

MARSHALL ISLANDS

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

Anthony J. Perna	1946	Kwajalein Bomb Tests, U.S. Air Force
Samuel B. Thomsen	1987-1990	Ambassador, Marshall Islands
William Bodde, Jr.	1990-1992	Ambassador, Marshall Islands
Joan M. Plaisted	1996-2000	Ambassador, Marshall Island and Kiribati
Greta N. Morris	2003-2006	Ambassador, Marshall Islands

ANTHONY J. PERNA Kwajalein Bomb Tests: Marshall Island U.S. Air Force (1946)

Anthony J. Perna was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1918. He attended Syracuse for two years and then decided to join the Air Force in 1940. He served in the Air Force for twenty years and was involved with the nuclear weapons tests on the Bikini Atoll. In 1960 he was sent to Paris and given the Strategic Air Command post with NATO. He also served with the National War College in Washington D.C. Mr. Perna was interviewed by Francine D. Haughey in 1992.

PERNA: The war ended in August '46, the war ended in August '45 when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In January 1946, a couple months later, I joined the unit that had dropped the bomb, and I became Deputy of the 509th Composite Bomb Wing. We organized a program to go to an island called Kwajalein in the Pacific in the Marshall Islands where we set up the Bikini bomb test. The Bikini bomb test was called Operations Crossroads. This was a program to detonate a nuclear weapon under scientifically controlled and test condition. The ones we had detonated heretofore was the test one in White Sands (the first one that went off), and then the second one was the one we dropped on Hiroshima, and the third one was dropped on Nagasaki. There was no test data to speak of, so we set up this test program and dropped one from an airplane onto a target ship, the Nevada. We had a whole fleet of navy vessels, a whole bunch of army buildings, and army materiel, including guns and tanks, etc...

Q: *To be destroyed?*

PERNA: Everything to be tested, to see what happened when you dropped a nuclear weapon. We dropped from 30,000 feet. I did not fly the airplane that dropped it. I was flying an airplane around the target site and I had what we call blast gauges in my airplane. When we came down

to the point that they were going to release the bomb, I released these blast gauges. Other pilots with other bombers like mine released blast gauges and with telemetering equipment and radio transmission they were able to record the blast and the data scientifically so that they could find out at various altitudes how much intensity you had from the burst of the bomb.

Q: How far away were you from the blast?

PERNA: I was eleven miles slant range. When the bomb went off here and I was eleven miles at 28,000 feet. We wore goggles for fear of retina damage to the eyes. When the shock wave hit us the whole airplane jerked. It felt like someone took a tremendous plank and slammed it against the airplane, and this was at 11 miles.

Well, we stayed out there for the second shot which was where we put a weapon on a tower again up at the Bikini lagoon and we set it off on a tower about 200 feet above the ground.

Q: This was how much later?

PERNA: This was just a matter of weeks, a month later. We did a test in April and May, and then we came home in the summer. We had to produce all the scientific data and recording material that we had. We had a tremendous array of instrumentation from Los Alamos and from all the scientific community in America, including some of the scientific colleges. These people were under contract to the War Department and recording the data to see what would happen. We had animals, we had materiel, we had structures, we had medicines, we had everything you can think of that somebody wanted to see what were the effects of a nuclear detonation. This was a very impressive moment in my life and I was convinced when I saw the thing go off that you could never use these. Then I spent the rest of my life hauling them around as part of the deterrent against the Russians. But I was convinced when I saw that one go off that this was not the answer for mankind. But we used the threat of them as a successful deterrent.

This Kwajalein "Crossroads" duty with the 509th lasted until the summer when we got our data together, then packed up and came back to Roswell, N.M. and Washington and turned in our report. I delivered the Air Force report called "The employment of nuclear weapons by the US Air Force" to the Air Force headquarters. This was Top Secret in those days.

A lot of service politics were involved and interesting at the time. The weapons had large explosive charges put in a casing, they called them "Fatman." The Fatman was probably 5 or 6 feet high, probably 8 or 10 feet long. In the core of it was where the uranium went. This was the material that caused the fission, but to make it detonate you had to have an implosion of all the high explosives. When it exploded inward, it made the U235 go critical, and you caused the fission phenomena. The ingredients U235 capsule that went inside was controlled by the Navy. We had a Navy Admiral on board our Air Force airplane, Admiral Parsons, who was the man who had inserted it on the flight to Hiroshima. So the Air Force did not have control of the whole thing, the Navy had control of the critical ingredients of the bomb, and he had to wait until we took off, and when we got in flight ...

Q: It was inserted in flight?

PERNA: It was inserted in flight, when you were at low altitude and didn't need oxygen to get in the bomb bay to put the thing in. This was a very interesting period. We had everybody in the world out there looking at the test.

Q: *What do you mean by that?*

PERNA: Well, all kinds of foreign diplomats, allies but there were no Russians there, but we had lots of the scientific community.

Q: *This was for Bikini?*

PERNA: This was for Bikini. We had lots of Asians, and all of our European allies were there. As a Deputy of the Composite Bomb Wing that was doing it, we were deeply involved in meeting all of these people, and helping. It was an interesting time to rub shoulders with the highest level of the scientific community in America who were all out there. Teller, and you name any of them, they all went out to see the shot, and see it themselves.

SAMUEL B. THOMSEN
Ambassador
Marshall Islands (1987-1990)

Samuel B. Thomsen was born in Minnesota in 1931. After serving in the US Army from 1952-1954 he received his bachelor's degree at the University of California Los Angeles in 1956. During his career he had positions in Vietnam, Laos, Washington D.C., Botswana, Nigeria, and an ambassadorship to the Marshall Islands. Mr. Thomsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.

Q: *[You were] on the Marshall Islands from when to when?*

THOMSEN: July '87 to July '90.

Q: *When you went out there did you have an agenda of things that having dealt with this and other aspects, that you wanted to deal with during the time you there, before things sort of happened.*

THOMSEN: You know when an ambassador goes out he gets a letter of instruction from the Secretary. And what happens really, or it should happen, in my case I wrote that letter. It was essentially an agenda for the system to approve, and having approved it by getting appropriate clearance it was sent to me as an instruction. The instruction was to guarantee our access to Kwajalein, and to implement the compact. That is, to make the compact work. To have the compact establish a structure of relations which were attractive to the Marshallese, and which

advanced all our broader national interests. Integral to success was the whole issue of Kwajalein, but the basic concern was to advance their capability of being sustainable economically.

Before I went out, and again this is something that ambassadors can do before they go out, I brought together a group of academicians and entrepreneurs under INR aegis. We had an all day session at AFSA. We mainly looked for ways in which we could enhance their economy. Marine resources became the key from our point of view. Tourism was a possibility. But we really saw the ocean as the source of their economic sustainability, and tuna being the primary resource. So what I tried to advance while I was out there was to develop a tuna industry, including obtaining American style trawlers, developing Majuro as a base for all American tuna vessels, and to try to get some sort of tuna processing out there. We came very close. To answer your specific question, I did have an agenda. It was one that was carefully thought out, and vetted around government, and given to me as an instruction. I think in terms of process, I proceeded along those lines. In terms of goals, I kept Kwajalein accessible, and I did have some problems there, and we did certainly a valiant effort in tuna. I had some pretty specific goals.

Q: We'll talk about that in a minute. Could you in the first place describe when you arrived the state of...in the first place the geography of what you had to deal with, your embassy, and the people of your area?

THOMSEN: The Marshall Islands is an oceanographic area about the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. The total square miles in land is I think something less than one-third of Rhode Island. It's minuscule. It's 24 coral atolls (an atoll is a necklace, think of it as a pearl necklace with a couple of breaks in it to let water in and out) with populations ranging from 50 to 20,000. The capital being 20,000, and the smaller atoll population being maybe two or three clans. Kwajalein was the second most highly populated. But Kwajalein atoll is the largest in the world. I think probably 70 miles by 20 which gave a splash down area for intercontinental ballistic missiles of a great range. The Kwajalein military base was on two islands, U.S. Army, Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA). They had developed two islands and tied them together, and a third island in immediate proximity called Ebeye was the residence for 7,000 Marshallese, many of whom worked on Kwajalein on USAKA. USAKA was an important strategic installation for the United States. The relationship between the American military administration at USAKA and the civilian population next door was very important.

The problem I had discussed earlier was that the Marshallese still owned Kwajalein and were leasing it to us. And their leasing system was different from ours. The local chief had the authority to abrogate any lease he wanted to. That was done with some frequency among themselves, but to challenge United States government that you might break a lease was a totally situation. And that was the kind of problem I would deal with from time to time, was trying to keep a relationship going with the local leadership on Ebeye that would cause them not to carry out their various threats. Either a threat to occupy Kwajalein, which they had done once in the past, or to try in some way to bring operations to a halt. Obviously in the end we would use whatever force was needed to keep the base operating, but we obviously didn't want to have to do that, we wanted to be able to deal with them. So that kept me busy.

My relationship with the leadership in the Marshall Islands had been developed during the negotiations with congress. So we had a collegial relationship. I had developed their trust. That meant they sought my advice on issues, that they would listen to me, and I think during the three years I was there that didn't change. They often would make fairly substantial changes in policy based upon advice I would give them.

Q: Was there a Department of Interior presence still there?

THOMSEN: A Department of Interior presence had long gone. In 1979, the islanders formed their own constitution and became self-governing. I think the last of the permanent Interior presence left shortly thereafter. So by the time I got there it was seven or eight years since there had been any permanent local American presence. Interior would manage its relationship with them through that government, and by means of frequent visits from United States. There was a Trust Territory regime on Saipan that was responsible to Interior, but the Marshalls were so far away that they rarely visited. They spent a lot more time in Palau and on Saipan itself, and in the FSM. Even while I was there previously during the Trust Territory period, there wasn't very much Interior activity with the Marshalls.

Q: So you just arrived and it was already an operating system.

THOMSEN: It was already an operating system, that's a good point. They had their president, they had their parliament, and they had their ministries. They had been operating as a self-governing regime for about seven years when I got there. I wasn't helping them set up a government. The most important thing about my arrival was that I represented the State Department, and that the State Department was now who they wanted to talk to. They didn't have to talk through Interior anymore. That was really an attractive element of my arrival.

You had asked about facilities. While I was in Washington waiting for the nomination process to be completed, I designed the residence by fax with a local contractor. I placed it on the lagoon so that it looked like the prow of a ship sticking into the lagoon on concrete pillars. The same contractor had built a 13-room house out of re-enforced concrete on the highest point in the island. We sent a State Department team of communications and security officers through Micronesia in 1985 to see what was available in the way of residences and offices. This residence home was regarded as the finest structure in all of Micronesia from a State Department security point of view. After some bureaucratic complications we ended up in a beautiful facility. The residence has been enhanced as it always is. But it's still the same location with the same fabulous view. So we were able to prepare in advance.

Q: Let's talk about two major things, and then we can move to other things too. Let's first talk about tuna. How did that work out and as a paradigm for the rest of trying to establish business?

THOMSEN: Before I left Washington I had been meeting with a major agency within Commerce that has the ability to make loans to Americans to buy fishing vessels. They had agreed that for this purpose the citizen of one of the freely associated states would qualify. Within a week of my arrival a tuna boat came in from San Diego with a Portuguese-American captain, a real character. One of the first acts I performed after presenting credentials was to

board that tuna boat, introduce myself as a fellow Californian, and say welcome to Majuro. Because I was trying to attract these people. Well, we had a friendly conversation and he offered to host the president for dinner. I recruited the president and the chief secretary (the prime minister), and we came back for dinner. The crew provided a great American style steak dinner. And before the evening was over they were talking seriously and in detail about creating a consortium in the Marshall Islands and have that captain be the manager. And that subsequently occurred. The Marshallese bought that boat, it was a beauty. And they subsequently bought a second boat with the same kind of financing. The sad story is that subsequently the price of tuna went down 35% which destroyed the profit margin for them. So they had a very difficult time making their payments on the two boats. They finally sold the boats, not at a loss, but without any great profit. In the meantime though they'd learned a lot about modern tuna fishing and the tuna industry. At the same time they did start attracting tuna boats, and Majuro now is a major port for the American tuna fleet. First of all tuna is highly migratory so it may be in one part of the western Pacific one year and a totally different part the next year. But there is a lot of tuna in the vicinity of the Marshall Islands. So it is attractive for tuna boat owners, and tuna boats do fish in the Marshall Islands.

Q: What's in it for the Marshallese?

THOMSEN: The profits from selling provisions and fuel, and what is spent on shore by the tuna boat crews. There's no great additional advantage. Two tuna boat owners have almost constructed processing plants in Majuro, but different kinds of problems came up and prevented them from doing it. Among other things there's a terrible problem with water. Any low lying atoll has a terrible water storage problem. They have almost no permanent water storage. So they're dependent upon rain water, or desalinization, which is becoming more prevalent throughout the Pacific. And it would require a huge desalinization capability to provide the amount of water needed to do the traditional tuna processing. So at the end of the day the tuna effort has had mixed success. It still has potential. There's still a possibility that if the tuna price went back up, they could get back in the business.

Q: We're talking strictly about the time you were there, '87 to '90. Japanese fishing has been known as sort of predatory. They go in and they have long lines, they sweep everything up, and they process things on their own ships. I know when I went to Truk, I just flew in there, the place was loaded with Japanese fishing boats which were just on their way, and I think they had planes that were flying sushi to Japanese restaurants in Japan. It struck me that this is not a very profitable thing. I mean, these people come in, they almost deplete your fishing resources, and sort of go on their way. Did you find in your area the Japanese fishing, and the methods were a problem?

THOMSEN: Very much the same situation. I wouldn't say that they deplete. The "long-liners" which is what you're referring to, the long-liners go after the big eye and the bluefin tuna, the sushi quality tuna, which are very deep. But there aren't enough hooks in a long-liner to deplete a fishing population. What are really dangerous, and the Koreans began doing this, are some of the very fine netting that they stretch for miles. They have finally been convinced not to do that anymore. In fact the Japanese were doing it too.

The American purse seiners, these trawlers that reel out, are also pretty large scale catchers, and a fleet of ten American purse seiners in one area can take care of a large school of tuna. But the long-liners are not as dangerous as that. The problem with the Japanese is that they would try to avoid paying the various license fees that were associated, and they were pretty much self contained, and did not put much into the economy when they came in.

After I left, the Marshallese signed agreements with the Mainland Chinese. When you say that, they did not go to Beijing and sign an agreement with the government. A fishing company out of one of the coastal ports in Mainland China signed a kind of commercial agreement. And they came in. Actually they've come in with up to 100 fishing vessels at a time, and there is more money now for the Marshallese with the Chinese.

Q: But this is after your time?

THOMSEN: This is after my time. I've just read about it. Actually, I saw them on a couple of trips out there.

