

SINGAPORE

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DON CARROLL BLISS, JR.
Commercial Attaché
Singapore (1929-1932)

Ambassador Bliss was born in Michigan and educated at Dartmouth College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1923, specializing primarily in the Commercial and Economic fields. During his long and distinguished career, the Ambassador served in Tokyo, Bombay, Batavia, Alexandria, Singapore, Prague, Bangkok, Athens, Cairo, Paris, Calcutta, London, Ottawa and Addis Ababa, where he was U.S. Ambassador from 1957 to 1960. These are excerpts from a memoir.

Crime in the Street

Tommy had just emerged from the guest room to join me on the balcony when Superintendent Lang of the Detective Branch dropped in, as he sometimes did when in the neighborhood at drink-time. He seemed to like Americans, perhaps because in our home he was treated as a human being and social equal, which was more than could be said for a class-conscious colonial society in which a policeman was respected as one of the lower orders. For me the big Yorkshireman was a valued friend and a mine of information about the seamy side of life in Singapore. He had even taken me with him more than once on his tours of inspection through the crowded lofts which housed in tiny cubicles the faceless multitudes of coolies, rickshaw-pullers, stevedores, food-hawkers and peddlers, complete with their wives and children – part of my education, he said. Tonight he had brought along Bobbie Fraser in his full uniform as Probationary Inspector of Police. Bobbie explained importantly that he was on duty, tomorrow being May Day when the Hylams were expected to put on a Communist demonstration. “Nothing serious, but they mustn’t be allowed to get out of hand, you know.” As for Lang, in wrinkled whites after a long day, he didn’t need to say that he was always on duty and that even then the Detective Branch knew exactly where he was.

It was pleasantly cool on the top floor of Eu Court, a new four-story apartment house – three stories of flats above ground-floor shops – built on Orchard Road by a Chinese merchant out of his profits from the rubber boom of a few years back. We were well above the clouds of mosquitos that emerged at nightfall from the shrubbery around the villas in which most Europeans lived, and we were high enough to catch all the fresh breeze off the sea. Singapore is

practically on the Equator, the sun sets all year round at exactly six o'clock, and night falls swiftly. In half an hour the heat of the day is forgotten and the mercury drops twenty degrees. That is the time, doctors say, for a spot of whisky to tide a man over the change in temperature.

Ah Soong stood waiting for orders. Highball for Tommy. Pink gin for Bobbie. What would the Super like? Whisky? Beer? "The way I feel tonight I'd like a nice pint of bitter out of the keg. Have you got anything like that?"

"Of course not," I answered, "and even if there were any I couldn't abide it. Last time I was through London I tried your famous bitter in a pub and barely got it down, out of politeness. For money you can put it back in the horse."

Lang reared up indignantly. "You Americans," he sputtered, drinking that poison you call Bourbon, and ginger ale on top of it, and full of ice! A highball, is it? You can have it. Give me a half peg of Scotch and a squirt or two of soda. No ice."

The rattan armchair creaked under the big man's weight as he leaned back, long drink in hand. "We've had a spot of luck this month," he remarked. "Only one homicide so far, a Chinese floating in the harbor and we don't know yet who he was or where he came from."

Tommy pricked up his ears. Fresh from the States and pigging it with me while my wife was away, he was insatiably curious about the many strange sights and sounds and smells of this polyglot Oriental city, trade center for the tin and rubber and copra and spices of Malaya and the islands of Indonesia. A Crown Colony garrisoned by British troops, it was also a port through which twenty-five or more ships a day passed on their journeys between the Indian Ocean and the China Sea. The policemen were something new and exciting for him, and he was eager with questions. Lang was in a kindly mood, rather flattered by the attention, and happy to give us a notion of what it was like to keep the peace in a city of half a million people, mostly Chinese, with fringes of Malays from upcountry and Tamils from South India and a smattering of strays from every country in the world, all governed under the benign jurisdiction of the Colonial Office in the name of His Britannic Majesty.

"Actually," Lang continued, "we have to deal with about five homicides month, on the average. The records show exactly sixty cases in 1929 and sixty in 1930; if we keep the figure under that we'll be doing well in 1931. We don't solve all of them by a long shot, the way they do in detective stories. Who can identify a low-class Chinese coolie, beaten up and clubbed to death, much less point a finger at who did it or why? Maybe his friends can tell us something about a Malay taxi-driver found stabbed on a back road, but not much about the man who knifed him and dropped out of sight upcountry. One way we hold down the violence is by keeping guns out of the hands of all natives; they can't buy one anywhere in the Straits Settlements and anyone caught with a gun on him gets an automatic jail sentence. Any weapon like that has necessarily been smuggled in from outside."

The second round of drinks was now in hand and Ah Soong had been told that dinner would be late. Tommy wanted to know why he couldn't find a single night-club in Singapore, by which he meant a place where he could dance into the small hours and maybe pick up a girl.

“There aren’t any, of course. Curfew at midnight, you know. This isn’t Shanghai. Some of the young people like you always want to go on after the dancing packs up at the Raffles, but you’d have to go to somebody’s house for a nightcap or else take a rickshaw to the Egg Club for fried eggs and a cup of coffee. The Egg Club is what they call it, but it’s nothing more than a collection of trestle tables and benches, charcoal stoves and Coleman lamps, set up in the open air in the middle of a back street. Illegal, of course, and we don’t let them stay in the same street more than one night, but the rickshaw coolies always know where it is when you go looking for it. We turn a blind eye; the neighborhood doesn’t often complain about the nuisance and the youngsters could get into a lot more trouble than that.

“Opium dens? You must be thinking of tales about Chinatown in San Francisco. Here, the opium business is controlled by the Straits Government, in Penang and Malacca as well as Singapore, and all addicts are registered. They have to smoke their pipes on Government premises and they get a daily quota that’s supposed to be within their means but enough to keep them happy, and they go on with it for years. Prices are fixed to give the government a nice bit of revenue out of it.

The Super continued on a graver note. The biggest problem for the Detective Branch is the gambling, and we go all out on that. We’re convinced that it’s the root cause of a great deal of thieving as well as most of the armed robbery and the like. Cut down the gambling and you automatically cut down on crimes against property. It’s the Chinese who are the inveterate gamblers, every last one of them, from the coolie betting a few coppers to the rich merchant putting down hundreds of dollars on a roll of the dice. In the racing season everybody bets, on the ponies, of course, but all year round the Chinese crowd into games organized by professionals. They work several kinds of dice games played with three dice or six, but biggest of all is Fan Tan, and that’s all over the place. There was even a set going on the roof of this apartment house. Bobbie here raided it last month when you were out of town, and got a good haul. The house servants who live up there didn’t know anything about it, of course, although the beans were rattling under their noses, but half a dozen characters who couldn’t explain why they were there drew jail sentences.

“Another headache for us is the so-called secret society imported from China. There may be as many as a hundred of them in Singapore right now and they give us no end of trouble. These secret societies are not really societies, more like what you Americans call mobs, but they certainly are secret and we don’t often get inside one. They may organize robberies or act as fences but they live mainly on extortion. Practically every Chinese shopkeeper in Singapore has to pay squeeze to one of those societies, and a failure to come across means that a gang will wreck the shop or eating place one night, or beat up the proprietor or even murder him. He usually contributes meekly after the society has exhibited one of its gunmen and he has been given a glimpse of a weapon. It’s worse trouble for us when societies get into disputes over territory. That can mean bloodshed, and maybe a corpse or two, but there’s usually damned little we can take into court.”

The telephone rang. "Is superintendent Lang there?" A few monosyllables and he hung up, turning to Bobbie. "Man shot in Victoria Street. Let's get to it." Bobbie started up and Lang glanced appraisingly at us. "Would you like to come along?"

Would we? There was a stampede for the door and we dashed down the stairs Bobbie in front yelling for the driver of the police car parked in the courtyard. As we piled out of the entrance the car drew up and we were off down Victoria Street. Four blocks away a rapidly growing crowd signaled the scene of action and we pulled up just across the street.

Victoria Street is a main thoroughfare, wide, paved, lighted by gas lamps, in the evening thronged with pedestrians, handcarts, rickshaws, motorcars, buses. It is lined with the usual unbroken row of Chinese shophouses, all two-storied, with shops below and a crowded warren of small rooms above. The upper story overhangs, roofing the five-foot sidewalk, and is supported by square brick pillars. Between sidewalk and street is an open drain, deep, about two feet across.

Most of the shops were closed and shuttered at this hour, and we headed for the lights of the lone coffee stand that was still open where the crowd was thickest. Lang shouldered his way to where a motionless figure lay face up on the sidewalk. There was no sign of violence – just a low-class Chinese lying there in his white cotton undershirt and black trousers, bare feet asprawl. A group of Malay constables kept the curious well away, and four or five Chinese detectives flitted back and forth, nosing through the crowd like hounds casting for a scent. A big shirt-sleeved Englishman was bending over the body – Williams of the Police, expert in matters Chinese. The coffee stand was deserted save for a single scullion squatting motionless on a stool; the proprietor was outside on the sidewalk explaining volubly to a detective. At one side a Chinese woman lay in a dead faint, her head supported on the shoulder of another.

Lang bent over beside Williams, lightly touched the silent form. "Very dead," he said, and turned the face to the light. "Ah, we've got him printed. He was up only a month ago." He pulled up the undershirt and exposed a small crescent-shaped wound, exactly like the little cut a penknife would make, just over the solar plexus. Lang felt under the back. "Still inside. That's a bit of luck. Small bullet. Must be a .32."

"Nice clean Murder," said Bobbie, looking at the body critically.

"He was hit twice," said Williams, and he felt under the man's hips, only to pull his hand away with a sharp exclamation. It was covered with blood, invisible on the black cotton trousers. He went into a shop, still deserted except for the rigid figure on the stool, and washed his hands at a tap.

Lang went swiftly through the clothing and garnered several bits of paper covered with Chinese characters. Williams looked them over under the gaslight. "Secret society pidgin," he said. "He's been collecting. Better have a look at his digs. He lives just up here beyond Rochor Road."

A choked, bubbling wail rose above the buzz of the crowd. The woman had come to. "It's his wife," Williams said. "She won't leave his body. They ought to get her out of here."

Lang talked in an undertone with Williams as detective after detective slid up, saluted, and reported briefly before merging into the crowd again. The woman broke into a crazy singsong, shrieked hysterically, and threw herself violently to the ground as a couple of policemen and her woman friend tried to get her away. Finally a stalwart Malay constable picked her up bodily and put her into a rickshaw, the other woman climbed in beside her, and they, started off up the street, the half-crazed woman shrieking and moaning and struggling to get down.

Bobbie had been racing up and down the drain with a flashlight and dashed up to report that he hadn't been able to find the gun. "There usually isn't one," he explained to us. "For a job like this they'll rent a gun from someone who makes a living by hiring it out at five or ten dollars a time. The gun is hidden in a package and handed to the gunman usually by a woman, just before he goes into action, and he passes it back to her later.

The conference broke up and we all climbed into the police cars, zigzagged a few blocks, and pulled up in front of another darkened row of shophouses. Lang jumped out and pushed through a little crowd of food-hawkers and idling rickshaw coolies to seize a Chinese by a shoulder – the only man in sight who looked like a local resident. Protesting volubly, the man led us through a shop piled high with gunny sacks, up a crazy flight of stairs, and along a narrow corridor lighted by a dim kerosene lamp. Lang pulled aside a flimsy curtain and the flashlights revealed the home of the deceased – a room about eight feet square, palatial for a low-class Chinese, furnished with a double bed, a wash-stand, a decrepit cabinet, cane chairs, a round table, two big spittoons.

Williams went straight to the stand and picked up the tin washbowl. "Always the first place to look," he said. In the little space below he found a sheaf of thin papers covered with Chinese characters and he glanced quickly through them while Bobbie held a flashlight. "Well, well, a list of the shops he's been squeezing. Good enough." He sorted through a heap of oddments in the cabinet and pulled out a bunch of slips. "Pawn tickets. Probably for stuff the gang has stolen."

The bed was turned back, the mattress poked. Nothing. The flashlights swung around the room and centered on a picture – a Chinese man and woman, dressed in their finest, sitting primly on either side of a round table. As we stared curiously that awful wailing broke out in the street below. The wife had come home.

Down the stairs and outside, where the street was now blocked by a crowd of curious Chinese attracted by the cars, the lights, the constables, the thrilling news that had spread like wildfire through the Rochor District. The distracted wife sat on a chair just outside the door while her woman friend dabbed her face with water and crooned to her in a soothing monotone.

Off again in the cars, this time to the police station, where a British sergeant of police sat at a desk and native policemen and detectives sat or stood about in a large room on the ground floor. One wall consisted of highly polished steel bars, floor to ceiling and six or eight inches apart, arranged to form three cells. In one of them, seated on stool under bright ceiling lights, was a young Chinese, perhaps in his early twenties, with unusually clean-cut features and alert eyes. Two Malay constables opened the door of the cell and led him out to stand before the desk. We

could see that his cotton undershirt was torn half off his shoulders and there was a smear of dried blood on his chin.

A Chinese interpreter stepped forward and question and answer alternated rapidly, Williams putting in a word occasionally on his own account. A linen coat was produced and held up before the prisoner. He touched it and his fingers ran rapidly over the pockets. His face seemed to sag and Williams pulled out a clip of cartridges.

More questions and answers, all very quietly. It might have been any idle conversation in an unfamiliar language except for the alert constables standing by their prisoner, the bars on the cells, the knowledge that less than an hour ago this personable young man had fired a bullet into another man's body, and in due course would be hanged by the neck till dead.

"He's confessed," said Lang, and the tension eased. Handcuffs were produced, the prisoner manacled, and a police car drove away with Williams beside the driver, the prisoner in the back with a constable and a detective on either side. "They've gone to take his confession before a magistrate," Lang explained. "It's no good having a confession to the police – not admissible in evidence. They'll rout out some magistrate who'll probably curse us for disturbing his evening. Then he's promised to show us where he threw away the gun, but it'll be a miracle if we find it."

Soon the four of us were back home, having a refresher after all that activity, and before going on to dinner Lang filled in the story for us. The corpse belonged to a bad hat, known to the police as head of a minor Hokkien secret society, and he was murdered because he had been poaching on the territory of another gang. That lot had a gunman on the payroll – the young man we saw at the police station – and they supported him upcountry when he wasn't in town. He got a hundred and fifty Straits dollars for every job like this. (At 77 U.S. cents per dollar that would be \$85.00 to us.) It used to cost only fifty dollars to have a man killed in Singapore but the price has gone up and the police take sore credit for that.

It was quite clear how it all went. When it was decided to murder the man he was followed for several days to establish that he often spent an evening in that little coffee-shop in Victoria Street. Probably used it as a kind of office. The gunman came down from Johore in the afternoon, the place was pointed out to him, and he was shown the target. As his victim sat there quietly sipping coffee he was just across the sidewalk, the gun under his coat, lurking behind a pillar and waiting for the next move. Completely unaware of all this, the man paid for his coffee, elbowed past a rickshaw-puller who was perched on a stool tucking into a bowl of bahmi, and strolled out the door only to be confronted by the gunman, who stepped out from behind the pillar and fired pointblank at him. The shot missed, hitting the coolie in the leg, and he turned to run. A second shot caught his hip, knocking him down, and he rolled over on his back. The third shot was perfectly placed and he never moved again.

