intelligence before. This latest information was evaluated and found credible. The Department instructed me to evacuate dependents and to reduce staff. Well, I wasn't so sure about the validity of the information, but I had my marching orders. There was nothing I could do. I broke the news to the embassy and, of course, to Julie and Brian. Julie was very upset. She saw no reason for this. She didn't want to go, but, of course, she had to. There was a lot of similar sentiment within the embassy. My DCM, Larry Benedict, had the unenviable job of preparing for me a list of those employees who would go. Once we agreed on the list, we let everybody know.

We had to cut the staff from 52 to 38. Then, about a week later, we got new information that indicated, if not immediate danger, at least a precarious situation for embassy Americans in Khartoum. A decision was made to cut the staff even further, down to less

than 30.

In a very orderly fashion, the evacuation took place. I said "Goodbye" to Julie and Brian.

*Q: Evacuate to where?*

PETTERSON: Back to the States.

*Q: Yes, not just Nairobi?*

PETTERSON: No. Those officers and staff who went back to the U.S. waited for a while to see whether they could return, but, as it turned out, none could. They had to arrange for other assignments. Julie and Brian went to Oregon, where we had decided we would retire, southern Oregon. But after a few months she was too lonely and Brian was not happy in his school. So they went to Mexico to be with her family.

For a short time, we in the embassy kept a low profile. More demonstrations took place. The government wildly exaggerated the number of people who were in attendance. They even organized a demonstration of southerners against us and dragooned some southerners into taking part in it. But only a small number of people participated, most of them not southerners at all.

Washington continued to worry about the safety of the Americans remaining in Khartoum. The demonstrations, inflammatory government statements, and an intense anti-American propaganda campaign finally elicited a harsh message from Washington to the Sudanese government and to Turabi. The message said, in effect, "Anything happens to Americans, we're going to hit you in a way that will hurt!"

*Q: Wow!*

PETTERSON: Yes. And I was asked to deliver this message, of course!

*Q: Oh, lucky you! [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I called the Omar Berido at the foreign ministry. He wanted to know what the content of the message was.

I said, "It's a message from President Clinton."

He accepted that. Their ambassador in Washington had been reamed out when he had been called into the State Department and should have known that a message from Washington to Khartoum would be quite negative. But he, fool that he was, indicated that it would be something positive. So Bashir and Turabi were expecting something perhaps saying, "It's time for us to begin to repair the relationship."

But then I come in with this bombshell!

*Q: Right.*

PETTERSON: They thought that I had duped them into receiving me, for they would not have personally received this kind of a message. I hadn't (and later on, they came to understand that I hadn't), but for a while my relationship with the government was in a deep-freeze. I could not see Bashir. But, as always happened during my time in Sudan, before long the Sudanese relented. Because they continued to want a better relationship with the United States, my access was restored, and we went on as before with the same frustratingly fruitless discussions about what they needed to do to have a better relationship with the United States. Because there was little I could accomplish in improving relations, I focused on the humanitarian assistance program. As the ambassador of one of the major donor countries, I took my turn chairing meetings of the weekly donor-country ambassadors and UN agency heads. I held these at the residence. As donor chairman, I accompanied the UN Coordinator to weekly meetings with the Sudanese relief authorities. I also met with NGO representatives fairly frequently. And I met separately with government officials in efforts to get them to be more cooperative on the delivery of assistance to the south and also to the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese who were in these awful camps around-

*Q: Around Khartoum.*

PETTERSON: Khartoum. My efforts on behalf of the humanitarian aid program, and my trips in to southern Sudan, became the most important factor of my work over the time remaining in my assignment, which was had almost two years to go. Julie and Brian, as it turned out, did not get back until just a couple months before we left Sudan. I had, on a couple of occasions, recommended to Washington that they lift the ban on dependents. In my view there was no great danger. As it was, a year or so after the evacuation, Washington determined that the intelligence report that had caused it was false. Nevertheless, once an evacuation has taken place, the Department is very slow-

*Q: Right.*

PETTERSON: …to permit dependents to return.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Twice when I recommended that the ban on dependents be lifted, my senior staff disagreed with me. I sent their disagreement in to Washington along with my recommendation.

*Q: Your staff thought that the dependents should not come back?*

PETTERSON: Right. I disagree with them. I saw no more danger in Khartoum than was the case when I arrived there, when we had a full staff. There would always be an element of risk serving in Khartoum, but no more so than in some other tight spots in the

world where we had full embassy staffs, and where dependents were at post. Finally I prevailed, and a couple of months before my assignment was up, Julie and Brian returned.

I would have to say that of all my assignments, this was probably the most difficult.

*Q: I'm not surprised.*

PETTERSON: We'd experienced a violent revolution in Zanzibar and I had had some difficult times in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Dealing with apartheid in South Africa was no picnic, either. But Sudan was the most difficult. It was next to impossible to make any headway with a government that would not deviate from its intention to maintain itself in power by any means necessary, including force. In addition, it persisted in giving refuge to terrorist organizations. And its gross violations of human rights continued with regularity.

*Q: Before we leave Sudan, I have to ask you one question, Don. After the attacks on the embassies in Nairobi and Dar, I believe one of the steps we took was to send a cruise missile to hit a factory?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: In Khartoum? From your service there, do you think that terrorist materials were being made there?*

PETTERSON: There was no hint of that while I was there. I left in 1995, the cruise missile attack on the pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum took place in '98. Subsequently, I was asked a number of times, for instance by radio talk show hosts when I was promoting the book I wrote on Sudan, whether the American cruise missile attack was justified. My answer was that I believed it was a mistake. The administration failed to produce conclusive evidence that chemical weapons were being made at the pharmaceutical factory. The administration had grounds for suspicion, but to commit an act of war, which the missile attack was, the evidence should have been iron clad.