Q: Did you work at that time with the Marshallese, or had it already been done about a fishing zone? This, of course, was a big thing in Peru.

THOMSEN: The Marshallese and the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau, had claimed 200 mile economic zones. They claim the right to require licensing for anyone who fishes within that area. In fact all of the oceanic communities do. One of the big issues while I was out there was the Kiribati, which is the old Gilbert Islands just immediately south of the Marshall Islands, captured an American tuna boat and held it for ransom essentially. And the Americans, mainly from State and Commerce, who were working on the problem, had to travel in and out through Majuro as the fastest way in. So I got familiar with that situation. And the Marshallese would capture Japanese unlicensed vessels and hold them for up to a hundred thousand dollars.

Q: Did they have a patrol?

THOMSEN: They had two patrol boats that we had left them. One of the things I managed to do was get them a few U.S. military surplus items, and they got a couple patrol boats through that. But the Australians gave them, brand new long range patrol boats which were much more sophisticated and much more up to date. But they were also very expensive to run. They gave them the boats but they didn't give them the wherewithal to operate them. They operated them infrequently, but they have used them to stop unlicensed fishing boats within their economic zone. The FSM is much more aggressive than the Marshalls at this. I think the FSM has gotten a couple of million dollars out of the Japanese for a couple of the boats that they have held until ransomed.

Q: How about Kwajalein during your time?

THOMSEN: Kwajalein had a long and checkered history of community relations. The Defense Department has an office of community relations which has a little bit of money that it passes around wherever there are communities associated with American military bases. The same

office was able to provide some funding for the Kwajalein area, and they put a little bit of money in on community activities. The relationship would be the result of the attitude of the base commander, generally an Army Corps of Engineers colonel. I was very fortunate during my three years there; two of them were assigned and were both superb. They were both very, very willing to cooperate. First of all, all of their resources were available to me which was a real blessing. Second, they wanted me to be involved. And I would fly over for a monthly meeting, of a "community council," which was made up of five of the senior staff from the Army, a couple of the senior civilian leaders from the largest corporations, and then a dozen or so from the Marshallese community. This would be a time to vent concerns. And the Marshallese would say, you aren't providing enough jobs or we want more access to your community facilities. They could go across on barges, or on our taxis, they could go to the coffee shop without any restrictions. They wanted more access to that, and they wanted access to a few other things, and some of the things they couldn't get access to, but a few things they could. So those kinds of things were worked out. The Army started encouraging the people on Ebeye to open little curio shops on there. The American community was encouraged to go across and get to know Ebeye. Ebeye was once called in a National Geographic issue, "the slum of the Pacific." After a couple of years of a variety of efforts, including some money coming in from the Defense Department under community relations, Ebeye cleaned itself up. The Corps of Engineers went over and helped them develop some parks, built some schools. We even had a civic action engineering team that came in and spent a year next door. A lot of things happened that were very positive. In spite of which there was still labor unrest, and other problems. They all were held within reasonable bounds. Tennis was a big thing out there interestingly enough. The Kwajalein-American community used to send over a team to Majuro and they'd play a match and then have a feast of some kind. And then the Kwajalein team started coming over as a joint Ebeye-Kwajalein team. It was no longer the Americans on Kwajalein. It was the folks who were from Kwajalein, and there were some really good tennis players on Ebeye, so Kwajalein-Ebeye started beating Majuro. These were good things. In any case, by the time I left I think that the community relations aspect was quite strong.

There was another problem though. And that is that Army regulations, or I guess Defense Department regulations, give American companies a 15% advantage over any foreign company in bidding on a military construction project. The compact of Free Association explicitly says that Marshallese, or Micronesian companies, would be encouraged to be involved in construction with American firms. The Corps of Engineers would not recognize the compact, and continually allowed American construction companies to overbid Marshallese companies for construction on Kwajalein. And because one of the Micronesian contractors was a close friend of the president, this became a political issue.

By the time I had left, that Marshallese company was in the final bidding process for a multistory apartment building on Kwajalein worth several million dollars. I had asked legal experts from the Defense Department to have conversations with the Corps of Engineers people, to explain to them that this was legally the right way to go. But finally, that was one of the single successes, finally the Marshallese contractor, who happened to be an American citizen, but who was employing Marshallese subcontractors and employees and they were good, was going to get the contract. This again marked a major change in the relationship. One of moving toward real equality and cooperation. I felt good about that, and I felt good when I left that pretty much I had

met the objectives of my original agenda. Our relations were good, the compact was working. There were problems on the tuna side, although the tuna boats were still operating. But things were going in the right direction. It was my last assignment, so we came to the end of a career.

Q: You can really look back on something, by God, you've done something. One issue, what was your impression of the government that you dealt with?

THOMSEN: First of all, the president was the grandson of the great high chief who had managed the takeover by Germany at the end of the 19th century. Kabua, the president who just died, was the strong traditional, authoritarian leader. He was a bright guy; he'd been educated by the Navy. He was a teenager during the war. One evening on Kwajalein, he told the story of what happened when the United States came in. He helped load bombs on American planes. As soon as we came in, he was there trying to beat the Japanese. He was the father figure for the country. He was always elected by the largest number of votes of anyone. He was a very strong leader, very much revered and admired by the people. So he was able to act as a cohesive force.

Most of the ministers were young, in their late 20s and 30s. Self-governance was a whole new concept for them. They soon learned, and I don't how, maybe by rubbing shoulders with other governments, but they soon learned the elements of corruption.

And they're not very efficient. I guess I should also say that. It's an inefficient bureaucracy. They have a few strong leaders who get things done. The chief secretary, who I have mentioned a couple of times, was really a straight arrow. He was what he called "U.S. Navy trained." He had worked for the U.S. Navy for a long time, and he really was a capable administrator. And when he was the chief secretary, he could keep his finger on the ministers because they were all younger than he was. And when he finally retired, they all gave sighs of relief because they were now out from under his control.

On balance, the three years in Majuro were a perfect conclusion to a varied career. I was able to use the knowledge, skills, and experience acquired around the world. My wife, Judy, enjoyed the lifestyle and the many friends she made there. She started a small bible-study, which continues to this day- light years after our departure. My only regret is that we were not able to find the key to a viable economy for a tiny island community isolated in the middle of the Pacific.

WILLIAM BODDE, JR.
Ambassador
Marshall Islands (1990-1992)

William Bodde was born in Brooklyn and raised in Long Island. He served in the US Army in Korea and attended Hofstra College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1962 and served in Austria, Sweden, and German. He was also ambassador to Fiji, Tuvalu, Tonga and the Marshall Islands and served as EE/MP to Kiribati. Ambassador Bodde was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Today is the 8th of March, 1999. Bill, we're off to the Marshalls, but first you've got to say how this came about and then explain what the Marshalls are.

BODDE: The Marshall Islands are one of the three Freely Associated States that are part of Micronesia. I have described Micronesia and the origins of the Freely Associated States when we talked about my time as director of Pacific islands affairs. Originally the Department did not plan to appoint ambassadors to the Freely Associated States. When we opened our missions in Micronesia they were headed by chiefs of mission but later the posts were upgraded to embassies. In 1990, I was here happily ensconced in FSI as the dean of the Senior Seminar, which is normally a two or three year assignment. But about halfway through my first year, Ken Hill, the senior assignments chief, called and asked me if I wanted to be on the list of candidates for ambassador to the Marshall Islands? I told him the embassy in Majuro was smaller than the embassy I ran 15 years ago. He said he knew that but he thought it was a good idea to keep my name in front of the ambassadors committee.

By coincidence, I had been asked by Jim Morton to address the graduating class of the Micronesian diplomatic training program. The U.S. was obligated under the Compacts to give diplomatic training for the Freely Associated States. After the ceremony I talked with Sam Thomson, who had been the first chief of mission in the Marshall Islands. He told me that things had changed a lot since I had been there in 1983 but that they still needed help in developing their economy. I thought to myself why not go out there and see if you can help. I had experience working with the developing Pacific island states and I know the President and many of the key players. After all, President Kabua and I were friends going back to the status negotiations. We should be able to work together and help the country develop economically. It was a mistake for a number of reasons. First, you should never go backwards in your career. Secondly, the Marshallese were not interested in advice, they just wanted us to give them more money. And most importantly, I hadn't really considered what my wife thought about the whole idea.

When I made up my mind to go, I simply ignored the signals my wife was sending me, by body language and whatever. She really was trying to tell me, without saying so, that she didn't want to go there. We had been back in Washington for four years, which was the longest period in our career in one place. She had settled in, but she was an old-fashioned Foreign Service wife. That is, she was ready to go with me to any post if I thought was good for my career.

We went to the Marshalls and we were both disappointed. The place was even smaller than I remembered and the huge amount of Compact money had corrupted the leaders and the society. I spent two years trying to convince them to be reasonable and invest in the country's future. They were spending the money like drunken sailors. They had an airline flying to Hawaii three times a week that was draining the budget. They went from one crazy scheme to another. The leaders were getting rich and malnutrition, social diseases, and diabetes plagued the society. The health and education systems were in shambles. As I told a congressional committee, we did more harm with the money than with the nuclear bombs we tested there.

The U.S. is renegotiating the Compacts of Free Association with the Marshalls and the Federated States of Micronesia. The U.S. has given the Marshall Islands almost one billion dollars over the last 13 years. That's for a country with about 50,000 inhabitants. Economically and socially the

place is a basket case. How could that happen? Well, it happened because the U.S. did not provide oversight nor did we require accountability. We were worried about being accused of being neo-colonialists.

We spent two years in Majuro and my wife had health problems, so I was ready to come back after two years. When I told the Department that I wanted to come back, at first the Department was surly about it: "Well, you've only been there two years," and so on. So I said, "Well, my wife has been medically evacuated three times, and I think we had better leave. I came back, and a friend of mine, Dick Smith, who was the principal DAS, got me a job in the Office of Environment and Science and Technology. Actually it was pretty interesting, and I basically figured it would be my last job before I retired.

Q: I want to go back to the time you were in the Marshalls.

BODDE: Yes, sure.

Q: What type of government did they have, and what was your role there?

BODDE: The Republic of the Marshall Islands has a democratically elected, single-house legislature. The president is elected by the parliament. In point of fact, the president was also the highest-ranking, traditional chief of the Marshalls. The Pacific island cultures have found a way to accommodate their traditional chiefly system with democracy. They usually elect their paramount chief as president or prime minister. So things go on pretty much the way they did before the introduction of democracy. However, this solution invariably leads to conflict when the president or the prime minister is challenged or criticized by the opposition. How could anyone dare oppose the paramount chief with all his or her mystical and religious powers? So there is a basic conflict between traditional power and democracy.

Amata Kabua was president when I was there and he died a few years ago. As the country's first president he proceeded to do the kinds of things that many Third World leaders do. He enriched himself, his relatives and his cronies. He gave his ego full reign. He created a national airline. The airline could actually pay for itself if its operations were confined within the islands of the Marshalls and maybe a weekly flight to its nearest neighbor, Kiribati. For ego reasons, Kabua wanted a national airline that would fly three times a week between Majuro and Honolulu. Every time the leased plane flew to Hawaii and back it caused a \$40,000 deficit in the budget. You don't have to do that too often before it runs into real money. After Amata Kabua died, his cousin, Imata Kabua, who was more corrupt and much more inept as a leader, replaced him.

My role as an ambassador? Maybe I had false expectations that it would be somewhat more than the usual bilateral ambassador. I expected to do the normal job of representing United States interests and reporting on developments that affected the U.S. However, I also thought I might help as an unofficial advisor on development questions to the Republic of the Marshalls (RMI). I had certainly more experience than anybody did in the RMI government. I found out very quickly that this was fine as long as I did whatever they wanted done. We ran into a serious clash when the RMI came up with the brilliant scheme of increasing income by selling passports. Under this free association agreement any Marshallese can enter and work in the United States

without a visa. To protect ourselves we included a clause in the Compact that if you were a naturalized citizen of the RMI, you had to spend at least five years in residence in the Marshalls before you could enter the U.S. on a Marshallese passport. Well, they were selling the passports primarily to Asians who were not interested in living in the Marshalls for five years.

Q: Iranians too, weren't they?

BODDE: Mostly they were Asians. To start they sold eight of them. At first they wanted a million dollars each but they had to reduce their prices. That still added up to a lot of money and over time millions of dollars that were allegedly paid for Marshallese passports have disappeared. The foreign minister and other RMI officials came to see me after they sold the first eight passports to Chinese people. I told the Marshallese government that these people couldn't enter the United States on Marshallese passports. They don't fulfill the residency requirements in the Compact. I also told them that I would have to notify Hawaii and other ports of entry to be on the lookout. The foreign minister asked me not to do that but I told them that I was obligated to do so under U.S. law. I told him I represented the United States Government and I took an oath to uphold the law.

Earlier, I had tried to convince President Kabua not to go down that path. I said to the President, "Imata, you can give away your passports, you can award them to people, you can even sell them, but you can't sell entry to the United States." I warned him that when a country cheapened its passport it becomes known as a sleazy country that doesn't care about its reputation. Well, my arguments made no impression at all and personal relations between us became very cool.

In the normal course of my duties I spent most of my time on three things. One was issues arising from the U.S. Army missile range at Kwajalein. Before we had an ambassador in the Marshalls the American colonel in charge of the base was independent. I had to bring him under my authority and to keep him from doing things that were likely to have negative political consequences. We had to make sure that the military lived up to what we had agreed to in the Compact of Free Association. For instance, we had agreed that revenues from the civilian telephones on Kwajalein should go to the RMI. All the Americans on Kwajalein used the military lines free of charge. We had to convince the colonel to see that revenue from pay phones on the base went to the RMI. Another time the military wanted to use spent uranium on the dummy warheads to give them more realistic weight. They said it was not dangerous and no one in the Marshalls would ever know about it. Right! Anyone who believes that is very naïve. I vetoed the idea because our nuclear testing had already complicated U.S.-Marshall Islands relations. The RMI is a place where we have a nuclear history. We tested our nuclear weapons, including the hydrogen bomb, in the '50s and '60s in Bikini and other islands. That's why the name bikini is a household name, because it's a girl's abbreviated bathing suit. The "explosive" bathing suit was named from the Bikini test.

Q: The Bikini tests, you're right, yes.

BODDE: In the course of testing we radiated a Japanese fishing crew and a number of Marshallese on some of the islands. We are rightfully paying hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation to the victims for that. Can you imagine how this country, which is hypersensitive

to anything nuclear, would react when they found we were using spent uranium in the dummy warheads? The one thing, Stu, you and I know from our business is that nothing remains secret forever. We had a lieutenant colonel on the embassy staff, Frank Moore, whose job was to liaise with Kwajalein. More was a very bright guy and since has made a brilliant second career in the computer business. Dealing with the Kwajalein problems made the job more interesting than it would have been if we were just another embassy in a small country.