The gunman ran down the street, trying to lose himself in the crowd, throwing away the gun and later his coat, since he still had those damning cartridges in the pocket. But the hue and cry was on, a police constable was on point duty at the next corner, two Chinese detectives were just up the street, and he was caught between them. He surrendered after a brief struggle and was led back to the coffee-shop while a phone call was being put through to the Detective Branch

and Williams was speeding to Victoria Street in a car full of detectives and constables. The detectives immediately pounced on everyone who might have been on the scene, and by good luck got two right away, a Chinese and a Malay who were eye-witnesses and could positively identify the murderer. Before we got there he had been rushed off to the lock-up, the wounded rickshaw-puller landed in General Hospital, and the witnesses were conducted to the Detective Branch to have their statements taken. The case was complete except for the weapon, but if it were found it would only be the cherry on top.

“Let me see,” mused Lang. “We can get him ready for the Assizes on the 12th, sentence will be passed on the 14th, and he’ll be for it on the 28th. Less than a month. We’ve had a bit of luck.”

“Nice clean murder case,” said Bobbie.

In a shooting outrage which occurred in the Rochor District last night one Chinese was instantly killed while another is in a very serious condition. The shooting is understood to have been in connection with a premature “celebration” of Labour Day. No arrests were made.

Singapore Free Press, May 1, 1931

Blackmail and Other Misdemeanors

It was tea-time on the terrace of the Europe Hotel as its shadow inched across smooth green turf toward the Cricket Club gleaming white against a background of palm trees and the bright blue of the sunlit harbor. The hum of voices nearly drowned the clatter of tea cups as turbaned servants in knee-length white coats girded by red sashes circulated among the tables distributing plates of Carr’s biscuits and cucumber sandwiches. This was a bit of England transported to colonial Singapore, the ritual of tea on a summer afternoon, complete with muslin frocks and flowered hats, although the gentlemen in attendance were clad perforce in the white drill of tropical civvies.

Only a few tables on the shaded terrace were unoccupied; the clientele of the Europe was notably faithful and could be counted on to be there every afternoon. In the social hierarchy of the Crown Colony they were in a class by themselves, those good people. None of the men were members of the Singapore Club, where tycoons met at noon for three pink gins and a curry before returning to the office to sign letters and doze away the afternoon. The ladies gossiped about the doings in the Tanglin Club but had never sunbathed by the pool or sat out a dance with an aide from Government House. The Raffles Hotel was world famous, of course, and one went there from time to time, but it was full of American tourists and a lot of foreigners from everywhere. One was much more comfortable here, among one’s own kind. Anyway the Europe was a cut above the Adelphi, stuck in the middle of town and no view, even though George could produce the hottest curries this side of his native Colombo. As for the Van Wijk, it was low, no two words about it, that Dutch hotel under the trees where sailors off the ships and all sorts of mixed breeds came looking for tarts. Non-existent for them, in a part of the city they never visited and of which they knew nothing, the several floors of the Southern Hotel blazed with light every night, it’s public and private dining-rooms crowded with Chinese bankers, merchants and landlords who might be ordering a banquet, complete with singsong girls, equal to anything in Hong Kong or San Francisco, though maybe not Shanghai.

It was in this atmosphere that the wives and daughters of the British subjects who staff the Empire with their menfolk in the Europe Hotel. The men were employees of banks and trading companies, working-level civil servants and administrators, serving out their time before going back home with their pensions. In England they would regard themselves as respectable middle-class citizens, loyal, dutiful, knowing their place. Here they were all that and more. Here they, and above all their women, were also guardians of the race, intolerant of miscegenation in any form and regarding “natives” as children to be disciplined for their own good, to be guided in useful directions, to be recruited as raw manpower, all with the best intentions in the world under the protection of His Majesty’s armed forces and British law. So they drank their tea and munched their biscuits, chattered and gossiped, secure and self-satisfied.

Into this sedate picture two alien figures came up the steps from the street. One was a white man (an Englishman?), a small erect figure neatly dressed in khaki shirt and shorts, khaki-colored stockings, well polished brown shoes. Not alarming, the man, not too much out of place. But his companion! A black woman, a very black woman, scrawny but full-breasted in a dress of shocking pink satin, her face heavily powdered under a drooping white hat, her cheeks rouged, her lips a slash of red. Not a Negress, no not that, perhaps an Indian, a Tamil? Tamils are very dark. Conversations broke off abruptly and the questions raced unspoken from table to table as every head turned to stare at this odd couple sitting down near the entrance.

“Boy,” the man called to a passing waiter, “bring one tea one lemon squash.” His voice rang out clearly in the stunned silence and the servant fled. An assistant manager hurried forward. “I’m sorry sir, we can’t serve you. You’ll have to leave.”

“What do you mean you can’t serve us? And why should we leave? We’re British subjects, my wife and I, and we have as much right here as anyone else. This is a public place, isn’t it? Bring us tea immediately.”

Still dead silence, and the company craned to watch. The assistant manager was firm. “No, you can’t have tea here. And you will have to leave. If you don’t go immediately I shall have you put out. And if you create a disturbance I’ll call the police. Now go.” A towering Sikh watchman, summoned from the interior of the hotel, loomed over the woman.

“Come, dear,” the man said. “We’re not wanted here, it seems, and I don’t think much of the place anyway, and even less of the people.” He took the woman’s arm and led her down the steps. The Sikh followed closely and pulled shut the iron grille that guarded the entrance at night. Barred from the hotel and standing on the sidewalk next to the rickshaw stand, the man faced the assistant manager and the phalanx of fascinated spectators, his eyes coldly contemptuous, his lip curling. “This is an outrage,” he said, “an insult to the British flag, a violation of the law.” His voice rang out more clearly than ever. “You haven’t heard the last of this by any means. I’ll be seeing you in magistrate’s court.” With that he climbed into a rickshaw beside the woman and they disappeared up the street.

On the terrace the excited babble rose to a crescendo. That was Begg. I’ve heard about him. And that was his wife. She’s a Tamil. What a horror! What will he do next? They ought to be in jail.

The hotel management went into a huddle. Would he really file suit? He's a smart lawyer, they say. Did anyone touch him or the woman? Good, he can't claim assault. And he was careful not to do anything we could charge him with. He's a clever bastard. But we can't have him and that woman barging in whenever they like. We'll have to buy him off, I suppose, and the Raffles will chip in if they know what's good for them.

And that's the way it was. The Singapore Free Press had nothing to say about the affair, although the European community was buzzing with the story. No charges were filed by anyone and there was no court case. Nor was the incident repeated. When Begg made a deal he kept his word, provided he were paid enough, that is, and often enough.

If a Chinese secret society could collect squeeze from a shop there was no reason why Begg couldn't collect from a hotel, less crudely, perhaps, but just as effectively and no doubt just as profitably.

We Americans viewed all this with detachment as we listened to the gossip and various ladies voiced their sense of outrage. We certainly didn't think to criticize; in 1930 there were plenty of Jim Crow laws on the books at home and in those days we took white discrimination against uppity blacks as a matter of course. Begg was something else again, and we wanted to know more about him and his wife.

He was a remittance man, everyone agreed, but he never received any remittances. Instead he had been fixed up with a job on a British rubber estate upcountry, after which his people washed their hands of him. How or when or why he married a Tamil girl was not clear. There were certainly plenty of Tamils on the rubber estates; they were recruited in South India and shipped in by the trainload to work as rubber tappers or common laborers. And it was not difficult to understand how a man living alone on a rubber estate might get a Tamil girl pregnant. But why on earth did he marry her? One story was that a Scotch Presbyterian estate manager insisted that he marry the girl and when the news reached London he and Begg were both out of work. Most people thought that this tale was clotted nonsense, but they had no other explanation to offer. The indisputable fact was that Begg and the Tamil girl were legally married and had come to Singapore to set themselves up in business.

That business was prostitution, no less, and they lived on Mrs. Begg's earnings, with trimmings of blackmail. The prostitution bit was straightforward enough. Every evening Mrs. Begg in her pink satin dress installed herself at a table at the Van Wijk Hotel, her paler sisters under the skin set at other tables, alone or in small groups, and men on the prowl sat at still others. The Van Wijk wasn't much of a hotel but waiters brought drinks from the bar to the lighted area of trampled turf arranged as an open-air cafe under the trees, the whole complex surrounded by a low wall and served by a rickshaw stand in the street near the gate. There was no movement between tables; a municipal ordinance forbade soliciting in a public place and the ban was enforced, but there was nothing to stop a man from giving a girl the eye, or vice versa. The woman would then get into a rickshaw and go around the block, the man would get in another rickshaw and go around the other way, and thus the twain would meet in a back street and go on from there. Some men like dark meat and Mrs. Begg didn't often have to sit all evening alone with her lemon squash.

My friend the policeman denied that this was just another example of British hypocrisy. “What do you want us to do?” he expostulated. “Here we have a dozen or more tourists and men coming off the merchant ships every night looking for you know what. We don’t allow street-walkers – there just aren’t any in the European parts of town, as you well know – and those people have to have some place to go. I’d rather see them at the Van Wijk, where we know everybody, than trusting themselves to the next taxi-driver or rickshaw-puller. The Chinese can look after themselves but a newly arrived American jolly well couldn’t. It’s a kind of prevention and much better than a tragedy that’s beyond cure.”

“Maybe you’re right at that,” I admitted, “but what about the Beggs? They seem to have invented a new wrinkle. One of my lads saw the whole thing one night. He was having coffee on his balcony when along came Mrs. Begg in a rickshaw to meet a man in the street just below. They seemed to be arguing, presumably about monetary matters, when suddenly she let out a string of curses and started beating the man with a stick, all the time screaming bloody murder. The man tried to defend himself but then Begg came racing up, yelling for the police, and that was too much for the victim, who forked over some money and fled. How about that? It’s blackmail, pure blackmail, and people say Mrs., Begg’s stick is set about with gramophone needles. Dangerous weapon if a man caught one in the eye. Tommy says that if he ever met Mrs., Begg on the street at night he’d run like hell the other way.”

“Yes, I’ve heard tell of things like that,” Lang said, “but what can the police do? I’d dearly love to catch them out but they’re pretty cute about picking time and place and we’ve had no luck. And then the victim is maybe a sailor shipping out next morning or a planter in town for a night out and well aware of what the London directors would think. So nobody comes to us with the tale and without a sworn complaint we can’t pull them in.”

The case of Abdul was something else again. Abdul was our office boy-cum-messenger, what they call a tambie, and he was a favorite with all of us, American officers and Chinese clerks alike. Always clean and neat, he was proud of his smart uniform and wore his pill-box hat with an air, happy to be working for the Americans who treated him so well.

One afternoon Abdul returned to the office with a troubled face. He had run into Mrs. Begg on the street, he explained to Chang, and he was worried about what she might do. He was just walking around showing a friend the sights, he said, when Mrs. Begg came down the street in a rickshaw. She was a sight herself, in her pink satin dress, and his friend asked who that could be. Abdul was a bit vague about what he said in reply, but whatever it was she heard it and scrambled out of the rickshaw, screaming obscenities and lashing at him with her famous stick. He and his friend between them wrestled the stick away from her, and Abdul broke it over his knee. That brought even louder shrieks and a demand that two British soldiers passing by come to her rescue, but they only laughed at her. She finally rolled away, screaming more obscenities and threatening Abdul with dire penalties when her husband learned about this. The soldiers told him not to worry; he had only been defending himself and there was nothing the bitch could do about it.

They were wrong. When Abdul came to work next day he was arrested by a constable and led away to appear in magistrate's court and face a charge of assault and battery sworn to by Mrs. Begg. We held a council of war and Tommy was dispatched to call on the magistrate before court convened and try to fix the case. After all, it was Abdul who had been assaulted and the charge was ridiculous on the face of it.

Tommy was glum when he reported back. Even if Abdul were an employee of the United States Government, the magistrate had said, he was a British subject under local jurisdiction and he would have to answer to a duly sworn complaint. The reputation of Mrs. Begg was not germane to the case and even to speak of it invited an action for slander. In his court all British subjects stood equal under the law and every case was judged on its merits, regardless of either party's social standing. He wouldn't dream of dismissing a case before he heard the evidence. Abdul would have to stand trial.

In the event the trial was a farce. Begg led on behalf of his wife and had recruited three witnesses to support the charge. One and all they swore that little Abdul had attacked Mrs. Begg without provocation, dragging her from her rickshaw and inflicting severe injuries on her person. The victim of this brutal assault offered to display her bruises. The stick was not mentioned; that was a delicate subject.

Abdul had no witnesses to support his denials. His friend had left town and he didn't even try to locate two soldiers in the ranks of the Welch Regiment. He was alone and defenseless, overwhelmed by the weight of evidence.

The magistrate found him guilty perforce but forbore imposing a fine on a first offender, although Abdul was admonished not to repeat the offense and he had to pay court costs. These were assessed at four Straits dollars, a sum that didn't put much of a dent in the petty cash account.

The more we thought about it the more we seethed with indignation. Was this the vaunted British justice? Perhaps something of the sort was only to be expected in a Malayan sultanate like Perak or Kelantan, we told ourselves, but not in a court presided over by a British magistrate who spouted legal platitudes about impartial justice and equal rights under the law. More British hypocrisy?

But Begg wasn't through with Abdul. A few days later Chang came to my door in mid-morning. "Mr. Begg is outside in the corridor," he reported. "He says he wants Abdul to come out so he can serve a summons on him."

"A summons? A summons for what? Bring him in and I'll talk to him."

It was my first and only confrontation with Begg in the flesh. I didn't shake hands or ask him to sit down, and he stood there by the door in his neat khaki shirt and shorts, pith helmet in one hand, a paper in the other. His rather sallow face was a mask under close-clipped brown hair, his gray eyes level, his demeanor quietly assured. "I'm here to serve a summons on your man Abdul in a civil action," he said. "He has been found guilty of an atrocious assault on my wife and

under the law she is entitled to damages. I'm suing him on her behalf and he will have to pay for his crime. I know that he's here and I'm asking you to produce him."

That was the gist of what he had to say and he said it several times, always in that flat, unemotional voice. I was far from unemotional, but we were alone behind the closed door and the things I said to him are fortunately not a matter of record. It was impossible to insult him, I soon discovered. He took it all with no change of expression, brushed it aside as "neither here nor there," and returned to his litany: Abdul had been convicted of a crime; he must pay a penalty; Mrs. Begg was entitled to compensation; that was the law. If Abdul wasn't produced he would wait; in the corridor until he came out, however long that might take. This last was what gained the day for him. I wasn't going to let him display himself by our office door for the whole world to see. While he couldn't barge into the office, and didn't try, there was no way to force him to leave the public corridor. So Abdul was served with the summons and would have to go to court again.

The Chinese staff coached Abdul elaborately and rehearsed him for his appearance before the magistrate. Barefoot and dressed in his shabbiest shirt and shorts, he put on a magnificent act, Tommy reported. He pleaded for mercy, he wept, he moaned that the Americans paid him only a pittance, he was in debt, his parents were dead, he was the sole support of an aged grandmother and six brothers and sisters. The magistrate listened without comment to this tale of woe, nor did he seem at all impressed by the importunate demands of Begg for compensation to salve his wife's distressing wounds. Without hesitation he announced the verdict.

It was unreasonable, His Worship declared, to expect a lowly office tambie to produce a large sum of money and his American employers could not be required to pay on his behalf. The amount of damages the plaintiff could collect, he ruled, was twenty-five dollars. That sum, he stipulated would be payable at the rate of one dollar per month and the plaintiff would have to appear in court to claim it. Begg's dismay at this dictum was a sight to see. Tommy chortled, while the magistrate ignored all protests and called the next case. Begg stormed out in a rage, declaring that it was an insult to require him to appear once a month for two years to collect his award, and he wouldn't do it. Our victory was complete.