*Q: Well, let me just say that on behalf of ADST (The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training), I want to thank you very kindly for taking the time and coming up to my house in Woodstock to talk to me about a really very, very interesting and demanding career.*

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*All right. Well, today is June 7, 2001. This is Stu Kennedy working with Don. We'll continue this.*

*When did you leave the Sudan?*

PETTERSON: I left there in the end of July 1995.

*Q: Nineteen ninety-five. And you what, retired at that point?*

PETTERSON: Retired at that point, yes.

*Q: Was this a retirement that you kind of looked forward to, or were you sort of keen to go out again?*

PETTERSON: I would have jumped at an interesting assignment, but I was going to reach the mandatory retirement age in November. If there had been an appropriate assignment opening up well before then, that is an ambassadorship, I could have been considered for it. At least that is what I was told. However, nothing was coming up in the near term. There was no way that Dick Moose, the under secretary for management, or anyone else could have kept me on the rolls after I reached 65, waiting for some ambassadorial opening. Anyway, although I was not ready to retire, I had no choice in the matter, and retire I did.

*Q: Where did you go when you retired?*

PETTERSON: I went to New Hampshire, which was a foreign assignment for me. I had grown up in California, had little knowledge of New Hampshire, and only some brief stays there, visiting one of my daughters. When we were in Somalia two older kids had to go to boarding school because there was no school beyond the eighth grade in Mogadishu.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Susan went to a school in upstate New York. Julianne chose a small school in Vermont. From there she went to the University of Vermont. She married a New England boy. They settled first in Massachusetts, and then in New Hampshire, not far from Exeter. My wife, Julie, our son, Brian, and I had visited them a couple of times when we were on leave. When she and Brian were evacuated from Sudan, they passed through that area again, and Julie grew more comfortable with the idea of living there. Some years earlier, when we began thinking about retirement, we had considered California, where I, in particular, had wanted to live after leaving the Foreign Service. But we soon concluded that we couldn't afford to buy a house in the places we liked, including my hometown of San Luis Obispo.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: To make a long story short, when Julie and Brian were on their way back to Khartoum after the Department had decided to allow dependents to return, they stopped in New Hampshire again. Julie found a house she liked very much in Brentwood, which abuts Exeter, and almost put a contract on it. We bought it after I retired.

*Q: Yes. This is an aside. In doing this oral history, I've found that we used to have rather extensive colonies of retirees in the San Francisco and San Diego area. Those have dried up because the government pension which used to go a long way in those places, housing is just out of reach.*

PETTERSON: Yes. My daughter Susan has lived in San Francisco for about fifteen years, and we know what housing costs are there. They're extraordinarily high. So, my heart is still, if not in San Francisco-

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: It's in the West where I grew up. But we like New England. It's a very pleasant area.

*Q: Well, Don, you then retired into the New England world of ice and snow and occasional sun. What did you do while you were there?*

PETTERSON: I started and then finished a book on Sudan called *Inside Sudan*, which was published by Westview Press in 1999. Julie and I concentrated on getting our son Brian through high school in New England. That didn't work out well. He had spent two school years in Mexico after he and Julie and been evacuated, and that's where he really wanted to go, we found. So she and he went back there for a year while I awaited a UN appointment.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: I had been asked by the Department if I would go out to Liberia as the UN secretary general's special representative there. That was fine with me. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali wanted an American, and the Department chose me. But it wasn't too much longer after that, while my wife and son were in Mexico and I was about to go off to Liberia (I thought), that the whole deal went sour as Boutros-Ghali and the U.S. government parted ways.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Madeleine Albright opposed his re-nomination, as you know, and he decided he no longer wanted an American for the job in Liberia. A decision on who would get the appointment was held in abeyance until after the new secretary general was chosen. I remained the U.S. candidate. I waited and waited. But it turned out that Kofi Annan was advised by his staff to choose an African, which he did.

But in that year, we got our son through high school, I made a lot of progress on the book, and got more established in the area. After Brian graduated from high school in Mexico City, he went to Israel to work in a kibbutz for five months. Julie and I, who for the first time since in 35 years did not have at least one of our children living with us, took a trip by car from New Hampshire to California and back again. In two months, we

passed through twenty states, visiting friends and family along the way.

Back in New Hampshire, in the summer of 1998 we took out a mortgage on our Brentwood house to cover a loan for one in Exeter. We repaired and remodeled the Exeter house it so that it would be suitable for a school. Julie, who was a very skilled schoolteacher and had worked in Washington, Somalia, and Tanzania, had for years wanted to run her own school. Now she could, and in September she opened a small pre-school. I was doing some work on Sudan and had started writing another book, on the revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, what happened to the Americans there, and how Zanzibar became for a time a major Cold War issue. Just before the school opened, I had a phone call from the State Department asking me if I would go out to Liberia to act as chargé for a couple of months or so. I said, "Sure."

*Q: You were in Liberia from when to when?*

PETTERSON: I got there in early October 1998 and left at about the end of the following summer.