Another area that involved the embassy was dealing with the unique issues arising from the Compact of Free Association. The compact is a very long and complex legal document. Interpreting and implementing the obligations on both sides took up a lot of the embassy's time. Finally, there was the usual workload of an embassy: political and economic reporting; representing U.S. interests; consular work, and persuading the RMI to vote with us on issues in the UN and other international organizations.

But it was not a happy two years. We met some very nice Marshallese and we had some good friends. The big game fishing was fantastic and sitting on the deck watching the beautiful sunsets over the lagoon had its moments. But it was basically watching a welfare-mentality society grow more and more greedy and more demanding.

Q: What about the Japanese? Were the Japanese working fishing rights and sort of cleaning out the waters or not?

BODDE: Yes, the Japanese gave some aid but they did not have a resident ambassador. For my first year there I was the only resident ambassador but then the PRC opened an embassy. The Japanese consul general in Guam covered Micronesia. Japan did a lot of fishing in that part of the Pacific but so did Taiwan, the PRC and Korea, not to mention the U.S. The Marshalls became a member of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Agency, and gained considerable income from licensing foreign vessels. The problem was that the Japanese insisted on bilateral agreements and by paying off powerful Marshall islanders they avoided paying the full price to the RMI government.

Q: One of the hardest things here is to deal with the problem of corruption, particularly when it's corruption with our money, essentially. How would you do it? One, would you be reporting this back? And if you did, what was the reaction you'd be getting from Washington?

BODDE: Yes, I would report it back in general terms, but I didn't get any reaction from Washington. I didn't have legal proof that would stand up in court but that could have been attainable if the U.S. Government pursued it. We certainly reported the waste but got no reaction. The basic problem was that the Interior Department was not auditing the expenditure of the Compact funds. We have the right to review the RMI's development plans but it was not done. When I reported back the case of an Australian who came to Majuro with a scheme to sell passports and establish a training college and garment factories that would use foreign labor. In other parts of Micronesia similar facilities make clothes, mostly with imported Chinese labor, under harsh labor conditions. There are such sweatshops producing Ralph Lauren and other well-known brands in the Northern Marianas and Yap. Under the Compact these products have free entry into the United States. Not only do these sweatshops exploit labor but very little of the

money finds its way into the local economy. A few local people make a deal with the company and get rich.

Well, this Australian con man came to Majuro to work out a deal. He paid the representative of the Marshalls who was negotiating with him a \$50,000 consultant fee. When President Kabua told me about it, he said he was offered \$50,000 too. He said that he told them they could go to hell unless they gave him a million dollars! The idea that the person who was negotiating for the government should be paid a consultant fee by the person he was negotiating with did not seem to him to be a conflict of interest. Eventually the Australian had a falling out with his Marshallese buddies and he was arrested. He paid a fine and left.

Don't get me wrong. I didn't know of any cases of an American company that was violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act or I would have reported it to the FBI office in Hawaii. My main concern was the way the Marshalls were squandering the Compact funds, which were provided by the American taxpayer. As I said, we didn't hold them accountable and just gave them the money. By the way, Micronesia ranks as a recipient of U.S. financial assistance, on *per capita* basis, right after Israel and Egypt.

Q: Oh, really.

BODDE: We have given Micronesia over \$2 billion dollars over 15 years. It was not administered through AID but by the Interior Department. When Congress passed the Compact of Free Association Act, Interior officials told Congress that they would need extra people to administer the funds. The State Department opposed extra money for Interior and they didn't get any help for overseeing Compact funding and nobody did it. By the way, the reason that control of the Compact funding for Micronesia remained in Interior had to do with a power struggle in Congress. The committee that had oversight responsibility for these islands when they were part of the U.S.-administered trusteeship didn't want to turn over power to the foreign relations committee. They kept Micronesia in the Interior budget where they had control. But Interior didn't do anything. Interior was supposed to assign a person to the embassy staff in Majuro. I insisted that this person report to the ambassador. I showed them the President's letter outlining the Ambassador's authority. I told them that the person could report to the Interior Department as well, but he or she could not be independent. Interior wouldn't agree so they refused to send anybody to serve on the embassy staff. To make matters worse I got very poor support from the Department. Dick Solomon like most assistant secretaries for East Asia and Pacific affairs was not interested in the islands. He was primarily interested in China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia.

Ambassador Aurelia Brazeal in the Federated States of Micronesia and I used the South Pacific Forum meetings in Ponape to meet with Assistant Secretary Solomon and press our case. Dick Solomon is a good guy, but he just wasn't interested in the Islands. Our deputy assistant secretary was not very strong and our country director was very weak. I can tell you, in those inter-departmental battles, you need somebody back in Washington to carry your water or you're in trouble. So we got little support from Washington.

Q: Well, what about Congress or the media or something? I would have thought that, you know, we're talking about money and you're talking about, waste, fraud and mismanagement. Wasn't it a scandal the way the money was being wasted and all? I would have thought that somebody from the media or a staffer from Congress would come and kick over some pails.

BODDE: Well, Congress was not interested in doing much because the people who were in charge of the islands, and their staffers, weren't interested in rocking the boat. They had been passing out congressional pork for years and they were not going to change. One staffer, Al Stamen, who is now the State Department chief for the Compact renegotiations, was quite good, but in general the Hill was not really interested in going after the Micronesians. It wasn't just Congress because there were many people in the executive branch who were just as happy to have things continue the way they had in the past. Once we tried to get a fix on how many federal programs were active in Micronesia. We were unable to get a final count but it was huge.

I am sorry if I sound like some sort of right-wing conservatives, but there's a whole American bureaucracy working on the islands that is interested in perpetuating these programs. At the very least the programs provide these bureaucrats with an annual visit to the islands. They get out the suntan lotion and bathing suit, put on a Hawaiian shirt, and go out to the islands. They spend a couple of days. The government takes them fishing and throws a tropical luau and the bureaucrats from headquarters think everything is great. They don't want to see these programs ever end. Whether they're effective or ineffective doesn't matter.

When auditors from various federal agencies came out they would look at the books and find them in such bad condition that they really couldn't tell what happened. The Marshallese in charge would tug on his forelock and say, "Oh, we're really sorry, we're just poor islanders. We've been trying. Just give us a break and we'll get these books in shape, and the next time you come back, we will be able to account for every penny." The bureaucrats go home with the promise that next time things would be different. Next time when the auditor came it would be the same but again there would be no penalty. It would work every time.

The responsible congressmen and staff weren't interested in changing things because they liked to go out there on trips, too. In their case they liked to play the big brother. You'd say, "We don't need this program. This program is a waste of money." I'll give you an example of what would happen, starting in the TTPI (Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands) days that set the stage for problems after free association. Congress passed a law providing grants to build hospitals in rural areas. Congress would tack on the American territories and the TTPI along with the 50 states.

They build a hospital to U.S. standards in Majuro, the capital of the Marshalls. It had five dialysis machines and other equipment that wasn't needed and could never be maintained. In the Federated States, they build hospitals in places that could not provide enough electricity to keep them running. The programs permitted little or no flexibility so the money was wasted. The kind of hospital you build in Nashville is not the kind of hospital you ought to build on a tiny island far from everywhere.

Q: No doctor would go out there.

BODDE: It's hard to get doctors. The U.S. Public Health Service assigned four doctors and a dentist to Majuro where they did an excellent job. But the Marshalls' government would use money from their budget for health care to send well-connected patients up to Hawaii for treatment. Yet every month they'd run out of penicillin and other basic drugs. The RMI did bring in some contract doctors from the Philippines. Generally the strategy of the Marshall Islands was to wait for Uncle Sam to provide whatever they needed. It created a self-destructive, spoiled child mentality.

I remember a meeting with the Micronesians during the status negotiations after I'd been to the Cook Islands. I told them that the premier of the Cook Islands, Dr. Tom Davis, had found an economical way to communicate with the outer Cook Islands. Davis was an exceptional Pacific islands leader. A New Zealand trained medical doctor, he went on to do postdoctoral study at Harvard Medical School and worked in the American space program. He has a real grasp of technical problems. Anyhow I told the Micronesians that Dr. Davis had found an off-the-shelf radio system in California for 10,000 dollars. Their response was, "We don't want any lousy 10,000 dollar radio system; we want our own satellite."

When I came back from my tour as ambassador, I called a meeting at the Department for all interested government agencies involved in the Marshall Islands. I gave them a straightforward, unvarnished this-is-how-it-is out-there talk. I don't think I made much of an impression. After I retired I was asked to testify before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Asia and Pacific. The committee was holding hearings about whether the U.S. should sign the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone treaty. When I was DAS in EUR we successfully opposed the signing of the treaty by the U.S. The reason was our nuclear cooperation with the French, but now the French were about to stop testing and had announced that they were going to sign the treaty. There was no longer a valid reason for the U.S. not to become a party to the treaty and I testified so. I used that opportunity to give a frank assessment of the situation in the Marshall Islands. Basically, my argument was that we tested there without the permission or approval of the people. We just did it. We radiated some of them, and some of them were forced to relocate to other islands. We therefore had an obligation to compensate the victims and otherwise assist them. I went on to say that, inadvertently, we had done more harm with the Compact money than with the bombs. I pointed out the miserable social, health, and economic situation and the widespread corruption. Well, the first person to pick up on my testimony was one of the American lawyers who represented the Bikinians. He was particularly sensitive to my comment that the American taxpayer would be unhappy that the Bikinians often held their village council meetings in Las Vegas. Somewhat later they got wind of my testimony in Majuro, and they passed a resolution in the *Nitijela*, which is their parliament, declaring me *ex post facto persona non grata* unless I apologized. So I've been PNGed from the Marshalls. I don't know if the new reform government in the RMI would ban me but I have no plans to go back in the foreseeable future.

Q: How they were using all sorts of American money to basically travel to the United States and back. I mean, Continental Airlines, when I was there, was absolutely full, and the cost of the ticket is so expensive that there has to be something. I know the Micronesians are supposed to be great navigators and they love to travel, but Uncle Sam is paying their way. Did you find that travel was sort of one of the major expenses?

BODDE: Oh, sure. They would fly to Hawaii at the drop of a hat. Many of the politicians owned condos or houses in Hawaii. In addition to his Hawaii apartment, Amata Kabua had a place at a luxury resort in Fiji. No wonder that they use their limited funds for health care flying the well-connected people up for treatment in Hawaii.

Q: And their family with them.

BODDE: Sure, and if they're a chief's family or something, then it would be not just the immediate family but their extended family too. That's absolutely right. By the way, the Federated States takes the diplomatic training program much more seriously than the government does in the Marshalls. The RMI has sent most of President Kabua's children to Washington for the course. They sent one daughter who owns and manages a disco and when I was there they tried to send the winner of a beauty queen contest.

The Federated States have actually made better use of the program. On balance, the Federated States has been somewhat more sensible than the Marshalls, but they too have spent much of the Compact funds unwisely. The primary problem was that the money was spent to expand the government and thus provide employment for friends and family. The money was not used to create wealth by encouraging entrepreneurs. For the most part the economy of the Marshall Islands has consisted of recirculating the money from the Compact and not creating any wealth. They spent very little of it on promoting economic development.

Q: This 1990-92 period was interesting in that by this time the Soviet Union had fallen apart and one of our big concerns had been denial of access; I think that was our major foreign policy there, keep the Soviets from establishing a base. That was gone very obviously by the time you were there. And we weren't particularly concerned about the Chinese establishing a base. Maybe in the future that might become something. So did you find that the absence of even this, which was at least something, really took their whole raison d'être out of the business.

BODDE: Yes, the value of strategic denial declined with the end of the Cold War, but the importance of the missile testing range in Kwajalein remained. In fact, if the United States is going ahead with the development of an anti-missile defense system, it is likely to be even more important in the future.

To rap up the discussion of the Marshall Islands let me describe an evening with President Kabua shortly before I left. I had decided to leave the Marshalls after two years and this last encounter with President Kabua confirmed the wisdom of that decision. Ingrid and I were invited to a dinner in honor of the visiting Korean ambassador. A man who had just been indicted for drug dealing catered the dinner. It was held in a partially constructed building that the Marshalls Government was to rent after it was finished. The owner and the man who constructed the building was a Korean businessman who formed a partnership with the president's son, who was the foreign secretary. The Korean later fled the country leaving a trail of bad debts. The Korean's girlfriend, who owned a "B-girl bar" in Hawaii, provided the entertainment.

President Kabua arrived two hours late to show his displeasure with Korea because a Korean fishing boat had been caught fishing in Marshallese waters without a license. The food was cold

and wilted and the mood sour. Kabua was in high dudgeon when he arrived and still angry that I wouldn't go along with his passport scheme. He immediately lashed out and said it was a good thing that I was leaving. As far as he was concerned, I was no longer a friend of the Marshall Islands. I thought back on the time when he said we could become rich together in a scheme to use Bikini to store nuclear waste. At the time I told him I came into government service without any money and I expected to leave the same way. He said the U.S. Army commander on Kwajalein and I opposed Marshall Islands economic development. He went on to express his unhappiness with me in general and claimed that I had instructed the U.S. Public Health Service doctors at the hospital to give white expatriates preference over the Marshallese patients. I denied his accusations, which were ludicrous, and we left the dinner shortly afterwards.

Not all of my experiences in the Marshalls were so negative. There were many Marshallese and resident Americans who were appalled by the social and health problems they saw around them. They, too, were disgusted with the squandering of Compact funds. Some ran as opposition candidates. Others devoted their efforts to non-government projects such as educating young Marshallese about ways to solve the desperate health and social issues. Other just tried to do their best to make the Marshall Islands government work better. Marshallese women were more impressive than the men. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that the Marshalls are a matrilineal society. In the Marshallese culture rank and land was inherited through the mother and not through the father. One woman senior official was so good that every time she was moved from one ministry to another, the performance of the one she left noticeably declined and the one she joined noticeably improved. Some of the brightest and most ethical Marshallese and Americans left RMI government service because they could not condone what was going on. There are many good people in the Marshalls who know that changes in country's priorities are desperately needed. In 1999 a reform government was elected and it is trying to turn things around. The question is will the voters give them time to do it.

It's taken us a long time to move away from the Cold War mentality and it continues to this day. We still have a strategic interest, particularly if the U.S. is going to build an anti-missile system. Even if we did not want to remain in Kwajalein it would not be in our interest to have China testing missiles there. So in that sense strategic denial still is valid. These are arguments for renegotiating the Compacts when their time runs out. The Marshallese know they have a real bargaining chip in Kwajalein and they will use it.