As we congratulated each other in the office we decided that after all there was something to be said for British justice if it functioned in practice, even if somewhat deviously, to protect one of His Majesty's lowliest subjects.

Smarting under this set-back, Begg made a mistake. For a long time had operated successfully in lower echelons of the colonial society, seemingly invulnerable to retribution, but now he reached upward in the social scale with a foray into the area where the levers of autocratic power are manipulated. There was no conceivable financial advantage to be gained from what he did, and no apparent reason for it unless it was simply an act of defiance. What did he do? He and his wife attended an auction, that's what.

In those days turmoil in China produced a constant flow of loot to the treaty ports and down the coast to Singapore and beyond. Priceless treasures came on the market at figures that bore no relation to their value: blackwood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl, elaborately adorned

lacquer cabinets, ancient screens and wall hangings, rare porcelains, intricate carvings of jade and ivory, fabulous silk embroideries. Many went to stock curio shops but the finest pieces were offered privately to wealthy collectors. Sir William had been one of the most assiduous and knowledgeable of such collectors as he climbed the ladder of promotion in the giant banking, shipping and trading company that he finally headed, but now he had come to the end of the line. The London directors as a matter of policy limited the Managing Director to five years in office, after which he was required to give way to another while he himself would retire with a comfortable fortune. Sir William was therefore leaving Singapore, but he had acquired many more things than he would have room for in a country house in the Home Counties. What was left behind would therefore be sold to the highest bidder and Sir William advertised a public auction to be held in his sprawling mansion in the Tanglin district.

The European community was agog. It would be a great opportunity to pick up treasures not normally available in the curio shops. It would also be social occasion; everyone would be there, possibly even the Governor and Lady Clementi with a party from Government House. All went well as the motorcars drew up and a growing throng circulated through the ground floor rooms, noting; and comparing and choosing the items that appealed to them. Then, horror heaped on horror? Begg and his Tamil wife debouched from a rickshaw, strolled through the entrance, and seated themselves on a sofa in the main drawing-room. No one thought to stop them and no one quite dared to eject them; after all it was a public auction, advertised as such. They seemed to be having the time of their lives, Tommy reported, Begg in his neat khaki, his wife reeking with patchouli in her pink satin dress. They giggled and nudged each other as they spotted one after another of their victims; they grinned broadly as newcomers did a double take and moved hastily into other rooms, the main drawing-room itself quickly emptied, and some people even fled the place altogether. Tommy didn't stay to see the end of it all. The auction was actually held, he understood, but judging by the situation when he left it was not the social success that Sir William had hoped it would be and it probably cost him money.

Not long after this an Inspector of Police came down to Singapore from Malacca, dressed himself in mufti, and sat at a table in the Van Wijk compound. In due course Mrs. Begg departed in a rickshaw, the stranger in another, and they met under a street-lamp for the well-worn routine, but this time the scenario had a different ending. When Mrs. Begg let out her shrieks and started beating the man with her stick he seized her and held her firmly. "I'm a police officer," he said, "and you're under arrest." Struggling violently, she scarcely heard him, nor did Begg as he charged out of the shrubbery across the street to attack his wife's assailant from the rear. A whistle blew, constables came running, and the two were at last in the clutches of the police.

That night Begg received a visitor in his cell. All charges against him would be dropped, he was told, and he would be provided with a passage to England if he would undertake never to show his face again in the Straits Settlements. His wife? No, she would have to remain in custody. Proudly, defiantly, Begg refused. Unless his wife went with him he would not leave Singapore.

The sentence was a stiff one – three years hard. Just for assaulting a policeman and resisting arrest? We wondered. Was it aggravated assault? Did Mrs. Begg's stick draw blood? Perhaps. Or was there more to it than that? Authority was inscrutable.

JAMES J. HALSEMA
Information Officer, USIS
Singapore (1949-1952)

James J. Halsema was born in Ohio in 1919, but spent his childhood in the Philippines. He entered into the USIE, a predecessor to USIA, in 1949. His career included posts in Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Egypt, and Chile. Mr. Halsema was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1989.

HALSEMA: So we got to Singapore at the beginning of 1950, and this was the time that the so-called Malayan Emergency was under way. It set a precedent, because every foreign post that I had was a place where something was happening which caused the country to be in a state of crisis while I was there. I don't think I caused any of these crises, but I certainly was involved in them. [Laughter]

Singapore itself was regarded as being relatively safe, being an island. Although we managed to have a bloody series of riots over a so-called Maria Hertogh, who was a Dutch girl who had been adopted during the war by a Javanese Muslim family.

Hertogh. H-E-R-T-O-G-H, I believe is the way it was spelled. She was raised as a Muslim, and after the war her parents tried to reclaim her. This caused a great deal of stir among the Muslim Malay population of Singapore who felt that a true Muslim was being dragged away from their midst. This led to a three-day riot in which a number of people were killed, and the AP man was seriously hurt, so that even Singapore itself was not quiet during our period there.

We were in Singapore. At that point it was the headquarters of the British overall representative for Southeast Asia, who was Malcolm McDonald, the son of the British Prime Minister during the Labor period. I guess he was coordinator--the exact line of command I was never too sure of. But Singapore was a British crown colony, Malaya was then a British protectorate, and, of course, there were Sarawak, Brunei, and other places in Borneo, which were also part of his jurisdiction.

McDonald was a very urbane, intelligent, and delightful person to know. His mistress was Elizabeth Marcos, whose brother later became President of the Philippines. At that point she was a journalist in Singapore. We knew her quite well. She used to come to visit us, and we were present among the handful of guests at the time that McDonald married her off to an Australian newspaper man by the name of Michael Keon. We were so full of champagne at that point, that I have regretted ever since that I didn't tape-record the introduction of the bride by McDonald. It was full of double-meaning allusions to their relationship. [Laughter]

Q: What was his motivation? Was he about to return to Britain?

HALSEMA: No, his wife was about to come from Canada for one of her rare visits.

Q: I see.

HALSEMA: But aside from that, McDonald ran a very good show out of a part of Singapore called Phoenix Park. He was in charge of all British operations in the area, including their propaganda to counter the Communists. Our main job was to help the British in this process.

Q: Your USIS work?

HALSEMA: Yes. Along with our conventional job of representing the U.S. I was a hundred-percent addition to the staff of Henry Lawrence, who was our PAO. Henry had been in Singapore for about a year by the time that I got there. At that point, they were just beginning to build up the program. Our consul general was Henry Langdon, who was a very old fashioned Foreign Service officer from the old days on the China circuit. Like most of the people who were in Southeast Asia at that point, they were refugees from the mainland, who were being sent to places supposedly because such places had a Chinese minority--in Singapore, of course, it was a majority--and it was assumed they would be well thought of there.

But Langdon thought very little of the Information program. I remember at one point he confided to me, "Jim, you know, there's no future in this kind of a program that the Department is running, but I think you could probably do very well as a public relations man at one of our larger embassies. I'm sure that there will always be need for that." But the powers that be were building up the program.

One of the first things that Alice did was to work with two of the local employees. One was Bill Lim. The other was Rita Han, wife of a Chinese Nationalist air force officer who was on Taiwan. Lim was a Singapore Chinese who'd been educated in the United States and who affected, at times, a southern accent. Alice once asked, "Why do you speak with a southern accent?" and he said, "Because Ah'm from south China." [Laughter] He was a great guy.

Neither Alice nor her two assistants had ever run a library before, but at that point USIS didn't have a librarian, and we wanted to open one. Henry Lawrence was a bachelor, and his house was filled with the books for the library which had been sitting there for several months because there was nobody around who could get them on the shelves. So the three amateurs got the library together, so that by the time the USIS librarian from Jakarta finally did arrive to check on the progress, he found that the library was there and in operation.

Q: Did they set it up on the Dewey System?

HALSEMA: Yes, they had read books and they'd put it together the way it was supposed to be done. The library was opened on Raffles Place, right down in the center of Singapore, a few blocks away from Change Alley. The consulate was in a building right on the waterfront, so it was a short walk between the two buildings. That was the first expansion we had.

Q: Did it get a considerable patronage?

HALSEMA: Oh, yes. Because it was the first free library that they'd ever had in Singapore, and the whole idea...

Q: First one of largely English books, I suppose, because of the long British occupation.

HALSEMA: Yes. The library was really a big addition to the life in Singapore, because a lot of people were able to use it who couldn't really afford to belong to subscription libraries. My office was in the same building, which was a converted warehouse, that was full of the smells of the various spices that had been stored there. A very dusty place that gave me a lot of allergies that it took me years to recover from. And it was hot, it was not air conditioned. That was considered a luxury in those days, which consuls general enjoyed, but not the troops. Henry had his office in the consulate, and I had my office in this library building. It was really quite a good set-up for me because it meant that I really wasn't directly under the thumb of the consul general.

As a former newspaperman, of course, I felt at home with journalists. And there were coffee shops on Raffles Place, and we could go down and most of the press were in that general vicinity, anyway. There was the Straits Times, of course, the British newspaper, and the new Singapore Standard, but there were several Chinese newspapers like Nanyang Siang Pau, and I got to know the newspapermen very quickly, as a former journalist. I also got to meet some very interesting young people around there, like a young lawyer who'd been educated at Cambridge, who was regarded with rather a great deal of suspicion by the Consulate and the British authorities because he was considered to be pretty far over to the left. Certainly pinko, if not further. His name was Lee Kuan Yew.

Q: The subsequent prime minister.

HALSEMA: Yes. It seems to me this is one of the places, if I could give an aside, where USIS has had a great opportunity, and usually took advantage of it, and that was to get to know people who were not in the center of things, who were too young to be important, but who were obviously comers and the kinds of people that we would send on leader grant programs, for instance.

I've always noticed that USIS knew people before they became important and got them on leader grant programs. The nominations that came from the embassy usually were people who were already well established in their jobs and were prominent for one reason or another.

I felt that some of the most useful work that we did was done through our operating in fields that were not really considered important by the diplomatic or AID establishments.

Q: By any chance, did you get Lee an exchange appointment, or didn't you get to that?

HALSEMA: No, we didn't. I also knew the previous leader in Singapore, Lim Yew Hock, a labor leader. We gave a grant to Lim, and several of the newspaper people. You know one of the big problems, I feel, in USIS, is the fact that we're engaged in a work which is long range in nature for the most part. Things like the leader grants, that whole cultural side of the operation, and yet we never stay in the post long enough, or ever really go back to find out what's happened

to the people that we used to know. This has been one of our great deficiencies, our lack of institutional memory.

Q: A lack of adequate policy, I think, on the part of the Agency. They insist that you move around, rather than to establish or reconstitute previous contacts.

HALSEMA: Yes. It seemed to me that every time you arrive at a post, you have to reinvent the wheel. You have to pick up all of the knowledge that your predecessor acquired, and usually you have to do it by yourself. You don't get it from your predecessor because he's gone and there's no process. Of course, I don't know about now. I've been ten years retired.

Q: It's not invariably the case, but I think you're basically right. There's very little overlap.

HALSEMA: So that you have to start in all over again. But we had in Singapore the conventional USIS operation with the media and the cultural side. Then we had this third side, which was more like what we did in Vietnam, for instance, where you were helping out in a psychological warfare program. In Malaya, our job was to assist the British. We were not doing any of this directly, but we did turn out materials and that so-called Campaign of Truth was during my stay in Singapore. Incidentally, at that point, Singapore was the USIS post for the whole Malaysia region.

Q: To the extent you covered Malaysia, it was covered from Singapore.

HALSEMA: Yes. We got to have a branch in Kuala Lumpur, but it was under Singapore, so that the whole arrangement was different than it is now. We worked with, for instance, the university in Singapore. There were a number of very interesting British professors, including Parkinson, the author of Parkinson's Law, and we, of course, had quite good relationships there. Although there was a real problem. In those days, the British did not recognize American university degrees as being valid, and one of the big jobs that we were working on when I was left Singapore, was to convince the authorities. Bill Lim, for instance, graduated from Northwestern University, but he couldn't get a government job with that university degree.

Q: So you were propagandizing the British as well as the local population?

HALSEMA: Yes. Singapore was very much a British crown colony in those days, and indeed, I guess, it was most epitomized by the time when Henry Lawrence and the consul general were both out of town and it turned out that I was by default temporarily the senior American present in the consulate general. So we got invited by default to a official party being given by Sir Franklin and Lady Gimson--he was the Governor of Singapore, and we got a real touch of Victorian colonial atmosphere at Government House where dinner was served--it was typically British, it was practically indigestible. But there was a printed menu and on the left-hand side was a list of the selections which the police band played outside the window during the meal. After the meal we were separated.

Q: Men from women, you mean?

HALSEMA: For a while, yes. I was escorted to the bathroom. I told my escort that I could take care of my own needs, thank you. [Laughter] Then we were escorted back eventually to join the ladies. Alice will remember particularly, you'll have to get the story from her about the time that she talked about cricket. You'll ask her about this later. But this was really Victorian British colonialism, whereas Malcolm McDonald's establishment--he lived in a palace that he rented from the Sultan of Johore across the causeway in the town of Johore. Malcolm McDonald was the kind of person that when you arrived at his palace the first thing he said would be, "Jim, take off that goddamn tie." [Laughter] Very informal and quite different.

But because of the Emergency, life was quite dangerous on the mainland. We had one example of it when we established the branch of the consulate in Kuala Lumpur. We got a new vehicle that had to be delivered up there, so our Malay USIS chauffeur, Ahmad, drove it up there and then came back on the train. The train was attacked and he was killed.

Q: As a matter of fact, he will be one of the names on this new plaque we're going to put in the lobby of USIS, because you've recommended him for inclusion. His name will be on the plaque.

HALSEMA: Well, I'm glad to hear it. He was an innocent victim of this indiscriminate kind of attack. But this was going on all the time, so we usually traveled by air. I didn't see nearly as much of Malaya as I would have liked. When you went up to the consulate--I remember one time we spent the whole evening at dinner at the consul's house and you could hear the guns firing not far away.

Q: A little unsettling.

HALSEMA: It was. And, of course, the other event that first year we were there, I was visiting the newspaper editors on the Malayan mainland, and the Korean War broke out. We were on the Peak above Penang, spending a weekend up there. I spent the most frustrating 24 hours in my life. The funicular that went up the mountainside where we were didn't run on Sundays, and I didn't have a radio, and there weren't that many radios around. So here I was trying to find out what was going on. I knew the war had started, but I didn't know anything else about it until Monday when I was able to get down the hill.

Q: How did you know that it had started? Had you heard a radio broadcast?

HALSEMA: No. I'd heard about it just as we went up. There had been rumors that there was a war on. Well, the Korean War had several effects in Singapore. One was, of course, the alarm that the U.S. Government had that the whole of Southeast Asia was about to erupt, and that the Chinese were going to be a fifth column who would take over the whole area.

So there was great deal of emphasis on expansion of USIS operations, as you know full well. So we got a big increase in staff, and it was a time of great disruption. The problem that nobody seemed to realize--and yet we've done this several times--was that when you're trying to do a job and you've got a whole bunch of new people who are untrained, you spend all your time trying to take care of these new people. Most of them had never been in Asia before, hadn't a clue as to how to live in that area, or what to do, had had no briefings, and they were really a drag on what

we were trying to do. I think that the net would be a small loss, if anything, because it took at least a year before they became effective.