*Q: What was the situation? How had things developed up before you got there? I mean, why was there so much interest in Liberia at that point?*

PETTERSON: Liberia had always had what the Liberians called "a special relationship" with the United States. It stemmed from the way Liberia was founded and from the interest the United States took in the country after World War II, when we built an important airfield, Roberts Field, not far from Monrovia. In the post-war years, Liberia became important to the U.S. as the site of an intelligence communications facility, a Loran navigation facility, and a VOA transmitter for Africa. The Liberian government became a staunch U.S. ally in the Cold War. We had a very large embassy, a huge USAID mission, and a military mission. The close ties between Washington and Monrovia were buffeted by the violent, bloody overthrow of the Tolbert government by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe in 1980. Washington learned to live with Doe, but by the late 1980s relations deteriorated because of the Doe government's corruption and human-rights abuses. Doe's excesses and megalomania contributed to his overthrow in 1990.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: The insurgency that toppled Doe was started by a man named Charles Taylor. In my view, Taylor fully lived up to the negative impression I had of him when I met him in northern Liberia in 1990. He and other warlords, fighting the Liberian army and each other and clashing with a West African peacekeeping force, devastated the entire country. During the war, from 150,000 to 200,000 Liberians were killed and tens of thousands were displaced. Doe was captured and killed in August 1990, tortured to death by a man named Prince Johnson, one of the warlords. Taylor eventually prevailed. He came to power in 1997 through an election. Because the Liberians were so sick and tired of war, they were ready to vote for anybody if that would end the fighting. They knew that if Taylor were not elected, he would go back to war. In this way Charles Taylor

became president of Liberia.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Once in office, Taylor began to commit gross violations of human rights. For example, one of his political opponents was murdered by Taylor' security forces. Taylor also began to amass a fortune in various unprincipled ways. He made little effort to hide this, believing that it was his due as the elected leader of Liberia. The U.S. government at first gave Taylor the benefit of the doubt, hoping that democracy would take hold, that Taylor would be prevailed upon to change his ways. Some gullible Americans, including Jessie Jackson and some people on the Hill, thought that he would, with their guidance, become a responsible leader. That did not happen. In time, it became clear that he was a thug whose his only interest was in feathering his own nest and maintaining himself in power.

There was internal opposition to him, but he crushed it whenever it appeared to take on momentum. In 1998 one of the other former warlords, Roosevelt Johnson, was ensconced in Monrovia with his own force. This became intolerable to Taylor, and a clash occurred. One of the results of that clash was that the Taylor security forces defeated Johnson's force and chased him and several of his men through a part of Monrovia. Johnson and his people, fleeing for their lives, headed for the American embassy, where they hoped they could get sanctuary. The embassy's chargé d'affaires, John Bauman, the regional security officer, and two American contract security officers who headed the embassy's guard force went out into the street to negotiate with the heavily armed Liberian security elements that had followed the Johnson party right to the gates of the embassy. Johnson and his men, unseen by their Liberian enemies, cowered behind a barricade by the gate. With the negotiations leading nowhere, Bauman walked back through the turnstile at the gate into the embassy compound. At the point, the leader of the Liberian security force, who had tacitly indicated to his men that they could use force, walked away. His men pushed toward the barricade and as soon as they spied the Johnson party, they opened fire. In the melee several people were killed. The turnstile, which had been opened for Bauman had not been closed, and Johnson and others, including the three Americans in the street, rushed through. One of Johnson's men was shot, and died in the embassy lobby. The regional security officer was slightly wounded, and one of the two contract security officers was seriously wounded.

All the Americans attached to the U.S. mission came to the compound. It seemed to the Americans that the embassy was under siege. Negotiations between the two governments began, conducted for the most part by telephone. Jessie Jackson in Washington took part in this, talking to Taylor. After several days, agreement was reached that Johnson and the other Liberians in the embassy would be flown out by U.S. military helicopter. They later were taken to Nigeria. That ended the standoff at the embassy, but the affair left a lot of bad feelings on both. It also raised questions in Washington about the way the incident had been handled, about the judgment of the chargé and the security officer.

Two weeks after this occurred, Washington called me, and within a matter of days I was

in Monrovia. The African bureau wanted to allow the chargé to have his long-deferred home leave, and they believed someone with experience was needed to take over the embassy in his absence.

*Q: Before you went out there, what sort of briefing were you getting about what from the State Department? You know, how were you prepared to go out?*

PETTERSON: I prepared myself as well as I could by, first, mining the Internet. I had some familiarity with Liberia. I was the director of the Liberian Task Force for a few months in the summer and fall of 1990. I had met Charles Taylor during that time, as well as other Liberians and heads of state in the region, when I made a trip there. When I got to Washington, I read through files, asked questions, and got what briefing I could during the short time that arrangements were being made to put me on the rolls as a temporary employee and get me out to Monrovia.

*Q: Had Jim Bishop been there?*

PETTERSON: He had been ambassador from 1987 to 1990. The most recent ambassador to Liberia had been Bill Milam, who left Monrovia shortly before the shooting incident. His assignment had been cut short to enable him to fill, on an urgent basis, the vacant ambassadorship in Pakistan.

*Q: This is Bill…?*

PETTERSON: Milam, M-I-L-A-M, William Milam. When Milam left for Islamabad, the DCM became chargé d'affaires.

Armed with as much information as I could get, I went out to take over the embassy. I had, as I saw it, two essential things to do. One was to restore morale at the embassy. The second was to see if we could pick up the pieces of the relationship with the Liberians.

*Q: This included Charles Taylor? I mean, now the relationship, Charles Taylor was still the president?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Did we have any reservations about dealing with him at this point?*

PETTERSON: Very much so. But we had to deal with him if we were going to pursue our objectives, the most immediate of which was to get an apology from the Liberian government, from Taylor, for the actions of the security forces. Not only had they had pointed small arms at the American embassy and then opened fire, but also they had fired at least two recoilless rifle grenades, which passed over the embassy. The chancery suffered bullet damage, and of course two Americans had been wounded. This was a very, very serious incident, and Taylor had not apologized.

The first problem I had to deal with was the state of mind of the U.S. mission personnel. They were still hunkered down, at least figuratively. They had believed that the embassy had been in danger of being overrun by armed Liberian security forces. They literally lived in the safe haven area of the building for a time, and then in embassy offices for about two weeks. Many of them had been, I found, traumatized by the events. Some of them seemed fixated on what had happened.