At first the RMI recognized Taiwan and there was a Taiwanese aid program. Then they recognized the PRC and got some aid and most likely there were some payoffs to key people. The Chinese put an ambassador in Majuro. Last year the RMI reversed itself and the Marshalls once again recognized Taiwan. There have been accusations of big payoffs to Marshallese politicians to bring about the switch. Based on past performance there is good reason to believe they are true

Q: Oh, yes.

BODDE: But the denial argument. It's very interesting now because as we gin up for the new negotiations, denial should not be a major factor, because who are we denying it against? But

Congress may still be in the denial mode. And the Marshallese will play Kwajalein to the hilt because they know it would cost a fortune to move that facility somewhere else.

Q: Well, then in '92, you came back, getting ready to be precluded from ever going back to the Marshall Islands.

BODDE: That happened after I retired, and I have no plans to go back to the Marshall Islands.

JOAN M. PLAISTED
Ambassador
Marshall Islands (1996-2000)

Ambassador Joan M. Plaisted was born in 1958 in Minnesota. She attended America University and received both her Bachelor's and Master's Degree. Her postings abroad include Paris, Hong Kong, Geneva, Rabat and Marshall Island as Ambassador. Ambassador Plaisted was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 30, 2001.

Q: You were ambassador to the Marshalls from when to when?

PLAISTED: And also to Kiribati for an exceedingly long time. I went out to post in early February of '96 and left in July, it was July 14, 2000. So I was out in the Marshall Islands serving as ambassador for 4 ½ years. Tours are usually three years; I was our longest serving ambassador in Asia. Even then when I did leave, my successor still hadn't been confirmed, and it was a little unclear if I should leave or not. I finally just got on the plane. Am I supposed to come back or not? I had things scheduled and couldn't reach anyone at the higher levels. I was sort of getting conflicting advice from the State Department. The East Asia bureau told me you had better stay until you talk to the assistant secretary. I think we want you to stay on. The personnel bureau in July of 2000 said it was all right. You can leave. I finally said I am getting on the plane. My successor didn't get out to post until about six months later.

Q: Well, let's talk about the Marshall Islands. What is the name of the capital?

PLAISTED: It is Majuro.

Q: What does that mean?

PLAISTED: It is just the name, the geographic name of the particular island. It's the name of the atoll where the capital is located.

Q: What was America's role there when you got there in '96? And to Kiribati, we will cover that separately. Let's stick with the Marshall Islands.

PLAISTED: To explain America's role, I should probably go back a little bit historically on the Marshall Islands. Our first contact was when American whalers and missionaries first arrived in the 19th century. You saw Germany, Russia, and Spain all competing for influence in these south sea islands. The Marshall Islands in 1885 came under German administration. Then after WW I, Japan administered the Marshall Islands under a League of Nations mandate. WW II really saw the Americans coming in force. There were very important WW II battles, bloody battles that were fought on Kwajalein and Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. At the end of the war the Marshall Islands became a U.S. strategic trust territory under the United Nations. After 1947 the U.S. administered the Marshall Islands as a U.S. strategic trust territory. We conducted a series of nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958. This was at the very height of the Cold War.

As part of the preparation of the Marshalls for self governance, by 1979 they had elected their own president, the first president of the Marshall Islands who was still president when I first arrived. That was Amata Kabua who was the father of the Marshall Islands. It was originally thought that the territories in the Pacific that the U.S. administered - Palau, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and also the northern Marianas - would stay together. Instead the Marshalls, particularly Amata Kabua, led a movement in the '70s to break the Marshalls away from the rest of the trust territory. In 1978 the U.S. sponsored a referendum and the Marshallese voted to become an independent entity themselves, separate from Micronesia and Palau. Then in 1979 the first president was elected. In 1991 the United Nations formally recognized the end of U.S. responsibility for administering the Marshall Islands. In 1992 the Marshall Islands gained recognition as a UN member. That just explains our very close historic ties as the former trustee with the Marshall Islands.

The main U.S. interests today in the Marshall Islands are strategic interests. The agreement that we reached with the Marshall Islands is called the Compact of Free Association. Under this agreement the U.S. is responsible for the defense and security of the Marshall Islands. We have on Kwajalein a very important missile testing and space tracking U.S. army facility. Security interests in the Marshall Islands are paramount. Secondly, under the Compact, we talk about the U.S. supporting the Marshallese efforts to move toward economic self sufficiency. It is very much in our interest to promote their efforts toward economic self sufficiency, the long term economic development of the Marshall Islands. Thirdly our interest there is trying to get a government that is really devoted to transparency, accountability, good governance, and real democratic parliamentary elections. Finally, in terms of the embassy, the U.S. had an important interest to protect American citizens in the Marshall Islands.

Q: What was the embassy like?

PLAISTED: It was a very small embassy. I had managed embassies with very large staffs, 665 people in Morocco and 370 people in Taiwan. This is the first time in my life I had ever served in such a small embassy. It was really a shock to see the small size of the staff. We had a total of some 16 people, counting the gardener and my household help. In terms of major staff members we had the ambassador, the deputy chief of mission, and my office manager/secretary. A couple of times I was fortunate enough to select an office manager/secretary who was so competent she could work as a third officer because we truly needed someone to help with some of the

substantive work. We had a locally hired military advisor who was an anthropologist by background. The regional administrative officer I shared with the ambassador to Micronesia. We would get very junior not very well trained administrative officers, and they would spend most of their time off island attending administrative conferences. The one time we had somebody on temporary duty who was actually well-trained, a retired FSO-1, it was the difference between night and day. He actually knew what he was doing. He not only was able to do the work of a regular administrative officer, but also able to train the staff and give them direction because he came to the job with the substance. It was a very small embassy.

I was doing things I hadn't done since I was a junior officer. Our Assistant Secretary was coming for the South Pacific forum meeting. The deputy chief of mission, Don Ahern, never got sick. He had been a pilot in the air force and was trained never to be sick because then you can't fly. Right before the Assistant Secretary's visit, Don came down with a horrible flu and really couldn't come to the embassy. So I ended up writing all the briefing papers. I was very pleased to see I could still write briefing papers.

Just keeping the embassy up and running could have taken all my time. I had to constantly remind myself there are more important policy issues to deal with. I would go in on a weekend to write a think piece and water would start streaming from the ceiling because of the poor maintenance of the building. I had to take care of the water leak first. I think Washington had no idea how difficult it really was just to run a small isolated post. We were one of the last posts to ever get E-mail. Both our classified and unclassified communications systems would go out periodically. Telephones would go out. There were times it was sort of nice not to be in touch with Washington, so I am not completely complaining about Washington not being able to contact us for days or weeks on end, but it was quite frustrating to have the communication systems going out so often. We were trying to get a classified fax machine, which seemed to be beyond Washington's capabilities. So just administering a small embassy really was much more of a task than I ever imagined it would be.

Security issues were always coming up. After the very tragic bombings of the embassies in East Africa, we received instructions the Department was finally going to carry out the recommendations in the Inman report. (Retired Admiral Bobby Inman had chaired the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security.) One was the embassy should be set back 150 feet from the major road. Another was to close off the road in front of the embassy. I went in with a cable back to the Department that was apparently quoted by the Secretary of State on the seventh floor which said, "If we are going to set back this embassy 150 feet, that is going to put us out over the ocean which the staff might rather like. We can fish at lunch time." There was only one main road on the island that passed right in front of the embassy. Closing this off would cut the town's access to the airport. Another directive that came out was to have 24 hour surveillance. Unless Washington was going to bring in teams, and they weren't talking about this, there is nobody trained in 24 hour surveillance, and we are not going to be able to train people. We had difficulty training the local guards to stay awake at night. There was another recommendation to install highly sophisticated bomb detection equipment in the entryway of all our embassies. Again, who is going to maintain this equipment in the embassy? We just didn't have the capabilities to do this. At the same time as ambassador, I didn't want to go in with the definitive message saying we refuse to take the highly sensitive bomb detection equipment, and

then have the embassy bombed shortly thereafter. You don't want to be in the position of turning down some of these innovations. I just felt that diplomatic security did not have a good understanding of the true security needs of a small embassy. Kids would break in and steal computer equipment in the Marshall Islands. We had alarms on the windows, but the contact points would keep falling off in a humid island environment. I kept asking for a little alarm you could buy at Radio Shack that you put on the ceiling. It is a motion detector you set at night. That would be enough to scare little mini robbers away who might break into the embassy at night. That wasn't on the approved list of equipment so we never could have a simple motion detector. The administrative issues really were a challenge, just trying to keep the little post up and running and trying to keep the morale of the staff up too because it was such a small staff. We were so isolated. People had to get off the island.

Q: Oh, yes. With these security concerns, did the Department of State take into account that we have got a bunch of different posts? Yours was one of the smallest but others were the same caliber. Did Washington say let's send out a security team to go out and come up with recommendations on what can and can't be done or were they trying to do this all from Washington?

PLAISTED: I think they were trying to do it from Washington. That was one of my recommendations, one of my swan song cables when I left the Marshall Islands. I certainly recommended earlier too to the department that the diplomatic security bureau look specifically at the needs of some of these small posts which are quite different from the needs of Embassy Paris or Embassy Morocco.

Q: How do you get there?

PLAISTED: You have to stay overnight in Honolulu if you are coming from the continental U.S. From Honolulu there were flights three to five days a week depending on the season to the Marshall Islands. It is a direct flight once you get to Honolulu, stay overnight, and continue on Continental Airlines for a 5 ½ hour flight.

Q: What was the Marshall Islands' government like? How did you deal with it?

PLAISTED: During my time there were three different presidents of the Marshall Islands. It was always a parliamentary government with 33 senators, who in turn elected the president. The president had quite a bit of the power, particularly the first president of the Marshall Islands who was still there when I arrived, Amata Kabua. Amata Kabua and the second president who was his cousin, Imata Kabua, were both hereditary traditional Marshallese chieftains. So you are dealing with the tribal chief. The third president was Kasai Note. For the first time in the history of the Marshall Islands, a commoner was elected president. That ended the rule of the traditional chiefs in the Marshall Islands. I can characterize the presidents if you would like me to.

Q: Yes, I would.

PLAISTED: The first president, Amata Kabua, was really revered by his people. He was the George Washington of the Marshall Islands. He was the father of his country. He had a

background as a secondary school teacher which in Marshallese parlance means he was one of the better educated people on island. He had been very active in the congress of Micronesia. He was the one who really led the movement for the Marshall Islands to split away from the rest of the trust territory. That is how they all became independent countries out there - the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau.

Q: What was the genesis of wanting to split?

PLAISTED: I think in his mind he thought the Marshall Islands was so much more valuable because they had the U.S. army base on Kwajalein. They would be so much more valuable to the U.S. separately, as a separate country, than they would be linked with Micronesia and Palau. The people supported him in the referendum. Later the northern Marianas voted for commonwealth status. As a commonwealth they became U.S. citizens and had certain other rights, too. I had many people in the Marshall Islands come up to me and say, do you think we could have another referendum? I think they were implying that given the choice today, they would have opted for commonwealth status. And that was one of their original choices.

In 1979 Amata Kabua was elected by the parliament as the first president of the Marshall Islands. I always enjoyed my conversations with him, dealing with him. I think many of the Marshallese either revered him so much or were scared to death of him because he had a lot of power as a traditional chief. He could remove you from the land, and land rights are everything. As the American ambassador, I was certainly not afraid of him. I was one of the few people who could really talk with him in the Marshall Islands, who could talk with him openly.

There were times when we disagreed and other times he would be very charming. I remember calling him at the last minute. An American businessman who had an interesting proposal for transportation from one island to another came into my office. I called the president to see if I could come to see him just for 15 minutes with this American businessman to present his ideas. Six hours later we were still out having drinks with the president. He was very friendly, fairly pro-U.S., but also had a good sense of his country.

There was an unfortunate case of an Australian who wanted to get a license to open up a bank in the Marshall Islands. These little island countries are often the subject of scams and quite vulnerable. This Australian had a very bad reputation. He had been closed down in Australia by their securities and exchange commission. So he wasn't the type of person you would really want coming in to open up a bank in the Marshall Islands. The IMF banking commissioner had refused to recommend a license for this Australian businessman. Yet Kabua wanted this approved. I raised it with the president, and his attitude was, you know, everyone deserves a second chance in life. Well, maybe everyone deserves a second chance in life, I told the President, but frankly, that said, you are president of the Marshall Islands and this looks like a scam. The Australian ambassador had given Kabua documents showing the difficulties the man had had with the Australian securities and exchange commission. I told the President he didn't want to inflict this on his people. This was all a very private conversation. He went ahead and approved the license. The IMF banking commissioner left the island seeing he had been overruled, so the Marshall Islands lost the banking commissioner, too. A couple of months later to his credit, President Kabua in a private conversation with me said, "You know, Joan, if I had

that decision to make over again, I don't think I would have approved the Australian bank coming in." By that time it did indeed look like fraud. So at least he admitted that he should have made a different decision.

But he was president only for a short time after my arrival. In November '96 I received a phone call at 3:00 A.M. asking if we could medically evacuate the president as soon as possible. Of course we started working on it immediately. I called our military advisor. We contacted the Coast Guard in Honolulu, and we were able to have a Coast Guard emergency medical evacuation launched. It seemed to take forever to get to the Marshall Islands, but the plane eventually came in and the president was quickly evacuated to Honolulu where he did recover. Kabua turned out to have a number of medical problems, but mainly a kidney problem. The first lady of the Marshall Islands, his wife, a lovely lady, gave the American embassy full credit for saving her husband's life. It certainly made our relations a lot easier for awhile on island. It was as if Martha Washington gave the Marshallese embassy here credit for saving her husband's life. Unfortunately, the President had a relapse when he was still in Honolulu and died around Christmas. It was quite a tragedy, quite a shock for the Marshallese people. Amata Kabua had been their one and only president since 1979.

One of our major goals in the Marshall Islands is to get the Marshallese to really move toward economic self sufficiency. The U.S. is providing 2/3s of the budget of the Marshall Islands. We give them more assistance on a per capita basis than we do to Egypt or Israel, among the highest in the world. Kabua realized the need for economic reform. We were trying to do more multilaterally so it wasn't just the U.S. saying this is what you should do Marshall Islands. We believed our message would be more effective if the Marshallese heard it from the Asian Development Bank and other countries, not just the U.S. There was an Asian Development Bank economic reform program. Amata Kabua was fairly firmly behind the need for economic reforms. He would talk about the need for trying to encourage more direct investment. One of the ways the Marshallese were shifting all this money that was coming in under the compact, \$60-70- million a year, was to put about 1/3 of the people on the government payroll, many of whom were not doing much of anything. You can't have a country that is sustainable with 1/3 of the people on the government payroll. So that was something obvious. President Kabua had to overrule his ministers who didn't want to cut people in their departments and say, "Look, this is something we have got to do for the future of our country, for the good of the country." And Kabua was someone who could carry it off. If he said you had to do it, the minister of education would cut staff. So I give him credit for seeing the larger picture and what the Marshallese had to do in terms of shifting resources from the public sector to the private sector.