Henry Lawrence, of course, had been with SCAP in Tokyo, and he knew something about Asia, having studied Japanese during the war as a Navy officer. He'd been in Singapore a year when I got there. I'd grown up in the Philippines and had visited Singapore and knew something about the area. But these new people were really completely unprepared for the kind of situation they were getting into.

Q: And they got no training in the Agency before they came out, because I don't think the Agency knew very much about it either.

HALSEMA: I've written my father's biography. I've finished it now, and one of the things that I learned in researching it was that the Americans who were sent out to join the Philippine Civil Service like he was in 1908, didn't get a briefing about the Philippines either, but that was a part of a deliberate policy. They wanted to establish an American kind of organization and didn't want them to know too much about Filipino customs. But this was just a pure, I don't know, lack of--it was one of these places where the government decided to do something and throw money at it.

Q: Well, as you know, the Agency itself was really very new at that time, because although there was a short interlude after the war when they still retained the elements of the old OWI, the program was completely eliminated for about a year or so until the Smith-Mundt legislation was enacted. Then State had to reestablish the whole thing. So this was 1950, and really the Agency itself, or rather, one of its two predecessors, USIE, had not been in existence more than about a year.

HALSEMA: I mentioned this thing about the Foreign Service having been mostly staffed by people who'd been refugees from China, that was true. Of course, the only experienced people that were around were also people with experience in China, like Harry Hudson and Earl Wilson, for instance. That tended to put a Chinese slant on operations in places like Southeast Asia. Now that was very useful in Singapore, which had a largely Chinese population, but not so useful in the other countries where the Chinese were an important minority but still very much a minority.

Q: And often suspected, too.

HALSEMA: Yes. So our operations even included under this Campaign of Truth making a film called "Kampong Sentosa", which was a full-length feature film. They sent out a film crew from the U.S. to do it. It wasn't finished by the time I left in early 1952.

Q: Would you mind spelling the name of that film?

HALSEMA: Yes. K-A-M-P-O-N-G, which is village, and Sentosa, S-E-N-T-O-S-A, which was the name of the village. This was complete with villainous Communist guerrillas preying upon these poor Malays, etc. This was all carried out by a crew that more or less had very little to do

with us. It was all being run out of Washington, so I hope it didn't do as much harm as it might have. [Laughter]

I found that the most important things that we could do, as far as Singapore was concerned, was the usual USIS operations in terms of establishing contact with the future leadership and that, as I've given you an example, I think we did get to know some people who were much more important in the long run than anybody suspected at that point.

Q: I'd like to ask, do you think that your contact with people like Lee, who subsequently became leaders in the Singapore government, had any bearing on a favorable relationship or a favorable opinion of the United States, or was that too uncertain at that time, and because you were disconnected from it later is it difficult for you to make any comment?

HALSEMA: The British in Malaya-Singapore were certainly no friends of the United States. We were allies but only in some directions. At the same time, I think, we were perceived as a threat to their continued rule in Singapore and Malaya. We did make a good many contacts with people who were subsequently important in Singapore. A good example would be a young reporter for Nanyang Siang Pau by the name of Wee Kim Wee, who is presently the President of Singapore, which is largely a ceremonial post, but nevertheless it does indicate how prominent he was in the country's affairs.

Q: Would you spell the name of the newspaper?

HALSEMA: N-A-N-Y-A-N-G, which is the Chinese and Japanese name for Singapore. S-I-A-N-G P-A-U, which was the South Seas City Newspaper, I guess is the way you translate that. This was rather typical of the kind of operations that we've had. We got to know the working stiffs, which Wee was. Alice was just recalling how he used to come to our house and just sit quietly and talk, or even look at some of our books and magazines. It was this kind of contact that it seems to me has been of greatest importance, because these people got to know us as Americans, and talk to us and realize what we were like. In many cases, we were the only Americans they had ever really known that close up. I think that the influence that we've had has always been underestimated even by ourselves. In particular because of this phenomenon and the fact that we go off and seldom see the people again, we don't really know what happened to many of our contacts.

Q: Do you have any way of knowing whether any of your successors retained those contacts or not?

HALSEMA: I don't know. When I left Singapore, which was February 1952, we had all new staff--the staff eventually had nine people on it. From one when Henry Lawrence was there, and two when I arrived in '50, we got up to nine. They were floundering around when I left. I trust they made the contacts.

Q: You had no role in introducing them?

HALSEMA: Yes, I introduced people to my...

Q: You don't know whether they took advantage of it?

HALSEMA: Of this, I have no way of telling. I talked to Haines Mahoney, who was later on PAO many years later in Kuala Lumpur. I think they had built up quite a collection of contacts. What I'm really suggesting here is that our role has always been to expand the range of contacts that the formal diplomatic establishment has, and I think we've done pretty well at it. A notable example is the fact that we naturally come into contact with media and the higher education people, and the arts people, who, if they're sufficiently prominent, the embassy people probably have met them. But we very often get to know people when they are far enough down the ladder that others don't pay that much attention to them.

Q: I think this is a very significant thing to note, and I'm going to note it here for the record, and that is that people like Fulbright and a great deal of academe in United States persist in finding this complete separation between the informational side and the cultural side of the program, and there's no realization on the part of these people that the two are completely intertwined.

If you're doing your job as a PAO, you know both of them, and you cultivate both of them. Even on the part of some of our own people, and on the part certainly of the embassy, there is a lack of appreciation of the political influence that is held by people that are in the artistic and performing-arts world. They assume that this is lost because these people are not necessarily politicized.

HALSEMA: The word intelligentsia is really pejorative in the United States, but it seems to me that that is the audience that we naturally have abroad. It's the forming members of the intelligentsia that we usually get to know, that are--for instance, I would be willing to bet that our people in Warsaw right now probably know more about the new prime minister than anybody else in the embassy, because he was a newspaper editor. Our effect is usually long range, and it's building on a series of contacts. It seems to me it has the greatest value, in that I get to know somebody, you get to know him later, he remembers both of us and our successor has further influence on him. But who's to say what it is because none of us have felt more than one piece of the elephant. And it's that way that we've had more influence, I think, than any of us have even given ourselves credit for, and yet we can't really give ourselves credit for it because we don't know the whole picture.

Q: We don't know, and the influence on the people with whom we dealt is so multitudinous after we leave that it's hard to sort out the portion of it which applied to our career of work and knowledge with these people, and what they've experienced in later times. But I, like you, agree that if we have established friendships with people, even if at the time we did not think that they were necessarily a future political benefit, the fact that we did it probably has had a long range effect that's very difficult to sort out.

HALSEMA: I think that in the life that we led--Singapore was probably the dullest of the posts that I've been in, because you felt that Singapore was full of people who were immigrants and for whom it was not home. I think that situation has changed now. I haven't been back to Singapore

for many years, but the fact that Singapore has been an independent nation now for a generation means that people have a sense of identity they lacked then.

For instance, even going to Jakarta, in many ways Jakarta was a much more difficult place to live in. This was when Willard Hannah was in Jakarta. Willard used to come up, and occasionally had business in Singapore. He'd stay at our house, and the first thing he always did was take a hot tub bath because there was no way to do it in Jakarta. [Laughter] But I envied him in the sense that he was at the center of a culture, which Singapore was not. Singapore was everybody's place of residence, but not their home when we were there.

I also regretted the fact that we didn't see more of Malaya, or that I never got over to Borneo. But we had our hands full. There just weren't enough people there on our staff until later on to make it possible to take any time off.

But from the subject at hand in Singapore, the only time I left Singapore on business were these occasional trips up-country to newspaper editors. One trip I made just by myself into Johore. I'd always wanted to see a rubber plantation and a tin mine, and I went to a relatively safe area in Johore state, found everybody armed to the teeth. Of course, while we were in Singapore, the governor of Malaya was killed in an ambush not far from Kuala Lumpur. So I think on the war side, we did quite a lot of work in terms of supporting the British.

Q: Your support was primarily furnishing them with materials. You didn't do any of the actual field work?

HALSEMA: No, we didn't distribute material. The British built up a very sophisticated propaganda organization for psy-war in Malaya, which I think, had we studied it earlier, might have saved us a lot of time and effort in Vietnam. But Hugh Green, the brother of Graham Green, who later on became the head of the BBC, was running that show in Kuala Lumpur. I think it would have been helpful if we'd been more in Kuala Lumpur than in Singapore at that particular point. And as the Korean War went on, of course, this became such an important element of our activity that the nature of the job that I'd been sent out originally to do was more in that direction. Of course, I found useful the fact that I'd lived in the Philippines in dealing with Malays. I didn't know the Chinese that well, but the Malays seemed quite familiar, although they were Muslim, not Christian. The other thing that I wanted to say was that when I joined the Foreign Service, I started out at the bottom of the ladder. What was it? The grade was a...

Q: S grade.

HALSEMA: S-8. I think that was the lowest grade you could get.

Q: No, there was an S-13 grade.

JOSEPH N. GREENE, JR.
Political Officer

Singapore (1952-1954)

Joseph N. Greene was born in New York, New York in 1920. He received a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1941. Mr. Greene joined the Foreign Service in 1942. His career included positions in Canada, Algeria, Italy, Singapore, Germany, Nigeria, India, The United Kingdom (England), and Egypt. Mr. Greene was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

Q: You were assigned to Singapore from 1952-54. What were you doing there?

GREENE: I was a political officer. I think folks in the Department thought I needed a change. But it wasn't that much of a change because I had started in a British Commonwealth country and here I was returning to a British colony. The principal concern out in Malaysia was the communist guerrilla attempt to de-stabilize the British government of Malaysia.

General Sir Gerald Templar was the military commander of the British counter-terrorist effort in the Malay states. Malcolm MacDonald was the British Commissioner General in Singapore where he had a large regional intelligence brief. Their brief went all the way up to Indochina.

Chuck Baldwin was the Consul General and his number two was Richard Hawkins. The CIA station chief was Bob Jansen. Jack McGuire was an economics officer and Harry Loftus was a consular officer. We did a lot of consular business, particularly since it was a shipping port. One of Jack McGuire's preoccupations was getting the British to arrest a ship that came into port doing things no one wanted them to do and finding a pretext to refuse to let it leave until we could determine what the crew and the captain had been up to. It wasn't drug trade but maybe trading with China.

I can remember one major project was going around Malaya, which was not easy because of the security situation, and talking to the local Chinese and Malays. My subject was the MCA, the Malaya Chinese Association which was a big Chinese political vehicle. The MCA was active in Singapore where the population was just over a million then, largely Chinese, very successful businessmen. I read a book The Overseas Chinese by Oliver Purcell and the punch line of the book was that the overseas Chinese were there to make a living, and they didn't care who held the cow so long as they could milk it. They were much more interested in the economic infrastructure and being able to control that, as many well-to-do Chinese were doing, than they were in going to meetings about self-government.

Q: How did you find the Indian community?

GREENE: They were professional people, storekeepers and lawyers. They were not into big business. They were content in small business and law and manipulating what power they could. The Malays were the most relaxed of them all. They had their ceremonies and one felt they had to be pushed to be active in anything. There were ten Malay states and each had its own leader. They took turns being prime leader of the confederation, and they still do. I felt the Indians and the Chinese just didn't take the Malays seriously. The British and the Chinese controlled the tin and the rubber. They controlled all the economic muscle.

During the time of the Korean War, until the armistice in Korea, 1953 (which a great achievement for Eisenhower and his administration) the US in Singapore took a lot of unfriendly comment from the Chinese and British, particular rubber plantation owners and operators but also tin miners. Once peace was restored in Korea, the bottom fell out of the rubber and tin markets, and it was held to be Uncle Sam's fault!

Q: Did you find in dealing with the British economic people that they viewed Americans as trying to supplant them and as rivals, unnecessarily stirring the nationalist pot?

GREENE: Not in that part of the world. One of my British colleagues, Michael Stewart, was the principal intelligence officer and I used to talk to him about more regional things. I think they indulged us that because I was no way part of the real intelligence establishment. I don't recall any sense of jealousy. We wanted to help the British put down the guerrilla war in Malaya. I recall we wondered whether any of the Malay states or Singapore were ready for independence.

The Gold Coast was cranking up for independence in Africa and independence was the going game in the mid 1950s.

MARY CHIAVARINI
Secretary to the Ambassador
Singapore (1954-1955)

Ms. Chiavarini was born and raised in Massachusetts. After Secretarial training, she worked with the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington DC before joining the Foreign Service in 1944. During her career with the State Department, Ms. Chiavarini served as secretary to the ambassador and other officers in Naples, Tirana, Manila, Seoul, Prague, Rome, Singapore and Warsaw. After her appointment in 1957 as Consul and Secretary in the Diplomatic Service she served in Palermo, Monrovia and Paris. She also served as special "trouble shooter" in Nicosia, Dublin and Riyadh. Ms. Chiavarini was interviewed by David T. Jones in 2007.

Q: Oh, you did. There was a time when you were in Singapore, in 1954. Do you remember being in Singapore?

CHIAVARINI: Yes, I remember being in Singapore. It was not a happy experience.

Q: What happened?

CHIAVARINI: Well, I just didn't seem to get things done the way I wanted them done.

Q: What was the embassy in Singapore like? Who was the ambassador?

CHIAVARINI: I can't remember.

My roommate and I were invited by either the governor of Singapore or whatever he was. He was a Singaporean. I knew his wife and they invited me and my roommate to attend a British farewell party. I saw, for the first time, a man get drunk and fall over backwards!

Q: Was he a Brit?

CHIAVARINI: Yes. He was one of those who was leaving. He drank too much; they all did. It's a wonder they didn't all fall over backwards. I wondered about him; I thought surely he died. But I learned the next day that he recovered. I had never seen anything like that happen.

Q: Were you able to travel in Singapore and Malaya?

CHIAVARINI: Yes. We went to Malaya on a trip. I drove. My roommate and I went, but she didn't drive. So I had to do it myself.

Q: This was a period when there was a communist insurgency going on in Malaya wasn't there?

CHIAVARINI: Yes.

Q: Was it dangerous?

CHIAVARINI: Well, I think it was. But I never knew that it was dangerous. I didn't read the papers enough or what have you. So I didn't know that there was that much danger. I remember coming back we followed the wrong group back. It was kind of late in the game when I finally discovered that. I remember trying to turn around, but then I decided I better go ahead with my original plan. I did and we got out of it all right. But I was pretty scared there for some minutes that I was going to be shot or worse.

Q: Did you have any Chinese friends in Singapore? Or were they mostly in the British and U.S. community?

CHIAVARINI: I guess I related mostly to the British.

Q: What your living circumstances?

CHIAVARINI: Well, we had a nice house in Lehman Park; where the houses were built for us. Anyway, I didn't linger over there too long.

Q: Were you able to live alone, or did you have roommates?

CHIAVARINI: I had to have a roommate. And that was all right. Jamie was from the south. She was very nice. I think she pandered to me too much.

Q: Really?

CHIAVARINI: I think so.

Q: Was she younger than you were?

CHIAVARINI: No, I think she was a little older. I never knew why. But anyway, she was fine. She told me that some dentist in Georgia had cured her of a jutting jaw. And he had corrected it with these, I call them sticks. She had to do that, go through her mouth all the time. She did that. I never knew why, but it all turned out well. Anyway, she didn't have a jutting jaw then.

Q: You were the ambassador's secretary again, Mary?

CHIAVARINI: I think so.

Q: Were there any issues that you remember in particular there?

CHIAVARINI: No, I don't. But I remember having trouble with our household help. Oh, I had the worst type of help you ever saw.