When I landed in Monrovia (Roberts Field was still closed to large aircraft, but I took a small a small airline in from the Ivory Coast into Roberts Field), the administrative officer and the military attaché met me. This was the first time that anybody had left the embassy compound since the incident had taken place almost a month earlier.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: I went to the embassy, talked to people, and within an hour or so, said I wanted to go around the town. I got a third-country national who knew Liberians very well to drive me. We toured the devastated city of Monrovia and its environs so I could get a sense of what the situation was. Back at the embassy, I met and talked with everyone. I encouraged people to get out of the compound and move about the town. I said I believed that whatever danger had existed was now largely dissipated and that there was no threat directed against Americans. At a meeting of all hands, I let them know that I cared about their welfare, understood what they had been through, and sympathized with them. I commended them for what they had done. But I felt, and I let them know, that it was time that we got back to normal operations.

Before long, it was apparent that morale had picked up considerably. I'd never been to a post where morale was in such a bad state as it was when I arrived at Monrovia.

*Q: An embassy being somewhat under siege was not new. I mean, it had happened before. Had there been an effort? Often we've sent in Marines or something like that. Did we have Marines around?*

PETTERSON: As you know, there had been evacuations in Liberia before, in 1990 for example. With fighting taking place in the outskirts of Monrovia, when I went to the embassy on a two-day visit in October of that year, a U.S. naval vessel was standing by and a contingent of U.S. soldiers had been sent in to provide protection for the embassy. So the kind of trouble that had arisen in 1998 was nothing new. This time, there were no outside U.S. troops brought in for protection. The embassy's marine guard detachment was there, of course. In full battle gear, they manned posts at key points, including a sandbagged post on the roof. But, again, I felt that the problem was over with respect to any danger to the embassy and to the Americans serving in Monrovia. And quite frankly, a few people there were exaggerating the extent of the danger.

*Q: Yes?*

PETTERSON: After I had been in Monrovia for a while, I concluded that except

momentarily at the time of the incident, the Liberian security forces would not have entered the embassy grounds, and that afterward the Liberian government had no plan to overrun the embassy. Nevertheless, the perception of the people who had been through the ordeal, and it was a real ordeal, was that there been great danger. Some were still jittery. They needed to be brought out of that state of mind and to get back to a normal existence. That certainly included leaving the embassy compound. Monrovia is one of the few embassies we have where most or all the American employees live inside a compound.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

PETTERSON: Which isn't the best situation.

*Q: No, it's not. The families had already been evacuated?*

PETTERSON: Yes. Because conditions in Monrovia were so bad, even though the war had ended three years earlier, there was only one or two embassy spouses there when the trouble erupted. Children were not permitted at post. All the time I was there, the Department's ban on dependents remained in force. Before I left, I had concluded that the restriction on dependents should be lifted and said so to Washington. However, as I pointed out when I was talking about Sudan, once dependents are evacuated, it is very, very hard to convince the Department to let them return to post.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

PETTERSON: It generally takes a long time.

As I was saying, I did the kind of things any ambassador should have done to restore confidence, exert leadership, and put the post back on a good footing. I was pleased by the results.

*Q: When they had been holed up in the compound, how were they getting food? I mean, was there any? What were they doing?*

PETTERSON: [Laughter] The embassy had a very well stocked commissary. And people had some items in their apartments, foodstuff that they brought with them. And if they really needed something from the Lebanese-owed grocery stores in town, members of the Liberian guard force could go get it.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: The commissary had been a lifesaver and still was reasonably well stocked. But, again, I deemed it essential that people get out of the compound and return to a normal existence. This they began doing. I soon approved letting those who had apartments in the USAID compound across the street from the embassy return to them. In addition, within a month I had begun traveling up-country. I took an embassy officer with

me. As a result of that trip, I lifted the 25-mile limit that the previous ambassador had placed on travel outside Monrovia and I encouraged mission personnel who had reason to travel up-country to do so.

*Q: How about getting out, reestablishing relations with the government? How did you go about that?*

PETTERSON: I went to see government officials. I met with the foreign minister and with advisors to the president. From day one, I persisted in seeking an appointment with Taylor. But because he knew that I would be presenting him with a demand for an apology, he didn't want to meet with me. Nevertheless, through my own contacts, and the contacts that the military attaché and other officers were now making, we were able to get a dialogue going with the Liberians. I made it clear to the foreign minister and to others in the government that there had to be an apology. Taylor's line, which was repeated by his advisors, was that the Liberians had done nothing wrong, that the incident had been a misunderstanding, that there was no intention to harm anybody, that the Liberian security people were fired on first, and so forth. I said that I had thoroughly studied the situation and knew that the Liberian security forces had opened fire without provocation. Washington was fully aware of this from the embassy's reporting. An apology was necessary.

This went on for weeks. The deputy assistant secretary of state who had responsibility for Liberia, Vicki Huddleston, came out and repeated what I had been saying. She told Taylor in a very forceful way that if Liberia wanted to resume a reasonable relationship with the United States, there had to be an apology. Soon afterward, it came. At first it was a left-handed kind of apology, an expression of regret that there had been some difficulty - something of that nature. Eventually, we got the apology from Taylor in the right terminology. Normal relations were resumed. It was not by any means a warm and cuddly relationship, given the government's continued human rights violations and the fact that Taylor was assisting the rebels in Sierra Leone. His support for them became the single most important bone of contention between the United States and Liberia during the rest of the time that I was there.

*Q: What had happened? Did we still have our communications set up and all in Liberia, or was this being phased out?*

PETTERSON: You mean the VOA?

*Q: The VOA and all those things.*

PETTERSON: The VOA transmitter and the other U.S. government communications facilities had long since been closed down. In fact, they had been trashed during the war. Even the power lines serving them had been stripped, stolen for their copper content. By the time that the facilities were closed down, the United States government had made alternative arrangements in other places in Africa. The importance of those facilities was no longer a factor in the U.S.-Liberian relationship.