After his death, the parliament, the 33 senators, 32 after his death, had to elect a president from amongst their members. There was a lot of jockeying for position. Who knows if Kabua had ever noted who should be his successor. There were so many people who claimed to be the heir apparent. I always wanted to talk to the ghost of Amata Kabua to see whom he really preferred. I had had earlier conversations with him, too, when I tried to draw him out, asking him who do you think should replace you someday. It was never really clear. So there was quite a bit of uncertainty after his death as to who should take over.

His cousin, Imata Kabua, another traditional chieftain, was finally selected. His cousin was one of the main landowners on Kwajalein where we had the military base. Imata had quite a different sense of leadership from Amata Kabua. In his inaugural address, Imata stressed the need for independence of the judiciary, and how he would respect the judiciary and its integrity. Alas, this reminded me subsequently of how countries (such as Taiwan flying so many flags trying to be sovereign) often emphasize their very weakest point. The independence of the judiciary really became a major issue under Imata Kabua. The judge would make the right decision. But after he made the right decision, he would be removed and another judge would come in to replace him.

Imata could be a very intelligent interlocutor. There were times I had some very good conversations with him, but he had a tendency to drink too much, and when he did, he would become very aggressive. I remember a rather funny scene in the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Tom Pickering's, office when he was receiving President Imata Kabua. Under Secretary Pickering, as he often does when the U.S. ambassador is present, was telling President Kabua how fortunate he was to have someone of my top standing as the U.S. ambassador to the Marshall Islands. Pickering was going on about my great background, economically and politically. President Kabua, who has said nothing up to this point, suddenly pops up and says, "And besides, she has a great wine collection." I was about ready to crawl under the couch in the under secretary's office. That is the last thing you want to be known for by the president of the country to which you are assigned. But, to put it in perspective, that was important to Imata Kabua. He did try to liquidate my wine supply a few times.

The relationship with the top leadership in the Marshall Islands, the foreign minister and others at that time, was often called prickly. It was a rather difficult period. It was difficult to deal with them, and when it came time for elections, the foreign minister and the finance minister were not re-elected. The reform program that I mentioned aimed to shift resources away from the public sector to the private sector was all but dead under Imata Kabua. He made it quite clear he did not want the ADB advisors. I had private conversations with him asking him where are you going to get your overall economic information. The Marshall Islands just doesn't have any native economists. You don't have to take their advice, but at least get the facts and figures on which you can base your own decisions. These people are here as macro economists who are being provided at no cost to your government to advise you. (They were funded by the U.S., Japan, and the Asian Development Bank.) Don't kick them out. You don't have to take their policy advice, just take their information. You can ask them to develop information for you. But he went ahead and had the Asian Development Bank advisors removed. The economic reform program was largely dead. The economy was slipping further, and it was a very difficult time.

A very contentious parliamentary election was scheduled for November of 1999. You had Imata Kabua and his faction on one side, and, on the other, a party that was running on a good government platform. I almost had to stop making speeches because their platform sounded as if it was exactly what I had been emphasizing and Secretary Albright was emphasizing in our speeches. The opposition party was running on a platform of good governance, democracy, human rights, an independent judiciary, anti-corruption, transparency, accountability - everything a good government should stand for.

It was a very close election, but the opposition led by Kasai Note thankfully won. He was subsequently elected President in January of 2000 by the Marshallese parliament. In fact, President Note would sometimes give me credit for his election. That is the last thing a U.S. ambassador wants. The embassy was certainly neutral and we made it a point to stay out of the elections. But I think it was very clear in terms of what his party stood for, that they were the party of good government supporting the same goals as the U.S. He subsequently found it difficult to translate the very best of intentions into action, although I think his intentions were very good, very fine. It was a much easier government to deal with. A real friendship replaced the prickly relationship we had with the previous leadership of the Marshall Islands. It was the first time you had a commoner who became president, ending the hereditary chieftains role as president. Democracy, I think, certainly made great strides in the 1999 parliamentary elections in the Marshall Islands. As an aside, the representational costs for lunches and dinners at my residence went way down, because it was the first time that the food cost more than the liquor. Most of the new cabinet members didn't drink, and those who did might have one glass of wine with dinner.

Q: A couple of things about the economic setup. What was the population of the Marshall Islands complex, and then what could they do to be self sufficient?

PLAISTED: A census was taken just right before I left. The population of the Marshall Islands turned out to be less than predicted, about 51,000 people as opposed to 56,000 or more. There are a number of things that could be done to reduce some of the dependency on the U.S. for funding, such as shifting resources from the public sector where too many people are on the government payroll to the private sector, and improving the foreign investment climate. During the term of the second president of the Marshall Islands, we saw some open hostility to foreign entrepreneurs coming in. The idea of not respecting an independent judiciary made it very difficult. How can local and foreign businessmen operate in an environment where you can't count on legal decisions always being implemented? The judges would often make the right calls, but the powers that be would try to overrule them or not enforce their decisions. Respect for the judiciary, which is very much the case under President Note, is an important step. Having only 51,000 people makes it a heck of a lot easier to stimulate the economy. You don't have to do too much. StarKist Tuna came in with a tuna loining plant to export tuna loins directly to the United States and hired 300 workers. There was quite a demand to work in this tuna plant. In terms of resources, the Marshall Islands has tuna, some possibilities for tourism, and copra. International prices for copra, coconut husks, have been quite low. The Asian Development Bank is working to adjust fishing policies so that, in addition to licensing the tuna boats, the Marshall Islands could entice more boats to pull into port in the Marshalls to buy gasoline and resupply from local stores. This could be a major source of revenue. We did start to see more boats coming into the Marshall Islands.

Q: Was there a problem of Japanese and maybe American, Russian, and other boats basically poaching? Were there Marshallese boats?

PLAISTED: Marshallese, no. The Marshalls doesn't do any deep water tuna fishing. There was a rather disastrous time when they did buy some tuna boats and proved they really couldn't operate them and then tried to sell the boats back to the country they had bought them from. Now their

emphasis has been more on letting mainly the Chinese and some other nationalities do the fishing. Their hope is to get more revenue from the spinoffs.

Q: What more can be done to improve the economy?

PLAISTED: One of the basic things that has to be done in the Marshall Islands is to improve the educational system. They get a lot of funding for education through U.S. and Asian Development Bank grants without really making a dent in better educating the youth. The Marshallese under the Compact are very fortunate to have the right to live, work and study in the U.S. Some of the more enterprising young people go off particularly to Hawaii for high school and a few are going to college. Some of them are returning to the Marshall Islands now. You really have to provide at the local level a better educational system and also better health care for the people. As a nation about 2/3rds of the people are overweight and about 2/3rds have diabetes.

We are working with the Marshalls to look at the large amount of U.S. assistance - roughly about \$60-70 million a year - that comes into the Marshall Islands under the Compact that is scheduled to end in October of 2001, which is going to be quite traumatic. If we are still negotiating, which we will be, the Compact's funding will continue automatically for two more years. October 2003 is the definitive cutoff date. We are beginning negotiations. One of the things we are really looking at on both sides is what proposals can the Marshallese come up with to improve health, education, the environment, and the domestic and foreign investment climate so that the next time around we can really target the U.S. assistance. What happened to all this assistance? The Compact was negotiated at the height of the Cold War. The United States didn't want to be known as a colonial power. We didn't attach many strings to this money, we just gave it to them. It largely went into their general fund. Over the years we provided over a billion dollars to the Marshall Islands. Unfortunately, the Marshallese have very little to show for it. The thought now within the entire U.S. government and I think within the Marshallese government too is that any future assistance really has to be much better accounted for, so the Marshallese will have something to show for any future assistance.

Q: What was your relation with the Kwajalein missile base, our installation there? How did that work?

PLAISTED: We have on Kwajalein a U.S. army facility, always run by a U.S. colonel. This is where the U.S. tests long, medium and short range missiles. We launch long range missiles from the west coast, from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, and send up the interceptor from Kwajalein. To date we have had two successful intercepts and two that weren't successful. For short range missile testing, we negotiated with the Marshall Islands government to use part of an island atoll to launch a SCUD type missile and this test was successful. Missile testing is a very important part of what we are doing at Kwajalein.

Kwajalein is also an important space tracking facility where we track foreign launches and track all the space junk, all the space debris. Have you seen the movie where the Martians invade and are attacking the White House? I asked a three star general who was in charge of the U.S. space program what his plans were. What if suddenly this scenario happens, what are your plans? He said he was going to call the U.S. ambassador! I always thought you may see me on CNN with a

little hairy Martian in each hand. If it is a really advanced civilization maybe this will be two little Martian women.

The U.S. has a number of benefits from this installation in the Marshall Islands. It is a very isolated area. If we want to recover something from the shot, we can shoot it into the lagoon. If we don't want to recover anything, and want to be certain no one else recovers it either, we just send it off into the deep ocean.

The Marshallese, on their side, receive some real benefits from the base on Kwajalein. It is their largest private employer. In fact it may even be the largest employer on island now because they are finally cutting down on the number of government employees. We have about 3,000 Americans on Kwajalein counting dependents. We employ 1,300 Marshallese on base. These are considered some of the best jobs you can get in the Marshall Islands. The average salary comes out to about \$10,000 a year in a country where the per capita income is a little over \$1,000. It is a very good salary. The Marshallese take in about \$14 million in wages each year. The government receives about \$15 million in taxes from the base. There have been Marshallese students in the schools on Kwajalein starting with kindergarten. The first class just graduated last year of Marshallese who have gone through grades one to twelve in the Kwajalein school system. This is quite an added benefit. Bases always have surplus equipment. The Marshallese government gets the first right to all the surplus equipment. It is only after they have said no, we don't need this, that the U.S. will turn around and sell it as surplus equipment to some other country. We have a Job Corps Program on Kwajalein that prepares the Marshallese kids who are mostly from the island near Kwajalein of Ebeye for vocational training in the U.S. Many of them will go on to Honolulu, where I have met with them. Most are quite enthusiastic about this Job Corps Program and feel very fortunate to be selected to learn trades in the U.S. That is another benefit to the Marshallese of having the Kwajalein missile base located in the Marshall Islands.

Q: Did you get involved in any negotiations on this? This is the one thing that the Marshalls have that they can hold, to try to work the best deal possible.

PLAISTED: We began renegotiations on the Compact as called for in October 1999. Yes, I was on the team for the renegotiations. We have a negotiator here in Washington, a compact negotiator. Al Stayman is the official negotiator for the U.S. government, but I was certainly part of the team for the opening of the negotiations in Honolulu. What is really up for renegotiation are all the economic provisions of the Compact. As for the lease for the missile base on Kwajalein, we had the right to use the base for 30 years. In 1999 we were to inform the Marshallese whether or not we wanted to renew the lease for another 15 years. Of course we sent a diplomatic note from the embassy saying we did want to exercise our right to use the base for another 15 years. The base is really not up for renegotiation as part of the Compact.

Q: At one point in all these Pacific islands, one of our prime objectives was strategic denial, that is to keep the Soviets from putting ships and bases on these islands. Has that completely gone by the board? During your time there, were we looking over our shoulders to see if the Chinese might want to play games on this?

PLAISTED: When the U.S. was in the Marshall Islands at the height of the Cold War, the concept of strategic denial was very important to counter the Russians. It is debatable how valid strategic denial is today. I think the Marshalls is still of strategic significance to the United States. It is a vast ocean space. These are important shipping lanes between Hawaii and spots further west in Australia and Southeast Asia. We do not want to have an adversary control these shipping lanes. Now there is no one today, not the Chinese, not the Russians, who is threatening these open shipping lanes, but it is very important to keep the lanes open. We don't know what the future threats are going to be. I think this area still is of significance strategically, although the Cold War has long ended and relations have certainly changed with the Marshall Islands since the days of the Cold War.

Q: Now on the personal and personnel side, how did you keep from going Island happy? I mean also not just you but...

PLAISTED: The whole embassy team. When I first went out to the Marshall Islands I was so afraid of not having enough to do. I am a very active person and had been posted in Paris, Geneva, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Rabat, not a series of hardship posts. I shipped out 800 pounds of books. I was buying every classic to either read or re-read. I had two copies of War and Peace in case I wanted to read it in two different translations. The embassy had a tennis court. I bought an automatic tennis ball launching machine, quite an expensive piece of equipment, so I could take up tennis. I bought oil paints and canvasses, just about everything I could think of. I shipped my chessboard out to the Marshall Islands. Coming back 4 ½ years later I shipped back 800 pounds of books, and the canvasses are still white, unpainted. I did use the tennis ball launching machine, and learned how to play tennis to some extent.

What I found personally, and I think it is true for other members of the embassy staff, too, was we were such a small embassy. We were awfully busy. It would have been very difficult to live there without working so intensely. Of course as ambassador I was on call 24 hours a day. I would get calls in the middle of the night that someone in Kiribati had just been bitten by a barracuda and was bleeding profusely and could I please send in the Coast Guard immediately. I think our Embassy staff did save a few lives. The substantive issues really kept me quite busy.

What I did for recreation, what I really enjoyed, was I took up scuba diving. To this day I can't swim very well, and I don't like to get my head under water. But I became quite an avid diver. The Marshalls has some of the loveliest coral in the world, and great fish of almost every tropical variety. What you are almost always guaranteed to see when you are diving are sharks. I can remember quite vividly the first time I ever saw a shark. I was just snorkeling in the Marshall Islands when a shark came swimming by to check out my dive buddy. I quickly learned the different species. The white tipped shark is the shark that is considered less dangerous. The black tipped sharks and your grey reef sharks are very territorial. If they start circling you, you had better swim as fast as you can to get out of their territory. They are telling you that you are in the shark's living room, you had better get out as quickly as you can. Very often, particularly when I was first there, I would spend my weekends under water to get away from the land sharks. I was up on Bikini professionally and was pleased to be able to dive there. I wanted to see the experiments that the Department of Energy is conducting to show how you can grow indigenous plants on Bikini that aren't dangerous to eat.

GRETA N. MORRIS
Ambassador
Marshall Islands (2003-2006)

Ambassador Morris was born and raised in California and educated at the University of California at Los Angeles, University of Redland and Claremont College. Before becoming a Foreign Service Officer she accompanied her FSO husband to Indonesia. In 1980 she entered the Foreign Service (USIA) following which she served variously as Public Affairs, Cultural, or Press Officer in Kenya, Uganda, Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. Her Washington assignments at State and USIA concerned primarily African Affairs. She served as US Ambassador to the Marshall Islands from 2000 to 2006. Ambassador Morris was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

MORRIS: Then I went to the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I had been, of course, nominated to be the ambassador, I had to go back actually in early June to Washington to have my Senate hearing and then I returned to Indonesia for another month and then I came back in July to finish the preparation to become the ambassador to the Marshall Islands where I went in August of 2003.