MORRIS DRAPER
Economic Officer
Singapore (1954-1957)

Morris Draper was born in California in 1928 and graduated from the University of Southern California in 1952. An Arabic language officer, Mr. Draper served in a number of Middle East posts including Beirut, Baghdad, Jeddah, Ankara, Jerusalem, and Washington, DC. Mr. Draper was interviewed in 1991 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Your first overseas assignment was Singapore where you served from the end of 1954 to 1957. What was the situation in Singapore when you arrived?

DRAPER: Singapore was going through a transitional period from being a crown colony to independence. The British were moving the process on stage by stage still controlling foreign affairs, defense and police. They were setting up a Parliamentary political system. They were nurturing it very carefully and cautiously. They institutionalized the judiciary as is their custom.

It was a tricky period for a number of reasons. There was an insurrection in Malaysia which spilled over into Singapore. It was led primarily by Chinese communists; it was a major uprising which brought large numbers of British forces to the area. It took them years to get the situation under control; in fact, the insurrection was never really brought under control; it eventually just petered out--the leadership lost heart. The Chinese were getting a lot of support through Thailand from mainland China. The insurrection was a real threat to British control as well as a threat to

stable regimes in Malaysia and Singapore. Singapore was 85 percent Chinese and Malaysia was largely Malay. The people of the peninsula were trying to decide how to shape the future of the two entities with people preferring a larger federation for economic reasons and because Singapore was so important to Malaysia as a port. Others were concerned that the ethnic and religious differences between the Malaysians and the Chinese of Singapore were so great that federation would create major problems. The British felt that the Malaysians could never compete with the Chinese, which was true. There were many comments, some pejorative, about the energy levels of the two peoples. They didn't really get along together very well. The sentiment was in favor of giving the Malay something of their own; the British were sympathetic to this. It didn't work out well at all for a few years. In the meantime, traveling in Malaysia was quite dangerous. There were road blocks everywhere. The terrorists were going into Kuala Lumpur and other cities carrying out bombing attacks, making things miserable, interfering with commerce. Some of this activity spilled over into Singapore. While I was there, there was a major riot, considerable number of killings, including an American journalist. The rioters began to lose respect for the British force, as represented by the Gurkhas. One British officer made a terrible mistake by withdrawing the Gurkhas from an exposed position. This gave heart to the rioters, who had never seen the Gurkhas retreat.

I got to know quite a few of the politicians. The society was very open; the politicians and the budding leaders of all the parties wanted to be in touch with the American representatives. I used to play golf with Lee Kuan Yew who was then the leader of the People's Action Party. He was considered by the British as a crypto-communist or worse. He was really something else-- a very impressive person. He had his own agenda. We knew that he was going to either succeed or be killed. He manipulated the forces around him with great skill and daring; this included a very radical segment of his own party, which was anti-British, anti-American, anti-everything, but had the ear of a large share of the population. It was a tricky period. Self rule was not satisfying most of the people; they wanted to move faster. The British supported David Marshall as the first Prime Minister, who, interestingly enough, was Jewish on his father's side, but with Asian blood as well. There were a lot of mixed-blood people in Singapore--the mixed parentage off-springs were the handsomest people in the world. We were all concerned with the causes of instability in places as Indonesia, which at the time was in chaotic state with 90-100 million people. Thailand was outwardly peaceful and attractive, but they had many serious problems and needs. Even then, all of Indochina was considered a potential powder-keg. China was 100 percent hostile to the United States. The British were losing their influence in the area. There was a lot of anti-western feeling in the subcontinent--Burma, India. We had major security interests in the Philippines and Australia, which was not that far away. We formed SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) which a lot of us could never understand. I was in Washington in the period when Dulles wanted to proceed with these alliances which he hoped would stabilize the area. SEATO was one of the most artificial arrangements of all.

Because I had been in the Secretariat and knew something about Southeast Asia, I was called while in Singapore to attend the first session of SEATO in Bangkok which was very interesting exposure to that part of the world. The whole arrangement was so artificial that the delegates might well have wondered what it was all about. We had a palace assigned to us by the Thais, but it was open air. There was a big round table and the setting was beautiful. Unfortunately, the birds would swoop down on our papers and do their business on them. We brought in secretaries

from the Armed Forces to take notes, which turned out to be a complete failure because they didn't understand all the funny accents being spoken. It was one disaster after another. The Thais were so gracious and charming. Anthony Eden was there and he was often disliked by other delegates for essentially good reasons. On one hot day, he got up, languidly stretched his arms and said: "It is too warm here. Let us all take off our coats!". It was a perfectly sensible idea and so the Westerners took them off. The then Prime Minister of Pakistan was wearing his tunic; it was very plain without insignias. He didn't want to take the tunic off. Finally Eden said: "All the rest of us are shedding our outer-wear. Why don't you join us?". So finally the tunic came off slowly only to show an absolutely filthy undershirt. Eden was never forgiven. You have to be careful about all kinds of things.

I got a lot of sensitivity training in Far East. For example, one would not dare touch the headpiece of an Indonesian. There were a lot of others taboos.

Q: When you were in Singapore, the Suez crisis, the aftermath of which you spent your career on, was developing. Did that have any impact on our relationships with the British in Singapore?

DRAPER: Yes, indeed. The British had major military forces in Singapore, particularly naval. "God Save the Queen" was still being sung in the movie theaters, despite all the protests by the Chinese and others. At the end of the Suez affair, in 1956, when the US position became clear, the British troops, officers as well as men, became very hostile to Americans. Many long standing friendships were broken. I remember that a British pilot stopped talking to me and my wife because he was so upset. I also remember watching Anthony Eden on newsreels; he was shaking as he announced that the British would have to leave Suez. He had fallen apart. How a politician allowed himself to be photographed in that condition was remarkable. I learned later that the British position in Singapore got worse and worse in the aftermath of Suez. The word was that the British were leaving from east of the Suez.

Q: Tell us a little bit about the staff of the Consul General in Singapore, which was known as a first rate organization.

DRAPER: We had a very large staff, especially in the economic and commercial side. We had a major CIA station in Singapore; we had military attachés and a modest military assistance program in Malaysia. We were well staffed. Elbridge Durbrow was the Consul General; he was known as a trouble-shooter; he was very able and gave the staff considerable leeway. He was very good with younger officers; he encouraged them to make contacts; he used them without regard to rank or age. I was busy all the time, even though it was small area of the world. The development of the contacts was an interesting experience; people were eager to have them, even if it was from a junior member of the staff. We did a lot of entertaining. On the economic side, contacts were even easier because all the business people wanted American investment. Americans were just pouring into the area, despite the instability, because they could see the future. The banks were doing very well; they had partnerships with Chinese bankers. If the area didn't go to pieces, it was bound to boom. Electronic factories were being established even then. The area had a labor cost advantage to start with and then Lee Kuan Yew talked about a positive investment climate. He promised he would try to maintain stability. They were booming times. While I was an economic officer during the first year of my tour, I got all sorts of

correspondence from Washington and all around the globe. People couldn't believe that the future could be as bright as I was painting it.

America was known for its "can do" spirit. The quality of our businessmen was very good. In retrospect, I remember far greater language capabilities in the business community than I found later. They spoke some of the dialects. There were a lot of oil company people with interests in Indonesia, Brunei. Few bankers spoke Chinese, but Malay was well known. Malay is not a tonal language; its syntax has similarities to English and therefore was not too hard to learn. You could learn a pidgin Malay and get by in large parts of the area. Despite the threats, therefore, it was boom period and those who wanted to take risks had plenty of opportunities. Many did. Our oil companies were extremely active considering the instabilities and threats in Indonesia. They moved ahead and explored where they could. There were a lot of problems living in Indonesia; people had squatters' rights and if they could come into your house at night, they couldn't be moved out. There were little revolts in Sumatra and Java all the time.

I can't say that I was astonished by happened later, but those of us who felt that Lee Kuan Yew would be a force for good, were satisfied with the direction he took Singapore. Singapore is essentially a great success; he changed the mores of its citizens in the process. He of course was working on a good base; Singapore was a boom town from the day it was founded in the 19th Century. The city was in a perfect location at one of the busiest crossroads in the world.

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE
Political Officer
Singapore (1956-1958)

Ambassador John H. Holdridge was born in New York in 1924. He graduated from the US Military Academy in 1945 and served as a 1st lieutenant overseas until 1948. He joined the Foreign Service in 1948. His overseas posts include Bangkok, Beijing, Hong Kong, Peking, and Singapore. He was the ambassador to Singapore from 1975 to 1978 and to Indonesia from 1982 to 1986. Ambassador Holdridge was interviewed by Marshall Green and Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989 and by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.

1989 Interview

Q (Green): *...In Singapore--again, you had a Chinese community. I assume that is why you were assigned to a city seventy-three per cent Chinese.*

HOLDRIDGE: That's right.

Q (Green): *Did you conduct much of your work in Chinese?*

HOLDRIDGE: I tried to keep up with my Chinese as much as possible. In Singapore, English was and remains the language of government and business. When I first got there, though, the

big problem was the clash between exponents of Chinese culture and education and the British colonial establishment--essentially, the schools that had been set up by the British missionaries or others who taught in English. An example is Raffles College. I hadn't been there but a few weeks when the riots occurred in 1956. It was then that the Chinese community challenged the colonial authorities, who would have none of it, over the issue of Chinese education and culture. They (the British) had battalions they brought in from all over Malaya, despite the emergency. They were not at all reluctant to use force. They put that Chinese disturbance down very promptly.

Q (Green): *What was that disturbance aiming to achieve?*

HOLDRIDGE: It was to establish Chinese as an accepted language of business, commerce, and government in Singapore.

Q (Green): *Many years later you were ambassador to Singapore. By that time had English and Chinese become co-equal officially?*

HOLDRIDGE: The funny part of it was that, once the Chinese won the battle, they did get Chinese accepted as an equal language, along with English, Tamil, and Malay. Then Chinese became an official language.

Once that was accomplished, the Chinese began to send all their kids to the English track because that was where all the money was to be made.

Q (Green): *Of course, back in 1953 Singapore was not a separate country. It was part of Malaya.*

HOLDRIDGE: We used to have great arguments. Elbridge Durbrow was my consul general for a good part of the time. Derby, of course, is a very strong personality. In theory, Singapore was responsible for the consulate general in Kuala Lumpur. The two consuls general did not get along very well. There was some real tension there. In August of 1957, Malaya became independent. Singapore was not a part of it. It remained a British crown colony.

The problem has always been in that area of the world the population, the communal difficulties between the Malays who, in theory, are the preponderant race, and the Chinese who had moved in and established a very strong position in the business commercial world. Economically speaking, the Malays were way behind.

Singapore was kept different. When Malaya was established, the Malayan leaders, the Tunku did not want Singapore in. This was because it might tip the balance in favor of Chinese preponderance. The way that question was eventually resolved was that Sarawak and North Borneo were also brought into Malaysia. This was somewhere in 1965. All these various components were brought in so that there would be a Malay, or a non-Chinese, majority.

1995 Interview

HOLDRIDGE: It was a direct transfer to Singapore, where I became the political officer at the then Consulate General, which was a supervisory Consulate General over another Consulate General in Kuala Lumpur. This was well before independence. Well, not well before, a year before, Malaya became independent.

Q: Could you describe what was the situation, what was it called, the colony of..

HOLDRIDGE: The Crown Colony of Singapore. It was chaotic. At that time, there was pressure on the one hand towards independence from the British, to get rid of colonial rule, and on the other, to press for Chinese culture and education to be recognized at the same level as English, Malay or Tamil in the educational stream. The British Colony authorities, headed by Governor Brown, who was also governor, at one time, of Hong Kong, I had known him in Hong Kong, was beset on all sides. There were strikes going on, the Harbor Board, what did they call it, it's still in existence, the government organization that runs the port--the Singapore Port Authority--and the people were organized under a labor leader named Jamit Sing, who seemed to a very fiery individual, probably a supporter of Bhoose..

Q: The Indian ally to the Japanese. And the Germans, too.

HOLDRIDGE: Anyway, Jamit Sing had the people in the port on strike a good part of the time, and we hadn't been there, my wife and I, more than a month, I think it was even less than that, when riots were generated among the fanatics of the Chinese communities in support of Chinese culture and education. Not too far from where we lived was a Chinese high school, *the Chinese High School*, it was called. I could hear, one night when we had a number of people in for dinner, all of this shouting and screaming, it was off in the distance, but it was quite audible. The kids had gotten together and were taunting the British authorities, and what have you, and the next thing you know, you had this mixture of the labor groups and Chinese student groups trying to, in effect, overthrow the colonial government in Singapore, which was not about to tolerate any such effort. Remember, this is a time when the terrorism was still going on in Malaya.

Q: The insurgency was it called? What was it called?

HOLDRIDGE: Well, the British always tried to call their opponents "Communist terrorists," that is, the CTs under Chin Peng. They had anti-CT battalions all over the place. The minute that this trouble began to break out in Singapore,--we could see it building up by the way, in the days before this riot took place, Martha and I went down a couple of times to a motion picture, down in the center of the old Singapore, (the center of gravity has moved elsewhere now). But anyway, we went down there and the riot squad would be out. Here comes a phalanx of blue clad policemen, some Indians, some Malays, some Chinese. The first ranks, would be all wearing steel helmets, and armed with lahtis and shields. But the last three ranks were armed with Sten guns. And behind all came specially built armored cars that had a large kind of a tower or turret, not rotating, but people could stand up there with a Bren gun and shoot over the heads of the riot squad members up ahead. These units were marching around, putting on a display of force. If this is what you want, they said, well, here we are, we're going to give it to you. One day I tried to get down to the office, and I found it was impossible. This was the day after we had had the party, and our guests all went home early. All of Bukit Timah Road, the main road between

downtown Singapore and the causeway over to Johor Baharu, was just absolutely blocked with people swarming around, overturning cars, throwing rocks and whatever, to which the British responded by bringing in a number of their battalions from Malaya. They were strung out like beads on a string all the way on the main highway, up as far as Ipoh. They brought these battalions in, and they mobilized every single British soldier they could find. I remember driving along, we were out on...

Mrs. HOLDRIDGE: Holland Road.

HOLDRIDGE: Holland Road. We were out there and I remember passing a rather bewildered and bespectacled young British soldier, who I determined was from the Royal Army Pay Corps, and who didn't join the British Army to carry a rifle, but there, by golly, he was and looking rather surprised. Everybody was thrown into it, and in about three days everything had quieted down. This is the time when Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party were very prominent. The chief minister was Lim Yew Hock, who was pro-British, I guess you can say, he was regarded as an instrument by the rebels, of the British. You know, somebody who was really "not one of us." He was not a good Singaporean because he played along with the Brits. And I saw a lot of him. He used to call me up in the evenings and say, I'm going to be meeting such and such a trade union group or the Hawkers Association, at such and such a Chinese restaurant, how about joining me? And of course this is almost a command, and I said, "of course." And the same time I used to see a lot of Lee Kuan Yew. Lee was one of the two members of the PAP, the People's Action Party, which now, of course, is the government party in Singapore, who wasn't languishing in Changi jail. And Lee Kuan Yew, if I didn't mention this last time, he used to come around and see me, after eight o'clock at night...

Q: We had just started on Singapore so you wouldn't have mentioned it.