*Q: So we didn't really have much that we needed from Liberia? Our interest was more of a general one, a humanitarian and normal relations and all that?*

PETTERSON: Yes. The passing of the Cold War eliminated whatever putative international political importance Liberia had had. Former President Doe played the anticommunist and anti-Libyan cards for all they were worth, and Liberia was well endowed with American aid. But those days were over for good.

Our basic interest was humanitarian. Beyond that was the continuation of an historical relationship that had begun with the establishment of Liberia by former slaves from America in the 19th century. At the outset, there was no close tie between the U.S. government and Liberia, for the American government had nothing to do with the repatriation of those slaves. Arrangements for the repatriation and the founding of the colony were made by the American Colonization Society, an anti-slavery organization. The United States was not in a hurry to recognize Liberia when in 1840 it declared itself a republic, and showed little interest in it until the 20th century, when Harvey Firestone established a rubber plantation and factory there. Closer ties came during World War II when the U.S. built an important airfield near Monrovia. Then came the Cold War and the establishment of the communications facilities that I mentioned earlier and the advent of the large U.S. economic and military aid programs for Liberia.

Liberians viewed the historical tie as a special relationship. This sentiment was shared by some African-Americans, including some prominent, influential individuals. There was a belief that the United States had benefitted in the past from the relationship and therefor had an obligation to help Liberia.

With the kind of government that Liberia now had, the concept of the special relationship was debatable. I believed very strongly that the United States had an obligation to do all we could to provide humanitarian assistance to Liberia, to help its people, who had been so mistreated by successive governments and whose lives had been disrupted beyond imagining by the awful civil war. Tens of thousands were still displaced from their home villages and were destitute. But I felt just as strongly that we owed Charles Taylor and followers nothing. We needed to avoid any kind of economic aid that would strengthen Taylor's control of the country and give him opportunity to add to his plunder. Instead of doing anything to revive Liberia's moribund economy, Taylor and his associates were robbing the country blind.

*Q: How could we meet humanitarian needs without enriching Taylor and cohorts?*

PETTERSON: Very easily, actually - not provide them with the kind of aid they wanted. They wanted capital assistance projects, the kind that would involve big contracts, from which they would get a cut. They wanted contractors who could be bribed and an influx of resources that could be ripped off.

The United States was having none of that. It channeled its aid mainly through UN

agencies, such as the WFP (World Food Program), UNICEF, and UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees) - the kind of assistance that people needed to ward off diseases and to get food and shelter. In addition we provided assistance to help strengthen the judicial system and democratic institutions, such as a free press, and to bolster human rights organizations. We aimed to help give the Liberian people a greater ability to stand up to their government. And we hoped to promote a better attitude among key people in the country regarding how Liberia should be governed.

None of this was pleasing to Mr. Taylor, who continued to rule in an autocratic and undemocratic way and to violate human rights left right and center.

*Q: You keep talking about violating human rights.*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Could you explain what this meant?*

PETTERSON: In 1997, Taylor's security people murdered the most prominent of Taylor's political opponents. Roosevelt Johnson's tribesmen, the Krahn, were hounded. During the fighting that broke out in September 1998, three hundred or more Krahn were captured or otherwise seized and summarily executed. People were arrested without due process, some were tortured. The government intimidated the press. Freedom of association and speech were abridged. There was fear in the country that the security forces could work their will whenever they wanted. It was also a violation of human rights when the government failed to do anything to provide resources that were so desperately needed for basic services to people - running water, electricity, housing, schooling for children, medical services. In Liberia under Charles Taylor, egregious violations of the human rights of the Liberian were a constant.

*Q: What was in it for them to deal with us at all?*

PETTERSON: Because the United States is the strongest country in the world, it carries great influence with international organizations that can make decisions favorable or unfavorable to a country like Liberia. To make progress economically, Liberia needed to attract private investment. Its ability to do that was impaired by its poor relations with the United States. In addition, in Liberia there is a sense that no Liberian government can really succeed without the blessing of the United States, which is seen, as some Liberians told me, as "our father." Others told me that the U.S. was "our mother," and others called it "our big brother." So - father, mother, big brother. No Liberian leader could be totally comfortable if he was at odds with the United States.

Although our influence helped in some ways to improve the lot of the Liberian people, it was not such that Taylor would change his behavior and begin to do the right things not only for the Liberian people but also for the people of Sierra Leone. His support for Sierra Leonean rebels contributed to a terrible war in which rebel forces were committing the worst kinds of atrocities, cutting off people's hands and arms-

*Q: Children's.*

PETTERSON: Men's, women's, and children's. Wanton killing, a state of vicious anarchy.

*Q: When you look at what happened in Liberia and then Sierra Leone, you know, what was the root of this viciousness? I mean, you know, there's a difference between taking over and destroying villages, and particularly when you start maiming children. But the whole thing seemed to have gone down to a level of depravity that we haven't seen in a long time.*

PETTERSON: Well, we have seen it in former Yugoslavia.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Why did it happen in Liberia and then in Sierra Leone? It's hard to say. The hatreds that grew between contending organizations were tribally based, for one. One side would do something to another, then the other side would retaliate, and then it would get out of hand. It got to the point that human life had no meaning for some of these fighters, many of whom were children, or barely teenagers, who often were plied with liquor or drugs and told to do things and did them - terrible acts that they normally would never have committed. There was a spiral downward of terrible, mindless violence. It happened first in Liberia, then in Sierra Leone.