Q: So we will pick it up then.

MORRIS: OK.

Q: OK, today is October 14, 2008 with Greta Morris. Greta where are we now?

MORRIS: We left off when I was finishing up my tour as counselor for public affairs in Jakarta, Indonesia. I was there from 2000 until July 2003. At that point I left Jakarta and moved to the Republic of the Marshall Islands as the ambassador.

Q: OK, how did this ambassadorship come about?

MORRIS: I was in Jakarta and I was thinking about my next assignment. I was very interested in the newly independent Republic of East Timor but there was someone else in mind for that ambassadorship; so they suggested the ambassadorship in the Republic of the Marshall Islands instead. I said, "Yes, I would like to be considered for that post." The process, of course, went forward in the way that it always does with all of the forms you have to fill out and the Senate confirmation hearings and all of that.

Q: Talk a little about all the forms and all this. I take it this was full disclosure?

MORRIS: Yes.

Q: This must be quite a process isn't it?

MORRIS: Well it is I mean it is the full financial disclosure, security, basically you lay out your whole life and then they evaluate that and decide whether to move your name forward first of all from the State Department to the White House and then if the White approves then the nomination is made.

Q: Did you have the feeling that there are some political appointees breathing down your shoulder or something?

MORRIS: Not for this post, no.

Q: My association with the Marshall Islands, what's it called? The Marshall...

MORRIS: The Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Q: The Republic of the Marshall Islands I landed there coming from the Federated...

MORRIS: Federated States of Micronesia?

Q: ...Federated States of Micronesia because out in around '95 or '96 I went out there as a counselor or consultant. When we landed there I was a little worried that the plane would have enough room to land practically.

MORRIS: Oh, yes.

Q: Tell me what were you getting as you read up on the Marshall Islands. What was the situation that you were going to?

MORRIS: Let me say first of all when I agreed to have my name put forward it was with I guess a little bit of concern because although I had had a lot of experience in South East Asia and even working on other parts of East Asia I had never been in the Pacific other than in Hawaii and Tahiti. I really didn't know anything about the Marshall Islands.

Q: Well welcome to the club.

MORRIS: So it was a lot to learn and, of course, it is an extremely unique place and we have an extremely unique relationship with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, as you probably know. It was originally part of the whole Micronesian area and then that became the trust territory of the Pacific, which the United States was given the authority to govern as a trust territory after World War II. The U.S., of course, defeated the Japanese who were basically in control of the Marshall Islands and Micronesia and that whole area – after World War I it was a UN trust territory and the Japanese were in charge. When the U.S. defeated Japan and that included the battle of Kwajalein, a major battle in World War II, Kwajalein being one of the atolls in the Marshall Islands, then it became a U.S.-administered trust territory. The part that is the Marshall Islands became an independent country in 1986; the U.S. was trying to bring all of the territories

along toward independence and the Marshall Islands and Micronesia became independent in 1986 as two separate countries.

The Republic of Marshall Islands is comprised of twenty-nine atolls and each atoll is made up of many, many islands that are roughly connected; much of their connection is underwater of course, coral atolls. There have been a lot of studies about how the atolls actually came into being; but they are coral atolls. There are 29 coral atolls and then five free standing islands and that makes up the Republic of the Marshall Islands. So it is a very small amount of land as you saw when you landed, very narrow, but a lot of water. The Republic of the Marshall Islands' land mass is about the same as Washington, D.C. if you squashed all of those atolls together but the water area is 750,000 square miles; so it's a lot of water.

Certainly geographically it's very unique. The people are considered Malayo-Polynesian; there is some evidence that some of the people, if not all of the people, came originally from the Malay Peninsula but that was perhaps 3,000 years ago so it certainly has been a long time. It was basically very isolated until the Spanish became the first European country to discover it in the 16th century and then for a while the Germans actually bought it from the Spanish and it was used for German business deals and then after World War I that's when it became a Japanese administered territory.

As far as our relationship is concerned, since it was a trust territory and during that whole period of time the U.S. was administering it through the Department of Interior providing assistance and basically providing for all of the administration of the Marshall Islands as well as other parts of Micronesia. As you probably know during that period of time, the U.S. also conducted over 60 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands.

Q: This is where the Bikini Atoll...

MORRIS: Bikini Atoll and Eniwetok Atoll were the two atolls where the nuclear testing was conducted. Actually the largest test was conducted in Eniwetok Atoll; these were really very major tests that were conducted. The Bravo test, which was conducted in Bikini, of course, was one of the most famous, that was conducted in 1954 and the Marshallese contended that the winds were changing and that this was something the military should have known about but they went ahead with the test anyway. Of course, the U.S., as I said, did not know that there would be the fall out from the testing that did take place. This is still a very contentious issue between the United States and the Marshall Islands because it damaged a lot of the land in not only Eniwetok and Bikini but also in some of the neighboring atolls, Utirik and Rongelap specifically. There have been...although in 1983 I believe it was the United States provided significant amount of funding, over \$180 million basically for clean up and for claims, to help the Marshall Islands set up a claims tribunal, to administer these claims for injury and damages as a result of the nuclear testing, but the Marshall Islands government and the people of those atolls have claimed that this was not enough so they have submitted a request for significantly more money. As of the present time, the people who originally lived on Bikini Atoll have not returned there; they returned once and then the Department of Energy said, well actually it really isn't as safe as we thought it was, so then they were moved off again and they haven't been back. There are just a few people who

have been living there to manage the underwater diving program to view some of the wrecks that are underwater in the Bikini Atoll.

Q: Is this from that very famous test where they took a lot of World War II ships and tankers; I'm an old Navy buff...

MORRIS: That's correct.

Q: ...seeing the old aircraft, Saratoga and others there since the explosion there are German ships, Japanese ships and American ships.

MORRIS: Yes.

Q: But those are...one can dive around them now?

MORRIS: Yes. This was actually supposed to be an income-generating project for the people of Bikini. There was a small staff that was stationed there including expert divers. People could come and stay for a week and dive these wrecks. I'm not a diver myself but people who have done this have said it is really one of the great diving experiences of their lives,; if not the greatest.

Q: I would think so.

MORRIS: It is deep and everything is intact in these ships and it's really a fascinating experience. Anyway, that was a very important money making venture for the Bikini people. I believe now there have been some problems because the airline, Air Marshall Islands, is having serious problems so they are not able to fly there regularly, which makes it difficult to schedule any tours there. At any rate, the Bikini people have not returned there; there are a few people who have resettled the south island of the Eniwetok chain but much of Eniwetok is still not populated now. This is a continuing issue and I would say that this was one of the most difficult issues that I faced when I was in the Marshall Islands because many of the Marshallese people claim that they have suffered cancers and thyroid problems as a result of this nuclear testing.

Q: Before you went out I would image there would be some people you have to deal with one of course is the Department of the Interior which I take it has never really given up its almost claim to the Marshall Islands. The other would be the Pentagon which has got the Department of Energy and the Marshall Island lobbyists, which I assume like so many, I mean I've just heard about them, some rather high-powered lawyers have taken this on as a cause and actually there is money to be had essentially from the U.S. government by making claims? Did you have to touch with all these people?

MORRIS: Yes. The Department of Interior, through the Compact of Free Association – when the Marshall Islands were granted its independence, we signed a Compact of Free Association. Under this compact the U.S. would provide very significant assistance to the Marshall Islands but the U.S. also had certain rights, for example, to the Marshallese waters, and the government of the Marshall Islands could not make agreements with other countries that could affect the

defense of the islands or of the waters without consulting with the United States. The United States provides for the defense of the Marshall Islands, there is no separate Marshall Islands military.

So we signed the Compact of Free Association and under the compact the Department of Interior is the government entity through which all the assistance flows to the Marshall Islands. The Department of Interior has the USAID function in the Marshall Islands, which was another thing that was completely new thing to me.

Q: This was all politics and I think there are several congressmen on the Appropriations Committee or something who had both a low four and interest in all these islands and they had close ties to the Department of Interior. Is that correct? I mean did you feel that there were Congressional watchdogs who were keeping a close eye...there were certain people in Congress?

MORRIS: Well there certainly are people in Congress who were very interested in the Marshall Islands. At the time that I was going out, in fact, the compact had just been amended, the Marshall Islands government and the U.S. government had signed the amended compact but it still had to be ratified by the Congress and the head of state of each nation. There was a lot of discussion going on about the compact including a lot of hearings that were going on in Capital Hill after I first got out to the Marshall Islands. That was certainly an issue that was discussed in my confirmation hearings.

Q: Well there was I think during the initial negotiations there was sort of a nasty thing on some of this where apparently we were bugging the negotiators on the other side. Did that come up at all?

MORRIS: I'm not aware of that, no. That was not something that was ever raised with me.

Q: That was back a ways and I may have my facts wrong but...

MORRIS: Well it's possible but it's just not something I'm aware of.

Q: I think it was just intelligence gone wild but anyway did you find were there any significant private lawyers and all that were wanting to get to you about the...as representatives of the Marshall Islands here or was there a lobby or anything do you recall that?

MORRIS: Not really with regard to the compact, no.

Q: I guess by this time things had settled.

MORRIS: The Marshall Islands Government did have lobbyists but they weren't lobbying me about the Compact. Of course, there was a lot of interest in the Congress as these debates were going on and the head of the negotiating team for the U.S. was a Colonel Al Short, a retired colonel, who I think did a very good job in negotiations and he was involved in a lot of the

hearings. It was passed on the U.S. side prior to the end of fiscal year 2003; on the Marshallese side it was not finally passed until January of 2004 when the new parliament came into session.

Q: How did you find...you were in the EAP bureau or was it...

MORRIS: Yes.

Q: Did you find that East Asia Pacific Bureau was not exactly a dominant bureau; did you find that coming from Indonesia, of course, which is an extremely important country, did you find that you had sort of fallen off the edge of the cliff?

MORRIS: Yes, I think that would be a fair assessment. It certainly wasn't a major priority and as is so often the case it was really only when there were problems that it was on the radar screen. So there was a lot of concern about getting the compact passed and the U.S. side was pretty adamant that the deal was not going to be sweetened with any additional assistance even though the Marshallese were trying to get some additional assistance. Getting that passed was considered a major success and then it kind of dropped off the radar screen again; but yes, I think it is fair to say it was not a high priority.

During the time that I was there we had one visit from a deputy assistant secretary of State who had the Marshall Islands in his portfolio but otherwise the department that was mainly interested was the Department of Interior. David Cohen was the political appointee at Interior who was the deputy assistant secretary in the office of insular affairs. The office of insular affairs reported to him and this was the office which was responsible for the Micronesian states and of the compacts. He was somebody that I met before I went out and then he visited the Marshall Islands several times when I was there.

I would say in many ways it was an interesting situation because the Marshallese in many ways, I think it is fair to say, looked upon the Department of Interior as their friend because it was the Department of Interior that was providing them assistance. It was really the U.S. Congress, the U.S. government, but since it was channeled through the Department of Interior and they had had a long relationship with Interior, Interior was their friend. Their relations with the State Department were a bit more complicated, because we were the ones first of all enforcing some of the new immigration regulations that were in the compact.

Secondly, there was what they called the Changed Circumstances Petition, we always referred to it as changed circumstances request. This was the big request that the Government of the Marshall Islands had submitted saying, "There are changed circumstances because we have more information about the damages from the nuclear testing and so therefore we want to reopen the whole issue and we want additional funding from the United States government." What they wanted amounted to around a billion dollars and this request was being evaluated by the State Department. The petition went to Congress but Congress asked the State Department and the Department of Energy to take a look at it and to come back with an evaluation to the U.S. Congress so that then Congress could see that evaluation, could consider all that and have hearings. The request, had been submitted I believe it was in 2001 and now we were already in 2003 when I went out there and there had not been any report yet from the State Department;

again that was another thing about which the Marshallese people were not very happy with the State Department. They said, “This is not a high priority for the U.S. and in the mean time people are dying and the State Department hasn’t done this evaluation yet.” That was another issue.

I guess the third major issue was the ongoing issue with Kwajalein. This was a more specialized issue because it really focused more on the landowners of Kwajalein. Just to back up a minute, all of the land in the Marshall Islands is owned privately; there are landowners who are chiefs. This includes the land that the military uses for the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Test Site and space tracking station—it is also privately owned. But, the U.S. had basically negotiated an agreement with the government of the Marshall Islands to use some of this land for the Reagan test site and then it was up to the Marshall Islands government to work out an agreement, a lease arrangement, essentially with the land owners so that the government of the Marshall Islands was leasing this land with funding that the U.S. government gave it to give to the land owners. This was a sore issue with the land owners because the land owners wanted more money and they were very upset with their own government as well with the U.S. government for essentially negotiating an extension to the original land use agreement without involving them or taking their request for additional funds into consideration. This was yet another issue and the embassy was associated with the U.S. government position, naturally. Again, I would say that the Marshallese had a more wary view of the State Department than they did of the Department of Interior.

Q: Was there a Department of Interior representative permanently in your embassy?

MORRIS: Not when I first arrived. This was one of the issues that was discussed when the compact was being renegotiated. One of the things that Congress was very concerned about was oversight. There was a feeling that under the original compact a lot of the funding had just been wasted; people would go out from Congress or Congressional staff would go out and visit the Marshall Islands. They would see a capital that really in many ways didn’t look all that good, there was a lot of trash; trash is a major problem there because where do you put it? You put it in the lagoon and you ruin the water or you just keep it there and it looks very unsightly. The educational system didn’t seem to be doing what it needed to be doing to help the young people in the Marshall Islands. Basically, it seemed like the funding that had been provided under the first compact, the original compact had not been very well utilized; so Congress really was concerned about oversight. They wanted to have the Department of Interior play a much more active role in oversight and the original idea and my understanding is that this was what the embassy and the State Department had originally favored was to have somebody from DOI stationed in the Marshall Islands. Well, DOI worked out a compromise and they were going to establish an office in Hawaii, in Honolulu, and then they would have one person who would be stationed in the Marshall Islands. The people in Honolulu who would have responsibility for different sectors like education and infrastructure would make periodic visits to the Marshall Islands and also to the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). There was a person already in Pohnpei, in FSM, who represented Interior there, someone who had been locally hired.

So that was one of the things that happened during my first year there. We recruited and hired somebody who was the Department of Interior representative and that person now works at the

embassy. The officers in the office in Hawaii do come out and make periodic visits. There is a lot more oversight over the funding now.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MORRIS: I was there from August 2003 to August 2006, for three years.