HOLDRIDGE: Well, all right. Well, Lee Kuan Yew wanted very much to keep in touch with the American Consulate General. Now, he had some grudges against the Americans. His wife, on one occasion, they thought had cancer, and he wanted very much to get her into Bethesda or Walter Reed, and somehow he got turned down by the US authorities, stupidly, and that gave him a grudge against Americans. On the other hand, he saw the merits of having a degree of American understanding of what he was trying to do. And he swore up and down to me, and also, if I may mention, a certain other organization. Well, the station chief lived next door. The two of us would come in, and Lee Kuan Yew would join us, and then we would discuss what Lee was going to do. And he swore up and down that he was going to get rid of the Communists in the PAP. I had my doubts. I had been told that Lee Kuan Yew was not, what you would call, the bravest of individuals. He might chicken out if the going got really tough, which it didn't. He was really plugging away, and he would make brilliant speeches in the Singapore National Assembly, which I would attend all the time, regularly. Another person on the scene was one David Marshall, who had been formerly the Chief Minister of Singapore. This is before Lim Yew Hock came along and the election threw out Marshall and brought in, what do they call it, the Lib Socs (Liberal Social Party). At any rate, Marshall and..., Lee Kuan Yew tended to dominate the proceedings, both brilliant orators. Lee Kuan Yew, I think, did very well at Cambridge on the equivalent of the Oxford debating team.

Q: Here was Lee Kuan Yew, who was obviously primed for something, as you are getting close to this. You are a political reporter, but also there is a station chief looking at it. Was there a difference in evaluation between, you might say, the station chief and you about Lee Kuan Yew or...

HOLDRIDGE: No, there wasn't, although as a matter of fact, it may have been the station chief who fed me the information about Lee Kuan Yew tending to chicken out when the going got rough. Anyway, we were good friends. We saw a good deal of each other. On matters of Singapore, I didn't inquire into some of the other responsibilities of what we called CAS.

Q: CAS being?

HOLDRIDGE: Controlled American Source. At any rate, I didn't inquire too deeply into what he was doing, but when it came to Singapore politics, I think we exchanged freely, and I don't think there was too much holding back. He's still a good friend. He's retired over there in McLean.

Q: What, let's go back a little, who was Consul General at the time?

HOLDRIDGE: Durbrow, Elbridge Durbrow.

Q: Now, Durbrow was an old China hand.

HOLDRIDGE: No, not really, he was an Eastern European hand. One of his favorite stories was when he was, I think, political officer, or something like that, in Romania, and the people who built, oh gosh, not Lockheed, (it was Northrop, I believe) were trying to sell airplanes to the Romanian Air Force. They said, anybody could fly it, why don't you, Durbrow. We'll fix it up so you take a few lessons, and you can go off and solo, which he did. And he had been in Moscow, where he was a drummer in a little group called the Diplomatic Notes. Anyway, Durbrow was the Consul General and he was really a lively fellow. We had only one little problem, and that was Durbrow's wife Emily, who was not exactly attuned to the Foreign Service. When I first got there, I replaced a fellow, Andy Anderson, who later tragically died of some mysterious disease. Andy's wife and Emily Durbrow hated each others' guts. This is one of these in-grown Foreign Service situations.

Q: Oh yeah, but it could be terribly important. I mean in a relatively small post. Did Durbrow, coming from Eastern Europe, and probably with a very jaundice view towards communism, did he tend to see communism everywhere, or was he rather dispassionate about how he observed the situation?

HOLDRIDGE: No, actually his job, as he saw it, was reporting the facts, and we depended very heavily, as a matter of fact, on our contacts with the British. Remember at that time, there was a super envoy of the British, The High Commissioner for Southeast Asia, located in a place called Phoenix Park, not too far from where we lived. Sir Robert Scott was the High Commissioner, and we had a lot of contacts with the British High Commission, exchanged information with them, and had a lot of useful reporting that came from British sources. Now, of course, we did not have the resources that the British did. Remember, they had their people scattered all through

Malaya. I deliberately say Malaya, because Malaysia did not come into existence until 1965. That's when Singapore gained independence, it was in 1962 I believe, that Malaysia was formed with Singapore as a part. The British thought that they were on their way out. They were smart enough to read the handwriting on the wall and they wanted to leave the region in as much of a tidy situation as possible. And so they worked hard to restore order to promote people in the government who would be there after them and would be capable of running the show. They had a few rough shocks though, there was one little experiment, an election that took place about early 1958 and that was when election for the City Council of Singapore was made a free election. The Communists took over. A fellow by the name of Ong Eng Guan was elected mayor. Ong as mayor then turned the whole City Council into a vehicle for spreading the [Communist] faith. After a certain decent interval of time, the whole thing was scrapped by the British.

Q: How did you operate? You were the only political officer.

HOLDRIDGE: Well I had two assistants. One was a genuine assistant, Paul Moy, a Chinese American from California, and the other was a representative of that other organization who now and again did a little reporting for me. I just tried ideas about how political officers should operate. What I did, I tried to call on everybody I possibly could to get to know. This meant members of the Foreign Consular Corps, it meant members of the government, it meant leading businessmen in Singapore--we still have friends to this day left over from that era. We stop and see them in Singapore when we are out in that part of the world. You pick up a little bit here and a little bit there. Of course you read the newspapers. Getting in touch with the press was one of the important features of the job, too.

Q: How was the press at that time? Some presses are so venial that they are opened to any bidder, others are completely under the rule of a party, while others are much more free wheeling.

HOLDRIDGE: Well they were pretty much under the thumb of the British government. If they got out of line, some people would end up in Changi jail. The British were quite determined that they were not going to have their whole history trashed before their very eyes. They had no compunction about using force.

Q: When did the British let go? Was this one of these planned things - as of a certain date we'll do this - how did it happen?.

HOLDRIDGE: I think it was forced by events in Malaya, with Tunku Abdul Rahman pressing for independence and the British deciding, along about 1962, that the CTs were pretty well under control. There had been some episodes when we were there in 1956-58 right across the Straits of Johore where some of the "new towns" had been attacked and people were killed. But by 1962, it [the emergency] was pretty well over and done with, at least as far as Singapore was concerned. Let us look at Malaya. By 1957 the British figured the situation was okay, they could keep their troops there as long it was necessary but they would turnover the government to a locally elected popular party, which happened to be the UMNO, the United Malays National Organization, headed by Tunku Abdul Rahman. Of course, there was also the MCA (Malayan Chinese

Association) and there was an Indian party, the Indian National Congress, both of which were allied with the UMNO. The three groups were working together cooperatively, and were able to take over the government. The British still had the special branch. They still had their troops there. Instead of having a High Commissioner in that part of the world, they had somebody who lived in Johore in one of the Sultan of Johore's palaces over there. And the British influence was there, but it was behind the scenes. It wasn't on the front burner, but it was kept quietly in the back. So in August 1957 Malaya became independent but with a remarkable lack of enthusiasm. I was watching this on television and watched the flag being hauled down, the British flag, and the Malayan flag being hauled up, and the people just kind of stood there, they did not understand the nature of the change really. And of course then you are getting into all sorts of politics in Malaya with the Sultans, e.g. Pahang, and Malacca, and all the rest. But at any rate, it seemed to work. But the British were still left with the Crown Colony of Singapore, about what to do with it. And this is where Malaysia came along. The problem being, if you added the population of Singapore, roughly 2-1/2 million people, of which 75 or more percent happen to be Chinese, to the population of Malaya in which (I had one Cabinet Minister under Lim Yew Hock tell me) that there were actually more Chinese in Malaya than there were Malays. The Chinese did not have as big families, but they believed in penicillin rather than going to a bomah, or native healer. So the Chinese survival rate was greater. Therefore, if you added the Chinese in Singapore to the Chinese in Malaya, then there would be a preponderance of Chinese, and this would be absolutely unacceptable both to the British and to the Malays. You would have trouble, and there had been riots, very serious ones before I got there. One of these got David Marshall kicked out because, well, I won't go into details. It was complicated. The way the British resolved this, they decided they would give up their colonies on Borneo, or Kalimantan and merge everything, Sarawak, British North Borneo, Labuan, all into a greater organization to be known as Malaysia. And if you threw in the Kadazans and the people from North Borneo, you did not have a Chinese majority. You had a packet full of troubles anyway, trying to get all these various racial groups to work together, but at any rate, the British went ahead and that's why Singapore for a period became a part of Malaysia.

Q: This is during your time?

HOLDRIDGE: No, this was afterwards.

Q: While you were in Singapore, what was the feeling by you and maybe the other officers looking at this conglomerate of states, what were you reporting?

HOLDRIDGE: What we were reporting was the number of ties that linked Singapore to Malaya. The reason being so many of the people in Singapore had relatives in Malaya, and Malaya at that time was not well developed in terms of its export potential, that is, its port. There was one port, Port Swettenham, that was able to hold only five ocean going ships at a time. Johor Baharu had not been developed. Singapore had to remain the entrepot. There was a little bit of exporting from the Island of Penang which was, incidentally, almost entirely Chinese. That was the one Chinese-run state. Actually, Malacca had a predominantly Chinese population, but was run by a Malay as a governor. Penang was run by a Chinese governor.

Okay, well the Malays were not shopkeepers, Islam has certain provisions in it which inhibit the development of business interests by "Bumiputra," the "Sons of the Soil," and the Chinese were the shopkeepers in both Malaya and in Singapore, and Singapore was also the entrepot, the banking center and so on. So there was ill feeling in that regard, but still they had to live with each other. The rubber, the tea, the tin, whatever Malaya had to export, by and large had to go through Singapore because of the lack of alternatives, and so they managed to get along and then later on the British came up with this improvisation of Malaysia.

Q: We are still talking about the reign of Walter Robertson in and East Asia Bureau, and the Eisenhower Administration, it seems from what you are saying that the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia were different breed of cat than the Chinese who were on Taiwan. Were we trying to bring them together or not?

HOLDRIDGE: No, as a matter of fact I rarely saw anybody who claimed to be a Nationalist Chinese, a member of the Kuomintang, or whatever, we stayed away from these. This was a period when we were being very circumspect about the whole question of China vs. Taiwan. I touch on that in my book, that Alex Johnson was in Geneva talking weekly at that time with Wang Bing Nan about resolving the differences between the two countries by peaceable means. Anyway, we really didn't figure that that was an element we wanted to get involved with, and so we stayed out of it.

Q: Did you get Congressional visits, or that sort of thing that made any waves or anything?

HOLDRIDGE: We didn't get too many. One time the Chairman of the Republican National Committee, the senior Senator from Pennsylvania, Hugh Scott, came to Singapore. He was a China expert, a great collector of Chinese art, and I recall on the one occasion that he came to town, he went to a shop run by a friend of ours and saw a beautiful rose quartz carved Guanyin. At this time we had the Certificate of Origin policy in full blast (all Chinese-style art purchases had to have a Certificate of Origin declaring that the item or items in question had not originated in Communist China.) but he had us buy it and ship by US Government aircraft back to the United States so it would not get caught by customs. This remains in my mind about the ethics of the Congress at that time, as according to the law, you weren't allowed to buy products from mainland China. So I say a whole generation of American Foreign Services Officers labored to keep items of Chinese origin out of the US. You had to have a Certificate of Origin.

Q: Are there any other things you think I should touch on about your time in Singapore '56-'58 period?

HOLDRIDGE: All I can say was that we can see at about the time I left, the pressures for a local election for internal self-government were building up, and Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party were pitted against David Marshall on something called the Worker's Party. Marshall, who I never thought was an ideologue of any particular sort, but was a man who loved the idea of manipulating the reins of power, however, so he allowed himself to be aligned with some of the more unsavory political leftists around town and formed this thing called the Worker's Party, the Barisan Socialis, and against the People's Action Party. By this time Lee Kuan Yew, to my utter astonishment, I did not believe he was able to do it, had pretty well

moved the Communists out of the leadership positions in the PAP, not necessarily in the rank and file. Just about the time I left, holy smokes, Lee Kuan Yew comes through and becomes the Chief Minister, but this was for internal self-government. The British had not yet devised their way to get out.

Q: How were the British that you were talking to see Lee Kuan Yew at that time?

HOLDRIDGE: Well he was one of them in a way, because he was a graduate of Cambridge. I think his wife had first class honors from Cambridge, and he only had second class, but at any rate, he spoke with a British accent. He described himself to me later on, this is not necessarily at the same time, as the last Victorian, and a man who believed in discipline and order and stability. And I think that the British saw that this man just might be able to produce it.

RALPH J. KATROSH
Vice Consul
Singapore (1957-1960)

Ralph J. Katrosh was born in 1927 and raised in Kingston, Pennsylvania. He attended Virginia Military Institute. From there, he joined the military and became a part of the Third Army Palace Guard. It was here in Europe that he developed a desire to join the foreign service. Upon returning to the States, he entered the Foreign Service School at Georgetown University. He then went to the State Department to work with China in Taiwan. He has also served in Burma, the Philippines, Malaysia, Israel and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 28, 1992.

KATROSH: ...My first assignment as vice consul in Singapore was in September 1957 when it was still a colony. Avery Peterson was just assigned Consul General. Singapore City at that time was a very pretty, small town on the southern end of Singapore Island. The rest of the island consisted of plantations...coconut palm, banana and other tropical products. It was a very quiet place, still a colony, and very British. Banking, shipping, and insurance were its strengths.

The Singaporeans began to respond to British suggestions that they govern themselves and become independent. This was a very interesting time to be in Singapore because it was really the birth time of this now magnificent city state, one of the great jewels of Southeast Asia.

As a vice consul, the day was fairly relaxed. One went into the office in the morning and stamped some visas and maybe took care of a shipping matter or two. Then you adjourned around 11:30 to a place called the Singapore Club where you had a couple of pink gins and a typical pukasab luncheon...mulligatawny soup, game pie, and other foods that will kill you in the tropics. Around 1:30 or 2:00 you went out to the veranda where they had these lovely chairs with arms that would fold in and enfold you. You put your legs up on these arms and slept until 2:30 or 3:00. Then one meandered back to the Consulate, stamped a few more visas, went home,

changed and put on a black tie and a white coat and went to the Tangelin Club or the Singapore Club for dinner and another bout with the bottle...brandy...on to cocktails, dinner, bridge, etc.

Q: It is a wonder you survived!

KATROSH: Few ever extended their time in Singapore, but we loved the perks during the two years we were there.

As I noted, the ambiance was very, very British, but there was a serious side to it also. In the development of the Singapore polity, the Communists were very active and had a great deal of influence. Those were the days when young State Department officers in Singapore...Ambassador John Holdridge among them...learned how to deal with the Chinese who are now the decision-makers in China, as well as elsewhere in Asia.

Q: Later Ambassador to Indonesia, Assistant Secretary of State, etc. etc.

KATROSH: Holdridge was the chief of the political section. Although I stamped visas, I did political reporting as well and during my last year there, I was a member of John's section. At that time we had quite a good dialogue with World War II Communist functionaries like Lim Chin Song, Fong Swe Song, and Devan Nair, who later became a member of the government. At any rate, John was chief of the political section. In the Consulate there was a lot of discussion as to whether Lee Kuan Yew, then known as Harry Lee and who at that time could not speak Mandarin Chinese, was a sincere democrat. Lee Kuan Lee is a brilliant English educated lawyer who allied himself with the Communists and traditional Chinese entrepreneurs and political warlords in Singapore. He had the toughest unions and a good number of the business people, etc. Harry Lee, of course, became Prime Minister.