*Q: What was Taylor doing in Sierra Leone?*

PETTERSON: Diamonds. Diamonds were at the heart of the descent of Sierra Leone, from a country that could have been prosperous to a country that is one of the most devastated, poorest countries of the world. From the time of Sierra Leone's independence greedy men sought to get a share of the diamond wealth that was being produced from the country's diamond mines. Diamonds corrupted the leader of the country, Siaka Stevens, and just about everyone else in high positions. The diamond producing areas were in the northern part of Sierra Leone. In years past, the diamond production had been largely a controlled enterprise, but even then there were many illegal diggers. A considerable portion of the illegally mined diamonds was smuggled out through Liberia.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: With the advent of the war in Sierra Leone, no longer was diamond mining a controlled enterprise, in part or in whole. The RUF made arrangements with the diggers and, in collusion with Liberians and with Taylor's blessing, got the diamonds into Liberia and from there to the world market. In exchange for his cut, Taylor was helping the rebels in various ways, including providing them with arms and ammunition. Some of this war materiel came from Libya and was flown to Liberia from Burkina Faso.

Taylor continued his involvement in this even though the United States government and others, the British government in particular, told him to stop it. A cease-fire in Sierra Leone was brokered in July 1999, shortly before I left Liberia. Later it broke down, and hostilities resumed. In 2000, a UN report implicated Taylor in his dealings in diamonds with the RUF, arms trafficking, and other kinds of profiteering. In May 2001, the Security Council imposed sanctions against Taylor for backing and arming the rebel group.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: As recently as a few months ago, accusations were still being levied against Taylor, charging that he was helping perpetuate the situation in Sierra Leone by continuing to assist the rebels.

*Q: While you were there, was the United Nations playing any role, or the Organization of African Unity?*

PETTERSON: The OAU (Organization of African Unity) wasn't, but some West African countries, Nigeria in particular, were. Going back to the early 1990s, a West African force in Liberia, ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) had been based in Liberia, first to fight against Taylor's National Patriotic Liberation Front and then to keep the peace. In 1999, the ECOMOG force was made up of Nigerians, the largest contingent, and Ghanaians. By that time, it was pretty ineffective. Because of the growing intensity of the conflict in Sierra Leone and with Freetown itself in danger of being overrun by the RUF, the remaining ECOMOG troops in Liberia were sent to Freetown.

The United Nations Special Representative did not take a strong stand against Taylor. Many members of the international community in Monrovia, including UN personnel, believed that he was too close to Taylor and to someone else in a high-level position in the Liberian government. I subscribed to that opinion.

*Q: Who was he?*

PETTERSON: Felix Downes-Thomas, a Gambian. He did not take firm enough stands on human rights violations. I tried to enlist his support for strong statements, which I routinely made publicly, that there had to be a change in the behavior of the Liberian government if the Liberian government was to be accepted internationally. Downes-Thomas said he said he would, but he did not follow through with anything approaching consistency. I did not get useful backing from the Special Representative. On the other hand, I had a good relationship with the United Nations agencies that were participating in the humanitarian aid program in Liberia.

*Q: Was our unhappiness and distrust of this UN man from Gambia being transmitted back to various channels to the United Nations headquarters?*

PETTERSON: I transmitted my thoughts on his performance to Washington. And yes, the State Department did make its displeasure known to the UN. But on what level, I don't know. Whatever was said apparently made no appreciable difference, for he remained in his post.

Let me emphasize, though, that the UN performance in Liberia was good. My opinion of the quality of the representatives of the various UN agencies with which I was associated in Africa ranged from excellent to abysmal. In Sudan, Phillip O'Brien, an Irishman who was the UNICEF representative in Nairobi and headed Operations Lifeline Sudan was superb. In Khartoum, one head of a UN agency was pathetically inept. But in my view, the problem with UN operations in a given country stems as much from the UN system itself as it does from the quality of UN personnel. The UN agencies are like baronies. Each head of agency is answerable to his agency's home office and not to the ranking UN official at the post. If, as was the case in Sudan and Somalia when I was ambassador, the head of UNDP, who was the ranking UN official, holding the title of UN coordinator, wanted the head of, say, UNICEF to do a certain thing, the coordinator had to rely on his powers of persuasion to get it done. Coordination could be, and often was, a sometime thing, not well done at all. I thought to myself more than once that if I, as ambassador, did not have authority over all U.S. officials in country, regardless of their agency, I would find it intolerable and be hampered in my effectiveness.

Having said all that, for the most part I had good relations with the UN people I worked with. This was generally the case in Liberia. I worked closely with officials of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). They were doing an excellent job of helping rehabilitate refugees of the Liberian civil war who had returned to their devastated villages and Sierra Leoneans who were in refugee camps in Liberia. I went up-country with representatives of the UNHCR to various places, to see what was being done, and I have nothing but praise for them.

*Q: Now, talking about up country, brings to mind, in earlier interviews with people serving in Liberia back in the good ol' (old) days and all…*

PETTERSON: [Laughter]

*Q: There were the Americo-Liberians, who represented a very distinct class, not really a tribe, but a class that sat there, and then everyone else was out in the bush, and we didn't have much to do with that. Had the whole dynamics changed?*

PETTERSON: Oh, yes. The Americo-Liberians were descendants of slaves who had either established the colony or had settled in Liberia in ensuing years and of slaves who, after slavery was outlawed, were brought to Monrovia after the slave ships in which they were being transported were seized. The Americo-Liberians became the dominant political force in the country. They erected a kind of black apartheid to maintain power, depriving the indigenous people of equal rights. The overbearing, short-sighted ways of the Americo-Liberians led to their downfall in 1980, when Samuel Doe overthrew the government, killing the leadership in the process.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Today in Liberia the clear distinction between the Americo-Liberians and other Liberians no longer defines the country's politics. Americo-Liberians and people of indigenous tribal origins alike occupy positions of importance in the government. However, underlying ill-feeling between those called "Americos" or "Congos" (as they are sometimes referred to) and those who are called "Country" remains and surfaces from time to time (especially on the Internet). In addition, other tribal animosities still continue to be a fact of life in Liberia. The killing of Krahns in 1998 testifies to that.