Q: When you got there what was the government like?

MORRIS: The government has a legislature called the Nitijela, which has 33 members. Then there is someone who is elected by the legislature so it's really like a parliamentary system but this person is called the president; that person is both the head of state and of government. When I got there the President was a man named Kessai Note; he was the head of a party called the United Democratic Party. There were only two parties in the Marshall Islands and they were more affiliated with personalities than with ideology. The UDP was a party that certainly professed strong support for democracy and also was very supportive of the United States.

Kessai Note had one challenge, a really big challenge there, and that was that he was not of a chiefly family. He was from a commoner family so he didn't have the same sort of traditional authority that the first president, Amata Kabua, who was considered the paramount chief who was one of the largest landowners (if not the largest) in the Marshall Islands. He was the person who was the architect of Marshallese independence and then became the first president. He died in late 1996 and it was at that point that his first cousin, a man named Imata Kabua, was elected president. Imata Kabua was one of the representatives of Kwajalein Atoll and was elected president by the Nitijela. Imata Kabua had a lot of problems as president; he had some problems with alcohol, unfortunately, and he would show up for diplomatic meetings intoxicated and was not able to represent the country terribly effectively. He was defeated in a vote of no confidence and Kessai Note then became the president after that vote of no confidence. He was elected in 2000 and then re-elected then in 2004. He was a very good friend of the United States. He certainly supported the United States as far as the compact was concerned, as far as Kwajalein was concerned, but even with Kessai Note we had this difficult issue of the nuclear testing because he had relatives from Bikini so he, of course, was very supportive of their requests for additional funds. In addition, he understood that this was a major political issue in the Marshall Islands.

You had asked about the role of lawyers earlier. I would like to add that the four nuclear-affected atolls each had their own lawyers who were trying to help them gain additional funding for injury and damages, which they claimed resulted from the testing, from the Congress and the Administration. These lawyers did contact me from time to time, but I was not the person to make these decisions. In addition, the Kwajalein landowners also had their own legal team that was trying to help them gain additional compensation for their land.

Q: What was your embassy like?

MORRIS: It was a very small embassy. There was the Ambassador, the DCM, a Foreign Service office management specialist and then another officer who was the consular/GSO and IMO

(information management officer); he was a very multitasked person. Then after about a year we got the additional person, the DOI officer. It was a very small embassy; we also had a locally engaged staff that included two American citizens one of whom was actually born Marshallese but became a U.S. citizen and had a full top secret security clearance and then another American who had lived there for a number of years and was locally hired. The whole staff of the embassy, not counting the security guards, was 15 people, a very small embassy.

Q: What was...

MORRIS: No Marine security guard.

Q: What does information management officer mean?

MORRIS: Basically this is a person who is responsible for all the communications systems, what we used to call a communicator, but also with responsibilities for all the computers and other electronic communication. That was very challenging there, I would have to say because particularly at that time there were all sorts of problems with band widths and basically just trying to get a decent signal and being able to have adequate communication particularly for classified communication. There would be long periods of time where we wouldn't have classified communications because the system just wasn't working. It was very difficult. We were able to work out an arrangement and get some additional bandwidth so that helped a lot but it was very challenging.

Q: When you got there and while you were there how did you feel about the health claims? Was it apparent that there was a major problem or was this just a way of getting money?

MORRIS: The health situation in the Marshall Islands is not good. I think my feeling was that there probably was more of a link between the testing and some of the thyroid problems and cancers that were affecting some of the people there than perhaps the U.S. government was willing to acknowledge. On the other hand, there were a lot of very serious health problems that had nothing to do with the nuclear testing. Diabetes is a major problem there. All of the problems associated with obesity and with diabetes were major problems there and the health care really was very inadequate so that is why health is the major focus of the amended compact, trying to do something about the health situation.

Q: When I was in the FSM, this was only for a week; the topography is quite different at least on Pohnpei. It's kind of forested and all but I got the very distinct impression that the people there really had been hit hard by our take over because they no longer fished, they depended on subsidies and it seemed to be pickup trucks and six-packs of beer and it looked like a depressed mountain town in West Virginia or something. Had that happened in the Marshall Islands?

MORRIS: Yes, of course there are no mountains there. I think it was a similar situation and how do you describe those situations and then ascribe responsibilities; it's very complicated. I think it's accurate that a dependency syndrome had developed where people were very dependant on U.S. assistance and also on importing a lot of food. Because of the low income – and because these were the kinds of things that were exported there even during the trust territory days – a lot

of the food was really not very healthful. They imported things like spam, canned corn beef; now that there are more frozen foods that are being transported people import turkey tails, for example. That is sort of a staple of the diet; white rice is another staple of the diet. People still do fish but they don't fish so much for food as they do for sport. They love to go out fishing and have fishing competitions and that's a very big form of recreation. They still do eat some fish – sashimi is a carry over from the Japanese period. Sashimi is on every single buffet table when there is a big party; people always have sashimi. It is delicious, wonderful fresh tuna which is ...

Q: This is raw?

MORRIS: ...raw fish and it is just marvelous. A lot of the diet is very bad and people also were not using and fixing a lot of their native foods like they did in the past. For example, there is a lot of breadfruit there and because there weren't a lot of other kinds of fruits and vegetables people were very imaginative in all of the things they did with breadfruit; and you can do a lot of different things with it. If you bake it or broil it and make it into almost like mashed potatoes it tastes very good, but people weren't doing that so much any more; they were eating more processed starch. They were eating a lot more white rice and that was contributing to their health problems.

Q: White rice being what? Nutritiously it's not very good.

MORRIS: No, no it's not.

Q: The hulls of rice are the nutrition isn't it?

MORRIS: Yes. The health care that was available was poor and it was not available in many of the outer atolls. There was not a habit of going to the doctor when you got ill, so a lot of the medical problems that people would have would just get worse and worse. There were unfortunately numerous cases of people with diabetes and then it had affected their limbs and they got gangrene and they'd have to have their limbs amputated. So there were some very heart rending health problems there.

One of the things that I think was really important that the U.S. helped set up—and it was part of this nuclear claims tribunal – was a special health program. It was originally supposed to be for people from the nuclear affected atolls to provide primary health care to them. The Marshallese extended it to provide some health care to people in all the outer atolls. They would station a health practitioner and they would try to have one on each atoll. Then the doctors, there were very few doctors, would go out on visits from time to time to provide primary health care to people in the outer atolls; otherwise, they had nothing. I think this was a very good thing and hopefully that is continuing because health is a major problem there.

Q: What's the population or was the population of the Marshall Islands?

MORRIS: It is about 60 thousand. It's fluid in many ways because the Marshallese under the compact, those who are native born Marshallese have the right to come to the United States without a visa. They can stay for as long as they want unless they get into trouble with the law.

They can work in the United States; they can go to school in the United States. They don't have to become immigrants, they don't have to become U.S. citizens or get a green card; basically they have the right to come to the U.S.. It's one of the features of the compact that the Marshallese prize the most. So there is a very large Marshallese population in Springdale, Arkansas.

Q: Good heavens why? Chickens?

MORRIS: Yes, the Tyson's chicken plant. This was one of these things that started with one or two Marshallese families going there, someone getting a job with the Tyson's chicken plant, writing back home that this was a very good place, they had good jobs, that their children were able to go to school, that they were able to get health care, they had a home to live in and so it was a good thing and more and more people came. Now, again, it's hard to have a firm number but they estimate there are perhaps 8,000 or even more Marshallese living in Springdale, Arkansas.

Q: Looking at that a built-in going to the United States some countries prize education very much and the kids really take off and the families press the other of sub cultures want the kids to start working as soon as possible. Where would you put the Marshallese?

MORRIS: Unfortunately, I think education has not been something that was traditionally given a high priority. Traditional education, knowledge of the culture, was considered very important and, of course, in traditional culture all the boys would have to, for example, learn navigation, have to learn to sail their canoes...

Q: And lineage I suppose?

MORRIS: ...lineage, and being able to navigate using not even just the stars but the currents of the water. It was a marvelous system that they had worked out on how to fish, all of these kinds of things. Some of the traditional stories and all of this were very important. For women learning some of the traditional handicrafts, the cooking, and traditional ways of acting; all of these things were very important. As far as formal education was concerned this was not something that traditionally was terribly important.

Q: Of course when you look at it sitting on a set of atolls, what the hell do you do with it? You get masters in something and it really doesn't go anywhere unless you get out of the country.

MORRIS: That's very true certainly in many ways. I think now in the current generation there are more people that are recognizing that education is important, that education is their hope for the future and for the future of their children. As you say, the whole idea is get a good education, go to college in the United States and maybe get a masters degree and then you can get a very good job probably outside of the country because the good jobs in the Marshall Islands are few and far between; there are just not a lot of them.

Q: How did you find working with the government there?

MORRIS: It was very interesting, very challenging in some ways but very interesting. I have to say there are some wonderful, wonderful people there that I truly enjoyed working with. The president was just an extremely nice person and was always very supportive. Sometimes we felt like we were on two different wavelengths and it was hard to communicate certain things; for example, some things on the nuclear testing issue. Even when we were working on the college there; there is a college of the Marshall Islands, it's a two-year college. It has U.S. accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which means that the students can get Pell Grants to go to college there and that's the only way they can go; otherwise they could never afford to go there. In order for it to keep its accreditation and it was just about to lose its accreditation one of things that was required was for the government to provide more of the funding the U.S. gives the Marshall Islands; they needed to provide more of it to the college. Communicating this sometimes with leaders in the government on how important this was, it was difficult because they had lots of other things they wanted to use that funding for.

On the other hand, I remember this was shortly after I arrived, we had a commemoration of the second anniversary of the 2001 September 11 attacks. The main high school of the Marshall Islands, Marshall Islands High School, decided they were going to have a special program. They gathered all the students together in an open-air auditorium and they showed a film, which has some footage from the attacks. I think it was a program that originally had been shown on U.S. television but it was a very, very moving program about the September 11 attacks. The foreign minister, a man named Gerald Zackios, spoke at the commemoration. He had spent part of his growing up years, junior high and high school, in Northern California and then he had gotten his first degree in Papua, New Guinea and his masters degree in law in Malta. He was a very well educated, very articulate man who wrote beautifully and spoke so eloquently and he got up and gave a wonderful tribute to the people who had been killed in the September 11 attacks and to the strong relationship between the government and people of the Marshall Islands and the government and people of the United States and the compact and our shared commitment to working together to rid the world of terrorism. I still get chills down my spine just thinking about what a wonderful experience it was to hear this man give this truly, truly moving tribute.

So there were things like that that made you realize that in many ways it is a very special relationship even though we didn't always understand each other that well. Still there was a special relationship not just from the compact and from all of the assistance we were providing but I think from our shared history. After all these two countries had really shared a very close history since the 1940s when the Japanese were defeated and it became a U.S. territory.

Q: Did you get many visitors or commemorations or something particularly the Battle of Kwajalein and all of this? Was this still a living memory?

MORRIS: It was a little after some of those World War II commemorations but every year the people of Kwajalein and working with our military facility there would have a commemoration of the U.S. victory of Kwajalein. They would invite all of the diplomats; it was a bit of a difficult situation for them, of course, because they had very close relations with Japan. There were only three full time diplomatic missions in the Marshall Islands: The United States, Japan and Taiwan. So inviting the Japanese when they were celebrating the defeat of the Japanese on Kwajalein was kind of delicate.

Q: What happened to the population of Kwajalein? You never think about that; you hear about the Japanese. I'm a history buff but there wasn't much room to get out of the way for the people there.

MORRIS: I don't think there was a lot of population on the part that the military is now using but those who were there basically moved to other parts of the atoll. Most of them are concentrated on this island, which is part of Kwajalein Atoll, called Ebeye. It is one of the most crowded places in the world, certainly in Asia. The number of people per square mile is really quite astounding. It's again a difficult issue in our relationship because people are in these very small little houses many of them basically look like cardboard shacks. It looks like a horrible, horrible slum. Of course, people come out: journalists, people come out from the Congress and wonder why the military is not providing housing for these people because these are people many of them who work at the ballistic missile site. The workers come over on the ferries every morning and then they go home to Ebeye every evening, so it is a difficult issue. Of course, what the people in the military say first of all is they don't own this land, they don't own Ebeye, they don't have any rights there; these are houses that are owned by some of the land owners who do own the land. They are leasing these houses to the people who are living there. So they are really the ones who have the responsibility to fix up the houses and basically the people who are living there are leasing so they don't want to fix up the outside of their houses, they don't own it. But it is a difficult issue.

The other reason why it's so crowded is because in the Marshall Islands the extended family is very important. If one person in the family is making money that person has the responsibility to share that money with everybody else in the family. So people from other parts of the Marshall Islands who don't have jobs or are not getting any money move in with their relatives on Ebeye. Most of the people on Ebeye are not working on the military test site; they are living with their extended families and maybe one or two people in each household actually has a job at Kwajalein. Again it's a very, very complicated situation.

Q: Again, going back to my Micronesian experience reading up about it there was the problem of starting businesses there because the person would start a business and stock up a little store and then all his friends and relatives would come in and basically say charge it. At a certain point the store would be denuded and nobody would pay it back. It was this type of thing so it didn't allow for entrepreneurship. Was this a problem?

MORRIS: Yes, it is a problem. I would say it is a serious problem even with the main hotel, or at least one of the two main hotels in Majuro, the capital. This hotel was owned and built by the government of the Marshall Islands basically for a large regional conference, conference of the Pacific Island leaders. So they built this hotel, they asked the Outrigger Hotel Company to come in and manage it for them but it was owned by the government of the Marshall Islands. One of the really serious problems that the hotel had was that people in the government especially would come and have lavish parties there or they would stay there and they wouldn't pay their bills; so the indebtedness of the hotel was quite serious. That meant that they were having a hard time paying essentially the management fee to the Outrigger and also to doing any kind of needed repairs to the hotel. So the Outrigger finally decided they couldn't stay any longer unless the

government was willing to provide the funding to make the necessary repairs. The government decided that no they weren't going to do that. I think it's still a problem that people from the government and others go there and they don't pay their bills so it is a real problem. What you have in Majuro now is a lot of foreign owned businesses so there are quite a number of people from Taiwan, as well as from Mainland China, who have opened up say restaurants, grocery stores and other kinds of ...

Q: And they demand payment.

MORRIS: Yes.

Q: Was there again going back to my other experience and a very short one but yams played a big part. Was there a yam culture or not? People would describe their wealth in yams I think or something.