The serious part of the two years was monitoring and participating in the struggle between Lee and a British lackey, Lim Yew Hock. The instinct of Washington at the time was to favor Lim Yew-Hock. Harry Lee and his cohorts were "Communists." The British were very nervous about all this because they liked Lim Yew-Hock very much, but Harry was trained in Oxford, spoke the King's English, was an excellent cricket player, etc., and everything the British admire. They didn't want to see Harry roughed up too much. But they worried about the Communist side of it. I am certain of this because of the dialogue we had with the British High Commissioner's office at the time.

The elections were held, I think, in early September, 1959 and wouldn't you know that Harry Lee and his Communist supporters, the People's Action Party, won the election. It is 1992 and the same party still is in power and Harry Lee is still the party's mentor. As soon as he won the election, one of the first things he did...he is brilliant...during the campaign he learned how to speak Mandarin, so now he can speak Chinese. The first thing he did was to round up all his Communist buddies and send them back to Changi prison. Anybody who knows Singapore knows Changi prison's reputation. It was a hell hole during the Japanese occupation and being sent there was no small matter. But Harry packed them all off and said, "You are going to stay in Changi until you repent, recant, and if you do it to a certain degree I will ship you off to England. If you really recant maybe I will let you back into the political process some way." Lim Chin

Song never recanted to that extent and stayed in Changi prison for many years and later went to England. Some others like Devan Nair became converts and joined the government.

The interesting thing was how quickly Harry Lee moved on the very people who put him in, because that election turned on the working class of Singapore. That is where the votes were and the Communists had the workers sewed up tightly to a point where I think the Lim Yew-Hock group won something like three or four seats in the parliament. The People's Action Party got the rest.

Q: Did you see this coming?

KATROSH: Yes.

Q: But you see Harry Lee as being a political worker rather than as a dedicated Communist?

KATROSH: He was a politician who had a unique grasp of traditional Chinese instincts for very strong central leadership and a totally free enterprise economic system.

Q: But you saw him at the time as...

KATROSH: It would have been better for US Asian policy if Lim Yew-Hock won, we thought. But we said that the PAP would win. All the dispatches to Washington said that PAP was going to win the election.

Q: The election happens. How did we respond? Were we talking or were we basically bystanders?

KATROSH: No. At that time, and I can only go through 1959 because I got distracted in another country, we said, "All right, so he won." There was enough sense of reality in the Department at any rate to know that this was the fact of the matter and we were going to have to work with him. When he took the action that he did against the Communists, there was full support for him in Washington. He was obviously wanted by the local people and the British were not upset; we said, "Okay."

Q: How were relations...knowing how we operated around the world in that period, we must have been diddling around to some extent? Obviously Singapore is a check point...

KATROSH: But at that time Singapore was a Consulate General and although we had some real professionals there like Holdridge, it wasn't that high on the screen.

Q: What I am saying is that often when something like this happens you end up with the man in power mad as hell at the United States because he knows (1) they might have reservations and (2) they might be helping the opposition or something like that.

KATROSH: Harry Lee certainly had those feelings, but I tell you one thing about Harry Lee, he doesn't let things like that bother him. That is part of the game. Harry Lee knew that if

Communism was going to be contained in Southeast Asia, the only country that had any possibility of being effective in that regard was the United States. You have to give it to Harry. He will close down a "Wall Street Journal," he throws out "Newsweek," you can't do this you can't do that. He tells people not to spit and fines them \$200. He ridicules the US but he is careful to maintain close personal relationships with the US establishment.

Q: We are talking now about things that have happened in the last decade...

KATROSH: This is Harry. This is his mindset. This fellow is practical. He doesn't let even his own preferences get in the way of his vision for Singapore. He just doesn't do it. He will go up to Malaysia and kowtow to the king, hating every minute of it, if he thinks it will benefit Singapore. The Malaysians know this and that is why they kicked Singapore out of the Federation. They assessed Harry as too tough. If we kick him out of the Federation of Malaysia, he still has to come up and kowtow, but we don't have to worry about him taking our country or jobs over...which he would have done if he had been successful in staying in the Federation. He is extremely cold in that regard.

Q: So you didn't find all of a sudden what you might call a hostile regime sitting in Singapore?

KATROSH: No. It was not terribly friendly, it was correct, very British. If you had some money and wanted to do business, fine. Harry wouldn't let us push him around. If he didn't like something he told us. However, if something is a deal, it is a deal and he would hold up his end of it.

Q: He is still the presence behind the...

KATROSH: Yes, that is right. But that is the way Singapore operates, it hasn't changed. And Harry is there to make damn sure it doesn't change. It has been 40 years. As long as he is alive, that government won't change. He has enough popularity with the people to get his way if he wants to. You can call it a benevolent dictatorship; a controlled democracy...it is not democratic in the sense that we are democratic. But if you are a citizen and have a beef, you can be heard. You get a chance to vote. If you want to vote for the opposition, go ahead. I think after Harry goes, the PAP could lose power because the nature of Asian society is such that...and he has done so well and so much for the state that they won't cross him while he is alive. When he is gone a new emperor might come in with a new "mandate from Heaven."

WILLIAM ANDREAS BROWN
Political Officer
Singapore (1961-1964)

Ambassador William Andreas Brown was born in Winchester, Massachusetts in 1930. He joined the "Holloway Program" which was part of the Naval Reserve Officers Training Program and went to Harvard University, graduating with a Magna cum Laude degree. In 1950 he went to Marine Corps basic training in

Virginia and later served in Korea. His Foreign Service career took him to a multitude of places including Honk Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, USSR, India, the UK, and Israel. His career includes an ambassadorship to Israel as well as several positions in the State Department, Environmental Protection Agency. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November of 1998.

Q: So then you went to the Consulate General in Singapore. Is that right?

BROWN: I went to the Consulate General in Singapore. I arrived in Singapore on Lumumba Day, February, 1961. A great, anti-American demonstration was taking place that day.

Q: Was anyone killed?

BROWN: No. Regarding the situation in Singapore now, I was assigned as a Political Officer. This was my great break in the Foreign Service. The situation in Singapore was as follows.

There was a very young Government, led by a very young, elected Prime Minister, whose name was Lee Kuan Yew. In earlier times he had been known as Harry Lee Kuan Yew. However, he made it clear that he did not wish to be called "Harry" Lee any longer. There had been previous elections, but they had not been full elections. If you will, they had been partial elections.

Lee Kuan Yew had gotten a law degree in London with honors and had come back to Singapore. He had created a political machine [in 1954] called the "People's Action Party" [PAP], whose logo was a great bolt of lightning. (End of tape)

Q: You were talking about Lee Kuan Yew. Was Singapore part of Malaysia at that time?

BROWN: No. In the history of Malaya the British had gone through the period of the "troubles," that is, from 1948 through 1960, known as "The Emergency." Actually, the Emergency was virtually over by 1957, when the Federation of Malaya was recognized as independent by the British and by the U.S. The Emergency lasted three more years until it was officially declared to have ended in 1960. There were nine states in the Federation of Malaya. Then there was a federal center at Kuala Lumpur. Of course, they had a British Parliamentary system of government.

At the time the Federation was recognized as independent in 1957, the leader of the Federation was Tengku Abdul Rahman. He was a British trained lawyer. I think that it took him about 15 years to get his law degree. He wasn't a great student but he was a well-born member of the ruling family of the State of Kedah. He was a great figure in modern Malay history because he was a moderate and an ideal father figure.

In addition to the Federation of Malaya was Penang, which was a separate entity, originally part of the Straits Settlements, along with Malacca and Singapore. It was a free port, as Singapore was. When I arrived in Singapore in 1961, it was separate from the Federation of Malaya. It had been a British Crown Colony. In modern, historical terms, it was the first British settlement in Malaya. It was a great, commercial enterprise, sometimes known as the "Jewel" or the "Pearl" of the Orient, and sometimes as the "Big Godown" [warehouse].

The population of Singapore was more than 85 percent ethnic Chinese. It was a hot bed of left-wing activism, especially after 1955. Most of Singapore's drinking water was pumped across the Straits of Johore in a great pipe from the Federation of Malaya. Politically, Singapore went its own way.

As I mentioned before, Lee Kuan Yew, the leader of the People's Action Party, was swept into power in elections held in 1959. Lee Kuan Yew's party platform was socialism and union with the Federation of Malaya. As the PAP program ran, "We are socialists, but we cannot run this place as an independent, socialist entity." What did Singapore consist of? It was an entrepot which did a great deal of business. The natural gas and electric utilities were state-owned anyway. The PAP said that its goal would be to come into the Federation on the right terms. Then, the PAP argued, they could agitate among those Chinese, Indian, the workers in the tin mines and the rubber plantations, industry, and so forth, and eventually take over the whole country.

As a Chinese Language Officer, I heard this line up, down, and sideways during my first days in Singapore. This was a time of great unemployment, social unrest, ferment, and ethnic tensions. Lee Kuan Yew was determined to project a unified, multicultural, socialistic approach. The national language was to be Malay, the Bahasa Kebangsaan. However, in fact there would be four official languages: Malay, Chinese, English, and Tamil [a language of southern India]. There was a tiny, five percent minority of Indian Tamils in Singapore.

Q: When you say "Chinese," what Chinese were they talking about?

BROWN: Mandarin speaking, although most of them spoke it as a second dialect. For this reason Lee Kuan Yew, who couldn't speak Mandarin, set about to learn to speak Mandarin. In the midst of all of his many concerns, he assiduously studied Mandarin and put it to use.

We had a Consulate General in Singapore which was independent. Indeed, there were old-timers, FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals] in that Consulate General who could remember having set up a small branch of the Consulate General in Kuala Lumpur, in what was now the Federation of Malaya. That small branch later became an embassy. So there was an American Ambassador up in Kuala Lumpur, and a very senior Foreign Service Officer as an independent Consul General down in Singapore.

After World War II the British set up an Office of the High Commissioner of the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia in Singapore, under Lord Selkirk. Its headquarters were at Phoenix Park in Singapore, a major administrative entity. Constitutionally, in Singapore there was a freely elected government, on the basis of one person, one vote. Men and women were equally eligible to vote. However, as things stood, the British had the ultimate authority to revoke the constitution of Singapore and revert back to direct, colonial rule over the territory should circumstances require.

When I arrived in Singapore in 1961, the British had significant, military forces there. They had Army, Navy, and Air Force bases. Since Singapore was in significant, political turmoil, all of this was fascinating.

Lee Kuan Yew and his party were urging the establishment of a federation with Malaya, in socialist terms and with a socialist program. He had a brain trust [advisers], which was relatively moderate, and cadre [party workers] who were overwhelmingly Leftist. The PAP at this time was essentially a Leninist party in its structure. All of this was to become very important as things developed.

The British were in their East of Suez, overall pullback mode at this time. That is, they were engaged in withdrawing their forces from the area East of Suez. Singapore was being described as a kind of Chinese Cuba, a hotbed of Left Wing activity with a leader, Lee Kuan Yew, who was regarded with a certain amount of suspicion. His rhetoric jarred the sensitivities of many people.

What the British had in mind was how to pull out but yet hand things over to local leaders in Singapore in such a way as to ensure future stability, peace, and prosperity. They came up with what was known in code language as the Grand Design. That was, to persuade Tengku Abdul Rahman to include Singapore and fold its 85 percent Chinese ethnic population into the Federation of Malaya. Tengku Abdul Rahman, to put it mildly, was quite reluctant to do this. He didn't need another 2.5 million Chinese in the Federation. He already had enough Chinese in it.

Q: You might mention the role that the Chinese had played earlier during "The Emergency" [1948-1960].

BROWN: That amounted to a civil war. Chinese Leftist students and workers had gone against the British supported and Malay dominated political structure. They had taken to the bush [jungle] in the Federation of Malaya [in 1948]. For those long years between 1948 and the mid 1950s, they had a patron and supporter in communist China. These ethnic Chinese, some of them youths and some of them older than that, took to or were driven into the bush, where they were hunted down by British and Malay troops and police. This created great ethnic tension.

The British way of handling all of this was to move many of the Chinese living in areas in or near the jungle into camps, which were called New Villages. These villages were enclosed with barbed wire and fortified, to some extent. The villagers had a curfew imposed on them, usually from sunset to sunrise. Any Chinese found outside that New Village after the curfew went into effect at dusk, particularly if he were carrying food, let alone weapons, was subject to extreme measures, including execution by hanging. Malays and Indians were told that if they saw a suspicious character, which they knew meant a Chinese out of place after the curfew began, were encouraged to report him to the police.

A guerrilla war had been underway and this was the British answer. It took a long time and a great deal of effort and energy, but the British pacified Malaya by this approach. So there were a lot of bitter memories left over among the ethnic Chinese after this process was completed.

Q: And you have to admit that the ethnic Chinese were a destabilizing force in Malaya.

BROWN: Many of them were. There were also many moderates among the Chinese community, but it was a very difficult situation. Now came the idea of including Singapore in this federation. Tengku Abdul Rahman was very reluctant to go along with this British proposal to incorporate Singapore into the Federation of Malaya. He felt that he did not need additional Chinese, who would essentially be led by Lee Kuan Yew who was considered by many conservative Malays as pro-communist.

The bargaining went on, back and forth. For his part, Lee Kuan Yew subscribed to this British proposal as a chance to broaden substantially his opportunities and achieve his goal of a united, Malayan federation, ultimately to be dominated by the PAP in Singapore, with its superior intellect, expertise, and so forth. Of course, he was looking well down the road.

For three years, Stu, I attended Lee Kuan Yew's political rallies and any others that I could. It was a remarkable thing. I was the junior officer in a small, Political Section. Steve Comiskey, the chief of the Section, was a Chinese language officer. He was a very sharp guy. He said in effect to me: "Look, I've been here in Singapore for three years. It's a small place. I know it up, down, and sideways. See if you can do some biographic work. By the way, the consular district of the Consulate General in Singapore also covers the three political entities on the North coast of Borneo: Sarawak, a British protectorate; North Borneo, a British Crown Colony; and the tiny Sultanate of Brunei, also a British protectorate, in between them. Go over there and visit those places. You can cover them as well."

I had recently graduated from the Chinese language school at Taichung, Taiwan. My knowledge of Mandarin was at the S-4, R-4 level [Speaking, Fluent; Reading, Fluent]. My knowledge of Cantonese was pretty far along as well. So I was loaded for bear. Comiskey didn't tell me specifically what to do, so what I did was to go out into this really exciting scene and attend every rally that I could, at noon, and in the evenings. I went on my own. It wasn't a requirement of the job. I tried to build up a picture of the situation. Meanwhile, I was reading the Chinese newspapers and filing notes on labor unions, Chinese organizations, individuals, and political figures, drawn from the Chinese language press. I could read these papers fluently and I set about to build up an extensive file system.

For three years, day and night, I followed Lee Kuan Yew as best I could. It was a fascinating experience. His knowledge of Mandarin was improving. He had a fantastic ability to orate. Depending on the audience, he would speak first in English, then in Malay, and his Malay was very fluent, then in somewhat broken Mandarin. Then he would go back and sum it up in English.

To come back to the overall plan, Tengku Abdul Rahman didn't want to include Singapore in the Federation of Malaya. The British said, "Okay, we'll throw in the Borneo Territories [of Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo]." Well, the Tengku didn't particularly like the idea of including the rather impoverished territory of Sarawak. Sabah, or North Borneo, was more affluent, but dominated by Chinese businessmen. In Sarawak there was a virulent progressive Chinese political party, the Sarawak United Peoples Party. He didn't like that. Of the whole kit and caboodle, the one thing that attracted him was Brunei, whose population consisted almost entirely of Malay Muslims. He thought that they were his kind of people, and they were sitting on a pot of oil.