*Q: Now, did the Libyans play any role in this, because they, over the years under Qadhafi, have been sort of troublemakers, at least one perspective?*

PETTERSON: Libyan involvement in Liberia while I was there in 1998-1999 was confined to the supply of weapons through Burkina Faso and Liberia into Sierra Leone. Taylor had received military training in Libya before he started the insurgency in 1989 and continues to have close ties with Qadhafi. There is no question that arms and ammunition destined for the RUF in Sierra Leone originated in Libya.

*Q: But it wasn't a major factor as far as…*

PETTERSON: Not really, no. Qadhafi was not playing the prominent role that he had played earlier on in West Africa.

*Q: The time you were there, was the Taylor regime beginning to become a more responsible one at all, did you feel?*

PETTERSON: Absolutely NOT!

*Q: [Laughter]*

PETTERSON: I did finally get to see Taylor, in late January 1999. The main point of what I said to him was a warning from Washington to cease helping the rebels in Sierra Leone or face sanctions. I told him that U.S. evidence of Liberia's support for the RUF was incontrovertible and that it did the Liberians no good to keep denying the charges. As I expected, he reacted defensively, denying that his government was involved in Sierra Leone. I also expressed concern about his government's human rights abuses, especially those committed by the security forces. I suggested that the government should, among other things, rein in the security forces, allow full freedom of the press, and stop harassing judges. Taylor responded that much of what was being said about human rights in Liberia was untrue. I remember that in my reporting cable to Washington I said that although I was not in a position to comment on the often-heard view that Taylor was an inveterate liar, I could now say from personal experience that he took large liberties with the truth.

Although I had been very frank in our talk, I had tried to keep the conversation on a friendly level. But Taylor was not a man who liked to hear frank criticism, no matter how it was put to him. He avoided seeing me again for some months.

In private talks and public remarks, I stressed that while the U.S. government wanted to work with Liberia's democratically elected government, Washington remained concerned about the excesses of the executive branch and the misconduct of the security forces. I also emphasized that for Liberia's economy to improve, it needed a strong private sector, but that the government's misguided economic policies and rampant corruption discouraged private investment from both domestic and foreign sources.

U.S. admonitions did not have much appreciable effect. Now and then, Taylor would do something that we asked. For example, we got the apology, and eventually he did begin to do some right things with respect to Sierra Leone, at least momentarily. But essentially he was the same criminal that he always had been, and his actions were harmful to Liberia's relationship with the United States.

*Q: You said you wanted to get the embassy out doing things. You mentioned morale, I mean, just to get out and see sunlight, not suffer from paranoia. But the other one is, I mean, where you've got a situation like that, say what does a political officer do, I mean if there's no real politics? It's all-*

PETTERSON: Ah, but there was plenty to do. There was politics. There was politics within the governing party. There was an opposition, however weak it was. The beginning of a revolt against Taylor was evident in northwestern Liberia. Liberia's involvement in Sierra Leone and other foreign affairs issues needed to be reported. All kinds of crooked economic deals were being made in Liberia. There was no end of what a reporting officer worth his or her salt could do. I encouraged the political/economic section to be very active.

I participated with the officer in the political section who was in charge of the embassy's self-help program, which made good use of limited resources for grassroots projects. I would accompany her to projects she had developed, mainly within a two-hour drive from Monrovia. I traveled up-country as often as I could and would always ask people to go with me. And I encouraged them to do some travels on their own.

*Q: Let's talk about the political situation a little. What were we looking at? What were we doing, not just reporting? How did the political officer or the economic officer operate in this situation?*

PETTERSON: In the same basic way that a political or economic officer would carry out his or her responsibilities anywhere. You get out, go around town, talk to people, gather information, and travel outside of town. The embassy's political-economic officers did get around. Unfortunately, there were others in the embassy who were not inclined to travel very much, if at all. But, overall the embassy had resumed its normal functioning.

*Q: Well, were there things like road blocks with a couple of pre teenagers with AK-47s who would stop you and say, "Give me your car!" or something like that?*

PETTERSON: There were roadblocks, and you simply had to go through them. Our vehicles had diplomatic plates, and when I traveled, the flag was [laughter] flying. Occasionally there were some minor problems at roadblocks, but they eased off as the weeks and months went by.

*Q: Did you have any problems with our staff? Sometimes you get people that start playing games with roadblocks, get angry and all, which is not the way to handle it. You know, I have served in Saigon and Korea, where they've had nighttime things, and you don't mess around with roadblocks.*

PETTERSON: No, no one played games at roadblocks. For most of the time I was there, I did not allow nighttime traveling.

*Q: Yes.*

PETTERSON: Our people were well aware that some of the individuals at roadblocks were not the kind of people you wanted to trifle with.

*Q: Because it was a pandemic, I guess, you'd call it, of AIDS, was that a problem in Liberia at the time you were there?*

PETTERSON: No, there was not a high incidence of AIDS in Liberia. Liberia had major health problems - malaria, serious malnutrition, gastrointestinal diseases, and other maladies - but AIDS was not among them. It did exist, but compared to some other places in Africa, the infection rate was low. Less than three percent of adults had HIV/AIDS.

*Q: What about other countries? Although Nigeria is at some remove, it was sort of, I would imagine, a major least English speaking country around.*

PETTERSON: Nigeria played the leading role in the West African military force, ECOMOG, and in ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States). Nigeria is by far the dominant power in West Africa because of its size and its wealth. With the advent of a better government, when Obasanjo was elected after the death of the odious General Sani Abacha, it seemed that Nigeria could deal more effectively in the Liberia-Sierra Leone situations. It was hoped that Obasanjo could exert a fatherly influence over Taylor. That appeared to be a possibility for a while, but Taylor doesn't listen to anybody for very long. He'll often say the right things when you meet with him, but then he'll continue doing what he had been doing before.