MORRIS: No, it's not such a big deal there. They did have some yams that grew there, taro root wasn't used so much because it is quite labor intensive, you've got to really pound it. There was also pandanas, which is a very unusual kind of fruit for Americans. It is very fibrous but people use the juice for various things and the juice actually tastes quite good; then the fiber is used for handicrafts. Breadfruits, I mentioned, and then coconut; coconut was a very big thing. People not only would use the coconut liquid for a drink but they would make coconut milk and use it for different food items. Then they would also dry the coconut meat and make it into something called copra, which are basically cakes of dried coconut meat. Then the copra could be exported. It has various kinds of industrial uses.

Q: So it made palm oil?

MORRIS: Yes, yes, that was one of the big industries there. The problem over the years was that copra was basically government subsidized and so the price would go up and down. Sometimes people wouldn't want to bother to produce it because it was a lot of work for hardly any money at all. My understanding is that the price of copra has now gone up finally. The government is providing some additional money so people are making more of it again.

Q: Did you have problems with typhoons?

MORRIS: Not when I was there. The Marshall Islands was very lucky; it seemed to be off the main path for the typhoons. Most of them would move farther west and would hit Yap or other parts of the FSM (Federated States of Micronesia) whether they were coming from Japan or the Philippines or they were coming from other parts of the Pacific. They did not seem to hit the Marshall Islands, at least they didn't when I was there and my understanding is that it had been a very long time since they'd had a typhoon. There had been one where a very huge wave basically washed over the whole island; that was back in the early 1990s. It was not a frequent occurrence.

Q: What about fishing? Particularly all the countries, the Japanese, the Russians, the Norwegians, you know anybody in what amounts to territorial waters. How did that stand?

MORRIS: That is another challenge. The Marshallese people enjoy fishing and they really like to do recreational fishing. They'll go out and they'll catch fish for their family as they need it and for special occasions; but as for developing any type of a real fishing industry this was not something that they did. Instead, the government had sold fishing rights to the Japanese, those that would come in, and to the Taiwanese. There were even a couple of companies from Mainland China that were starting to come in but it was mainly Japanese and Taiwanese that had the fishing licenses. This was a source of revenue for the Marshall Islands government but then in the meantime these foreign fishing boats were basically taking a lot of fish out of the waters. There was a lot of concern about over fishing and then most of this fish was being sent directly to Japan or in some cases it was being sent to mainland U.S. and the Marshallese weren't really getting any income from the fish; the only income they were getting was for the fishing licenses. When I was there, there was what they called the "fish loining" plant. Fish loining basically is stripping out the filet and then they would flash cook it and it would be sent for canning. I believe this was being done in Samoa. This was through a company called the PNO Line...

Q: Pacific and Orient or something like that?

MORRIS: Yes Pacific and Orient. They were having a lot of financial problems so finally they had to close down their plant. The thing about this plant again the Marshallese weren't making much money out of it but it did employ about 500 Marshallese workers; so it was a major source of jobs in the Marshall Islands. This was a major loss really when PNO decided that they just couldn't do it anymore and the Marshall Island government wasn't willing to work with them to give them credit and that sort of thing so they left. At least this was a way of doing some of the processing in the Marshall Islands; but after that then none of the fish were really being processed there.

Now my understanding is that a new company has purchased that operation and is starting again; this is a company from Shanghai. I don't think they're hiring as many Marshallese as they are bringing in more people from China to handle the operation.

Q: I suppose part of the problem is as with many places the culture is such you don't get much work out of certain people. The Chinese are very industrious, I assume the islanders are not that industrious and I suppose it almost goes with the territory doesn't it?

MORRIS: I think there's a certain amount of truth to that. I think actually in the case of this fish loining plant one of the major problems was that most of these workers were women, not well-educated women, but these were women who needed some income. My understanding is that when they came they worked very well and I would have to say Marshallese women tend to be very, very hard working. The problem was that if they were having problems at home, a sick child or they had to take care of an ailing parent or other relative they just didn't come to work. So it was very hard to know how many people you were going to have on any one day at the fish loining plant. Once they were there they were fine but it was a very unreliable kind of work force situation.

Q: It is such a family reliant area.

MORRIS: Right.

Q: How were relations for you as the ambassador with the Japanese at the time?

MORRIS: The Japanese embassy was headed by a charge; the Japanese did not have an ambassador there for some reason. Then there were a couple other people at the Japanese embassy including one young man who was basically responsible for all of the Japanese assistance projects. The Japanese had really quite a lot of assistance they provided to the Marshall Islands including providing the funding to build a brand new hospital in Majuro, which was really a major thing; it was a beautiful new hospital.

But the Japanese charge was a very nice person and we got along well. We'd get together from time to time and I think it was a good (relationship).

Q: Of course with Taiwan we have this peculiar relationship. How did you have to play it? It wasn't much room for maneuvering.

MORRIS: Yes, that was a very challenging relationship and Taiwan was represented at the ambassador level. Actually when I first arrived, we had a charge from Japan the Taiwan ambassador was the dean of the diplomatic corps, such as it was; there were a couple honorary consuls also there. The Taiwan ambassador was a very charming and engaging person; he was just a wonderful diplomat in every sense of the word. He was a very nice person, very sociable and wanted to have really close relationship with the United States. So it was very challenging. I could not go to his embassy or to his residence and I could not invite him to my residence or to the embassy but we did meet from time to time at a restaurant for lunch or dinner. Of course, I would see him all the time and whenever there would be official events he was there, so it was pretty hard to avoid him.

For the Taiwanese, of course, these relationships were very important. Every relationship that Taiwan has is extraordinarily important for them because it helps them out in the UN. They did have the relationship with the Marshall Islands; they had diplomatic relations with Kiribati, another very small Pacific island country. Actually, Kiribati had relations with China when I first arrived, but the Kiribati government decided to kick the Chinese out and establish relations with Taiwan so they had relations with Kiribati. When I was there they established a relationship with another very small country in the area, Nauru. The Federated States of Micronesia, of course, had relations with the People's Republic of China.

Taiwan was trying everything they possibly could to make sure they kept that relationship with the Marshall Islands so they provided all sorts of assistance, unlike U.S. assistance that had to go for specific things, if the government was having a hard time doing its pay roll one month they would call up the Taiwan ambassador and the Taiwan ambassador would say, "Oh sure, we've got some additional aid you can use this to do your payroll." So they were very popular.

The president of Taiwan was going to pay a visit because the president of the Marshall Islands had paid several visits to Taiwan so now the president of Taiwan was going to visit the Marshall Islands; this was I believe in the spring of 2005 that he came with a huge entourage. It was really

a very large entourage. They came for Marshall Islands national day and so, of course, there was a big official commemoration of the national day as there always was; all the diplomatic corps was invited but I couldn't sit with the Taiwan delegation. They decided they were going to have a lunch – they would always have a lunch after these things and normally it was in honor of national day – but this time they decided they were going to do it in honor of the president of Taiwan and his delegation. Of course, I could not go to that so it was a very awkward situation. The Taiwan ambassador was somebody who understood this, he'd served in Vienna and other places in Europe and in the U.S. and he knew very well all of the issues surrounding the U.S.–Taiwan relationship. But the government of the Marshall Islands... getting them to understand these issues was a bit more difficult and, of course, they were not very happy that basically I went to the national day ceremony and then that was it, I was not able to participate in any of the other events because they were all in honor of Taiwan. It was a very challenging kind of relationship but on a personal level the Taiwan ambassador was a delightful person to know.

Q: In the Marshall Islands how did you deal with that other political power the Department of Defense on Kwajalein and all that? How did that work out?

MORRIS: We had very close relations. I would go to Kwajalein on a very frequent basis because this was not only a very important U.S. facility in the Marshall Islands but also we had this major issue of trying to make sure that the U.S. Army could continue to use this facility, which basically meant that the government of the Marshall Islands and the land owners were going to have to come to some kind of an agreement about extending the land lease. The U.S. government and the Marshall Islands government had already agreed to extend it up to 2066 and the landowners said, "Wait a minute we have an agreement with the Marshall Islands government that only goes to 2016; so there is a problem here." At any rate, it was important for me to maintain close relations with the military folks because I was very much involved in working with the Marshall Islands government on this whole issue of the continuation of their presence. I would say that I had very good relations with the colonel; there was always a full colonel who was in charge of the Reagan test site facility. I had very good relations with the commanders there.

Q: This is a place where we fired rockets to and they plunked down in the middle of the water in the atolls?

MORRIS: That's right, in the lagoon.

Q: Does this make one nervous?

MORRIS: No, I wasn't really nervous. Of course, there was always a lot of anticipation when there would be one of these tests on whether or not it was going to be successful. Some of them were and some of them were not successful.

Q: By this time at one point we had a policy of vis a vis the Soviet navy as strategic denial. We wanted to make sure that none of these island states allowed the Soviets to build bases and the Soviets were sniffing around. But I take it by this time that was no longer an issue at all.

MORRIS: No but one of the things that some of the Kwajalein landowners, for example, would talk about was that they had had discussions with the PRC.

Q: People's Republic of China.

MORRIS: Yes, and that China was very interested and would pay a lot more than the U.S. so they would try to use this as a way of getting us to up our assistance because that is basically what it boiled down to, they wanted more money for their land; they thought it was more valuable than what we were paying. So they would use this as a kind of threat or stick to wave at us to get more money. Of course, the problem is they couldn't do that (lease it to the Chinese) without forfeiting the compact because they would have to get permission from the U.S. to do this and I don't think we would provide that kind of permission.

Q: Did you make much contact with the landowners at all?

MORRIS: They, of course, wanted to be very much involved in the discussions. So they would alternate between trying to win our favor and then if they didn't seem to be getting them what they wanted then some of them at least were not above blasting the United States. Certainly I knew all of them, they would come to the embassy from time to time if they had a big event of some kind and they would always invite me and the other members of the diplomatic corps; so I knew all of them and had some discussions with some of them about the issue. When they were together they were very unified that they were not going to sign a new agreement with the Marshall Islands government unless they were going to get more money. Individually some of them were much more willing to sign an agreement because if they don't sign an agreement then they stand to lose in a fairly significant way. Yes, I did have contact with them.

Q: You were there during obviously this was the Bush II administration and we were going through a very unpopular time by many of our foreign policy the war in Iraq and all that. Did that play any role at all for you or was that just too far away?

MORRIS: No, it wasn't and I'm glad you brought that up because the Marshallese, of course, also have the right to serve in the U.S. military. Nobody seemed to know exactly how many Marshallese did serve in the U.S. military but there certainly were a number and a number of them were sent to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Marshallese who joined the military saw it again, as a good job, it was an opportunity to get an education after they had finished with their military service, and so they saw this as a very positive thing. There was a military recruiter who would come in usually a couple times a year to administer the test, as they had to do a written test first. Unfortunately, because of the poor educational system a lot of the Marshallese were not able to pass the military test. But usually then there would be a group that would be sworn in a couple times a year and usually would be ten to fifteen each time who would be sworn in. We don't know exactly how many Marshallese were in the U.S. military and frankly we tried to get that number from the U.S. military several times and they just couldn't provide that information. Of course, with the Marshallese in the United States – the ones in Arkansas, the ones in California and other parts of the country – undoubtedly a number of these people also joined the U.S. military but they would not have been recruited out of the Marshall Islands.

This was a source of pride; it was a source of income, of education. The Marshallese people then tended to be very supportive of U.S. military effort; they had people who were in the military so they were generally very supportive of the war against terror. They were supportive of Iraq; of course I left there in 2006 so I don't know if the attitude has changed. There were – at least as of the time I was there until I left – there had not been any Marshallese who had been killed in either Afghanistan or in Iraq. There had been one who had been fairly badly wounded but he was getting good care at a U.S. military facility. I think the only sore spot as far as that was concerned is that Marshallese were not eligible to become officers; they would have to become U.S. citizens in order to become officers. Basically that was something that they saw as very positive.

Q: Did UN votes play any role for you?

MORRIS: Yes and again this was very important. We wanted the Marshallese to support us in the UN and UN organizations and generally they did. They and the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, the other compact nation and generally had the best voting records in the UN in terms of their support for U.S. positions. So sometimes you would have resolutions on Israel, for example, and the U.S., the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau and Israel would be the only ones that would be supporting it. So, yes, they were generally very supportive. The one issue where unfortunately they did not support us was on whaling, the Japanese were very, very persuasive; they wanted to over turn the ban on commercial whaling and the Marshall Island government supported them to our great disappointment.

Q: Was there any other issue that we should discuss here while you were there that you can think of?

MORRIS: I think we've discussed the major issues. Again, I saw one of the most important issues and it wasn't so much an issue between our two countries as an issue that the Marshallese people really needed to deal with; this was the whole issue of education. The educational system was not providing the kind of education for the Marshallese children that it needed to. When the students finished high school, many of them, if they were tested objectively, they had to have a test. For example, if they wanted to go to the College of the Marshall Islands they had to take an entrance exam. Most of them would come out at about the eighth grade level in terms of their English and math skills. Many of them when they entered the College of the Marshall Islands would be basically in a remedial or developmental program until they got up to the level where they could be considered in their first year. Of course, if they wanted to go someplace else to school, if they wanted to go to Hawaii or the mainland it was very, very difficult for them.

Q: Did we have a Peace Corps there?

MORRIS: We did not have a Peace Corps there when I was there. The Peace Corps had been there but had left; I believe it was during this time of Imata Kabua, the second president. I guess there had been some problems with the Peace Corps program; they weren't too certain of the support of the Marshall Islands government so at that point the Peace Corps pulled out. When I first arrived we had an assessment team that came out from the Peace Corps. They were very interested in seeing whether they should come back in; they wrote a very positive report after

their two week visit but I think because of financial issues with the Peace Corps and demands that they open up in other places in the world they never did open up another program again in the Marshall Islands. I think that was very, very unfortunate because the Peace Corps was beloved when it was in the Marshall Islands. Many Peace Corps volunteers there have actually stayed and either married Marshallese – in most cases Marshallese women, raised families there, taken on very important positions. Others have just stayed even though they didn't marry Marshallese women, they've just stayed there and continued to work and live there and contribute a lot to the country. I think this was a wonderful program contributing so much there and particularly to the educational system. It's a shame that it's not there.

There were a couple volunteer programs; the largest one was something called World Teach which actually had been started by a woman named Helen Claire Sievers who had lived on Kwajalein for a while and decided that there needed to be more volunteer American teachers there. So she started this World Teach Program. As of the time that I left, I think there were over 40 World Teach volunteers and basically these were people who would go out like Peace Corps volunteers to various parts of the country and would teach. They had a commitment of only a year but some of them stayed for longer than that.

Through Dartmouth College there was also another small teacher volunteer program. There were some other volunteer teachers; the Japanese had a volunteer program and even Taiwan sent a few volunteers. There were concerns about the safety of the volunteers, particularly the female volunteers. A couple of the female volunteers had been attacked.

End of reader