*Q: While you were there, was there much attention coming from Washington?*

PETTERSON: Yes. Because of the historical tie between Liberia and the United States, the large number of Liberians living in the United States, and the empathy of the African

American community, or segments of it, for Liberia, there was a continuing fairly high level of attention given to the Liberian problem.

*Q: Did you get much direction, instruction, that sort of thing from Washington? Or were they, sort of, you'd been around the block, you knew what you were doing, and sort of let you say, "Well, go ahead and do it."*

PETTERSON: I gave Washington my thoughts as to what we needed to do, and how I saw the situation. Certainly I got instructions, as all ambassadors do, but essentially my relationship with the State Department was one of mutual consultation. With the communications revolution having finally caught with State Department, I was able to pick up the phone and be immediately connected. Unlike my earlier days in Africa, it was now quite easy to talk with people in Washington as frequently as I needed.

*Q: You left there when, in the summer of '99, was it?*

PETTERSON: Yes.

*Q: Who took your place?*

PETTERSON: Let me explain why I stayed on so long and how that was done. After the first two months passed, the Department told me that the chargé d'affaires would not be able to return right then and asked me to stay on for another month. I agreed. Sometime during that month, I was informed that because of questions that had arisen concerning the performance of the embassy during the crisis situation, the chargé would be getting another assignment. I was asked to stay on until a new ambassador, whose processing had begun, could be confirmed by the Senate. The Department expected that this could take place by the late summer of 1999.

I wasn't keen to stay on for that length of time because I would be separated from my family again, not all that long after our two-year separation when I was in Sudan. But I felt an obligation and a responsibility, and I said I would do it. This required me to be sworn in as a Foreign Service officer again. I stayed in Liberia until July, just before the arrival of the new ambassador, Bismarck Myrick, an African specialist.

Then I went back to Washington and resigned, and that was that.

*Q: As you left, what did you think about the future of Liberia?*

PETTERSON: I could see that as long as Charles Taylor was running that country, there was little hope for Liberia. Any idea that this man would change his spots was mistaken. He simply is not a good person, and he's going to continue do whatever is necessary to maintain himself in power as long as he can, at the expense of the well-being of the Liberian people, at the expense of any possibility for a democratic system in Liberia. He continues to be in bad odor with the U.S. government and to be accused of doing the kind of things that he was doing when I was there. So, whither Liberia depends on how and

when Taylor's despotic rule can be ended, and whether decent intelligent Liberians who really care about their country - and there are many Liberians like that - can somehow form a new kind of government, a government responsive to the will of the people. That's a big question. Who knows?

But for right now, the near-term forecast is not good because Taylor is still there.

*Q: Okay, well, Don, I want to thank you very much for this. This is great.*

*There's a footnote here about Sudan. Go ahead.*

PETTERSON: In the summer of 1997, a prominent Sudanese businessman of Syrian extraction, Anise Haggar, asked another former American ambassador to Sudan, William Kontos, and me see if we could come up with ideas for improving relations between Sudan and the United States and ending the war in southern Sudan.

After touching base with the State Department - we talked with both the assistant secretary of state for African affairs and the under secretary for political affairs - to make sure that our venture would not be counter to U.S. interests, we flew to Khartoum in October. There we met with everyone we could, including President Bashir, others in the government, opponents of the government, southerners, educators, NGO representatives, business and professional people, clergymen. After a week in Khartoum, we went to Nairobi, where we talked with representatives of the rebel factions, Kenyan president Moi, UN personnel, and participants in the East African presidents' peace initiative, the so-called IGAD negotiations. Then we went back to Khartoum for a couple of days before returning to the United States.

In Washington we completed a report that included some conclusions we had reached and a set of recommendations. One of our findings was that U.S. policy toward Sudan, however well motivated it might have been, had failed to achieve its objectives. Therefore, the U.S. government should try a new approach. The two key elements of our recommendations were (1) The United States should resume a diplomatic presence in Khartoum, not only to be able to interact with the government, but also to help remedy the gaps in U.S. intelligence on Sudan by being able to report on what was going on in the country. (2) The United States should become involved on a sustained basis in a direct and intense international negotiating effort to end the war in Sudan. The United States should appoint, we believed, a special envoy, a person of international stature, to take a leading role in that effort.

Our recommendations were not adopted at that time. Within the Clinton administration, animosity toward the Sudanese government had hardened during President Clinton's second term. In particular, the African Bureau of the State Department was convinced that the Sudanese were totally dishonest in their interactions with the Americans on human rights, the war, and other issues. Having shared the frustration of dealing with the Sudanese government for three years, I could sympathize with this viewpoint. But Bill and I felt that this attitude was too rigid and was leading nowhere. We believed that

above all else in regard to Sudan, the focus should be on ending the war.

Bill and I continued our work, participating in sessions on the Sudan issue in various forums, such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the United States Institute of Peace. We met from time to time with State Department officials and others in Washington, including congresspersons, and with Sudanese. Bill and I believed that we should continue doing whatever we could to contribute to efforts to bring peace to Sudan, which is of such importance because so many people are dying-

*Q: Oh, yes.*

PETTERSON: In this terrible never-ending war in Sudan.

*Q: It's an extended war that never seems to end. It's a killing machine almost.*

PETTERSON: Yes. Bill Kontos died in March 2000. It is gratifying to see that the U.S. government has adopted recommendations that we made. A diplomatic presence is being reestablished in Khartoum. There will be no ambassador for a while, I'm sure. But the point is to have professionals on the ground in Khartoum. And the administration is on the verge of naming a special envoy for Sudan. He will, as far I know, embark on a new and intensified effort on the part of the United States to take a direct role in the peace process, which I believe is essential.

So that's the end of my postscript.

*Q: Okay. Well, thank you very much.*

*End of interview*