In the end, after tremendously complicated negotiations, he got everything but what he wanted most. In the end the Sultan of Brunei didn't agree to come into the Federation of Malaya. It turned out that Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo, also known as Sabah, were to be included in the Federation of Malaya.

As soon as Lee Kuan Yew's cadres or rank and file party workers realized what was up and that there was to be a referendum on the inclusion of Singapore in the Federation, all hell broke loose. Many of them, perhaps 90 percent of the membership, broke away from the PAP. However, since it had a Leninist party structure, they couldn't overthrow Lee Kuan Yew in party terms. They just all left the PAP. They set up something called the "Barisan Sosialis" [BS], or the "Socialist Front."

Q: When was this?

BROWN: This was in 1962.

Q: You were in Singapore from 1961 to 1964.

BROWN: Yes. Now I was really in business. Now rallies were going on, day and night, all around Singapore. The debates were in Mandarin, although the leaders of the Barisan Socialists also spoke Hokkien, Teo Chew, and Cantonese, depending on their audiences. However, mass communications were conducted in Mandarin. I can't tell you how many rallies I attended in a white sport shirt hunkered down like everybody else. The Barisan Socialist Chinese political activists really had a machine for turning out great numbers of people. The activists were saying: "Absolutely, No" to the idea of including Singapore in the Federation of Malaya. Lee Kuan Yew was saying: "Absolutely, yes, under the right conditions which I will obtain."

Q: He was for union of Singapore in the Federation?

BROWN: Yes. The Federation was to be called the "Federation of Malaysia." Lee Kuan Yew's opponents knew what was coming, and it came. They were hounded, arrested, and incarcerated. Lee Kuan Yew was able to hang much of the responsibility for this on the British and then on the Malay authorities. He was a politician par excellence. As I heard him say, "You've got to be willing to cut your grandmother's throat in this business." I also heard him say, "Look, I've got the little gun. But behind me is the big gun," meaning the British. It was a situation where what he was implying, really, was that if the Chinese Left got too frisky or too violent, the British would conduct another security sweep and put many of the activist leaders in jail. In fact, this is what eventually happened.

It was like mowing the lawn. The British progressively arrested the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew's erstwhile colleagues who had set up the Barisan Sosialis, and into prison they went!

Q: I would have thought that we would be particularly watching the influence of communist China in this.

BROWN: Oh, yes, we did.

Q: Since they were Leninist socialists, I would have thought...

BROWN: So what then developed was an American effort, after considerable to-ing and fro-ing internally. Remember, the Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, Charles Peterson, who was a political appointee but had once been Consul General in Singapore, thought that this was the greatest thing since sliced bread.

The Ambassador in Indonesia, Howard P. Jones, hearing the remarks made by President Sukarno and his supporters in Indonesia, thought that the inclusion of Singapore in Malaysia was a distinctly bad idea. He thought that it would only rile things up in Indonesia which, from his point of view, should be the center of our attention in the area. Our Ambassador in Manila, also had qualms after hearing the claim made by the Philippine Government under President Diosdado Macapagal that what we called "Sabah" rightfully belonged to the Philippines. Macapagal said that this territory had somehow been confiscated from them by British slight of hand.

In Singapore our independent Consulate General was in the middle. We made our frank comments and we were very much a part of the discussion. In the end, Singapore was included in the Federation of Malaysia. When this happened, the Barisan Sosialis was essentially decimated, with its leadership in prison, following progressive security sweeps by the Singapore police.

President Sukarno of Indonesia then launched what he called "Konfrontasi" or Indonesian confrontation of Malaysia. It was not an official war, but it amounted to that. Terrorist bombings began to take place in Singapore, and all kinds of threats were made.

In the middle of all of this I had become more active in the Political Section in Singapore. I was making more and more visits to Borneo. Over there the British had been warning the local population, which was split, about the dangers of Communists and other troublemakers. The largest single group in the population was non-Muslim and indigenous to the area. They were composed of Dayaks and other tribes in Sarawak and Kadusins in Sabah.

When I arrived in Singapore in 1961, the British Governors in the Borneo Territories, in their formal, colonial uniforms, were addressing the people along traditional paternalistic lines, asserting in effect, "We hold these territories in trust for you against dark forces." This was an apparent reference to the Chinese communists. They continued: "There is talk of independence and so forth. One need not pay any attention to this. All of this will take time, a great deal of time, and we will go at it gradually, always protecting your rights."

Suddenly, London told these Governors: "Let's go to independence." These same Governors then had to come out and say, "It's now time for independence." The plurality of the voters in the Borneo territories were non-Muslim. The prospect of being taken over by a Muslim headed Federation of Malaysia was not very appetizing, except for the Muslim minority groups, which amounted to about 20 or 25 percent of the total population. They thought that this arrangement was great!

In Sabah the Chinese community was conservative and unhappy about coming under Malay domination. The Chinese in Sarawak included some moderate, conservative types, but some hot headed leftists as well. They had a party, the Sarawak United Peoples Party (SUPP) which was something like Lee Kuan Yew's PAP e.g. moderates at the top and leftist cadres. Its leaders were not as skilled as Lee Kuan Yew was. There were pro-communist newspapers in the various little ports of Sarawak. I subscribed to and read them. They were putting out the straight, Beijing line. It was amazing.

Also, to the irritation of the British, I was getting out and interviewing the Chinese, including some of these pro-communist cadres in Sarawak. It didn't take me long to figure out that the British had a real problem. I also arranged to talk with specialists on this subject in MI-5 [British Security Service], including Chinese experts who had been brought down from Hong Kong. They were privately telling me that the situation was a lot worse than the colonial authorities to whom they were reporting realized.

So I was building up a certain expertise on the situation in Sarawak and Sabah, plus that in Brunei. Brunei was a British protected Sultanate. Its oil production was declining, but it was still a wealthy area. Brunei had a Malay Muslim population and a smaller Chinese ethnic population which was doing much of the work within a British shell.

Into all of this came a firebrand named Sheikh Azahari, an ethnic Malay. He had Indonesian connections. As Sukarno launched the Konfrontasi against Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah, Azahari and his crowd launched an abortive, Muslim coup in Brunei [on December 8, 1962]. I had the good fortune, professionally speaking, to predict it. After home leave I had come back to Brunei where I always spoke to Chinese shopkeepers. I found that a lot of green camouflage cloth and sharp instruments were being sold.

Putting all of this together, with some other information, I came back to Singapore fresh from home leave and said, "There's going to be a revolt in Brunei." I drafted a cable about this. My boss, Sam Gilstrap, who was then the Consul General in Singapore, and Bob Donhauser, my immediate supervisor, called me in and said, "This is pretty strong stuff that you're writing about a coming revolt." I said, "Yes, I predicted a rebellion." They said, "Well, this is pretty far out. Tell you what we'll do. We'll make it an Airgram." So we wrote it up as an Airgram, sent it in, and the revolt did break out. Naturally, Washington asked "Why didn't we know about this?" Sam Gilstrap, the Consul General, was visiting Washington and said, "Well, we predicted it for you. It's all there!" [Laughter]

Q: For those people who don't understand, hot news in those days went by telegram. News regarded as less important went by Airgram, which went in the diplomatic pouch, equivalent to air mail.

BROWN: Airgrams were much slower in reaching Washington. That experience made my day. The focus now came on the area.

JOHN A. LACEY
Consul General
Singapore (1964-1965)

John A. Lacey was born in Illinois in 1917. He joined the Department of State in 1950 and the Foreign Service in 1955. He served in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, and Rangoon. He was interviewed by Henry Precht in 1989.

Q: We are in the early 1960s when John is assigned as Consul General in Singapore. Why don't you continue from there, John?

LACEY: Thank you, Henry. Actually, the years were 1964-65, and you will recall that was an era of great ferment not just in China or Singapore area but almost literally around the world. Up to 1960 there had been only some fifty-five member states of the United Nations. By mid-1960, the number exploded into over one-hundred and grew successively to the number which now is around 155 or 156. In any case, Uncle Sam was ill-prepared to deal with that situation. In fact, we weren't cognizant, really, of the policy implications of that explosion towards independence. We later became so, and in my judgment, became unwisely so because of our intransigence towards being out-voted by the United Nations group. But that was a very significant, earthshaking development.

I was there to see how it affected Asian people. My job entitled me to many trips throughout that part of the world. Whenever I had leave, I would plan some kind of self-briefing trip. It was my habit to seek out informed people, journalists, officials of other nations, or own people, to keep myself reasonably up to date on what was going on, not just in U.S.-Singapore relations but in U.S.-Asian relations. What I discovered was these newly independent nations were proud as punch strutting the world stage of independence, and yet wholly ill-prepared and ill-trained, to deal with the affairs of a sovereign government. Our people in Washington were almost blithely ignoring that significant change, perhaps because of their preoccupation with Vietnam.

That is probably one thing going back to Vietnam. Just as we "had to" move into Vietnam because of the failure of the French, so did we feel unconsciously perhaps that U.S. interests in Asia somehow demanded the peace and tranquility that up to then had been provided by colonial powers--the British, the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch and others. I have often thought that that was a major turning point in world events which Uncle Sam has yet to really comprehend.

The other thing significant at that period was that while I said earlier that Singapore was less frenetically concerned about the effects of Vietnam than maybe the Thai, Singapore was at a stage where the British were moving out. That was part of the earlier syndrome that I just referred to. You may remember the clarion call, the British were moving "east of Suez." Remember that? What that meant was in Singapore almost overnight, the British naval bases, which were the headquarters of Britain's Far Eastern Command, were dismantled.

And Lee Kuan-yew used to speak woefully to me, "What are we going to do? We have lost money and protection which British's presence provided. But we are also faced with the task of

finding jobs for 50,000 people," former employees of the base. That was a far more searching matter on his mind than was Vietnam. I think that helps put Lee's situation in perspective.

Q: Who was he afraid of in terms of security, danger? Where did he think a danger to Singapore arose?

LACEY: I think in his heart of hearts it was China.

Q: The large Chinese population in Singapore?

LACEY: There was a large Chinese population in Singapore proper. But Singapore is perilously close to mainland China and the Chicom threat. Lee Kuan-yew was smart enough to see that with the withdrawal of the British and with the tides of nationalism, which is a kind of a offshoot of independence, Singapore was exposed to a lot of revolutionary grief. Now, indeed, it was. The KMT, the Kuo min tang, for example, had mercenary forces, in Malaysia, Thailand and Burma, too.

Q: Was the government at Kuala Lumpur still threatened by insurgency at that stage when you were there? Or had that been put--

LACEY: I think Kuala Lumpur was sitting supreme in its isolated ignorance of the world, which is another way of saying I don't think much of the Malay. I never met a Malay yet whom I could trust. They are a very slippery, conniving group.

Let me tell you a story that supports that attitude. Tunku Abdul Raman was in Singapore negotiating.

Q: He was the Malay ruler.

LACEY: Yes, he was the Prime Minister, the civilian ruler of Malaysia. He came to Singapore to negotiate the terms of Singapore's full entry into Malaysia. I was there courtesy of the U.K. Deputy High Commissioner Philip Moore, who was well informed and probably knew more about the Far East, Malaysia and Singapore than even Lee Kuan-yew. This fellow invited me to attend one of the negotiations.

Well, the Tunku and his gang sat on one side of the table, and Lee and his group sat on the other. My friend, the Deputy High Commissioner, sat next to Lee Kuan-yew as an advisor. And I sat at one end of the table, sort of a silent observer.

I noticed that the Tunku was fumbling for what I thought correctly was a cigarette. He finally found one. Then he was groping again over his body for a cigarette lighter. Whereupon Lee Kuan-yew got up, went around the table, flashed on his own cigarette lighter, and lit the Tunku's cigarette. That little act changed the atmosphere completely. Instead of being grouse, the Tunku beamed, rather not beamed, but smiled. From then on, the negotiations proceeded apace.

As it turned out, Singapore in the end established its own independence from Malaysia. But at that time, terms were agreed upon whereby Singapore could be an acceptable part of Malaysia.

CHARLES T. CROSS
Ambassador
Singapore (1969-1971)

Ambassador Charles T. Cross was born in China in 1922. He attended Carleton College and Yale University, and served as a lieutenant overseas in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1942-1946. His assignments abroad included Taipei, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Alexandria, Nicosia, London and Danang, with an ambassadorship to Singapore. Ambassador Cross was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You finished your tour in Vietnam in the summer of 1969. Then what?

CROSS: Upon my return to Washington, I was almost immediately asked whether I would be interested in becoming our ambassador to Singapore. I don't know why that happened, but I think Bill Bundy, then assistant secretary for FE, was behind it. So I spent the summer as deputy assistant secretary and then went to Singapore. The senior deputy was Win Brown; my area covered everything but Vietnam, which was Bill Sullivan's bailiwick. Sullivan headed a task force which essentially reported to Kissinger, who then was the head of the NSC.

Q: When you returned in 1969, the Nixon administration had been in power for about six months. Did you notice a change?

CROSS: Mel Laird, the new secretary of defense, was a college classmate. Laird wanted me to come to work for him and the Department supported that idea. But it was too late, since the ambassadorship had already been offered and accepted. I didn't really want to go to the Pentagon. But I did write two memoranda, neither of which made much of an impression. The first one dealt with "Vietnamization;" I took issue with that term because my view was that the war had always been a Vietnamese affair. There was no way that the war could be "turned over" to the Vietnamese - it was theirs to start with. I suggested that the phrase "de-Americanization" be used because that was a much better description of our decreased involvement in the fighting without giving the impression that the South Vietnamese would be helpless without us. My suggestion was squarely against the administration's efforts to distance itself from the war.

In my second memorandum, I suggested that if we were going to withdraw, we should not take measures to "improve the war." The efforts to improve the war did not deal only with guns, but also with the military engineers, for example, who looked at what the previous engineers had done in laying square meters of cement and then tried to outdo that. All the new roads that were being built to make it easier for the military to travel and other measures to make life easier for our military, should be stopped. We should leave combat troops in Vietnam, also the special

forces and turn over to the Vietnamese all of the infrastructure work we were doing. That suggestion also fell on deaf ears.

Q: You were our ambassador to Singapore from 1969 to 1971. Did you have any problems getting confirmed?

CROSS: No. I had impeccable credentials even with my service in Vietnam. All the questions I received during my hearings had to do with the war. I wasn't challenged on my views and soon thereafter I was confirmed.

Q: Did you have any contact with the NSC and Kissinger before you left for your post?

CROSS: No; I don't think I saw anyone there.

Q: What about Marshall Green?

CROSS: I didn't have too much contact with him. I think Marshall wanted someone else to go to Singapore. I admired some things about Marshall. He was extremely competent, but we didn't always see eye to eye. There were three other people in the Yale class of 1939 who became senior members of the foreign policy establishment dealing with East Asia at the same time: Marshall Green, Mac Godley, and Bill Bundy. They kept in close contact after graduation. As I said, it was Bill Bundy who wanted me to go to Singapore, even before I was assigned to Vietnam. I was told later that the Department leaned on Bundy to let me go to Vietnam; he never mentioned that to me.

Q: What did EA tell you about Singapore before you went there?

CROSS: I was given a great build-up. I really wanted to go to Kuala Lumpur where I had been previously; it also was a bigger post. But Singapore sounded good and my predecessor, Frank Galbraith, was one of my best friends in the Service. He gave us a very good start. I am glad that we didn't end up in Malaysia; it would have been too much of a repetition of my previous experiences - the Malay-Chinese tensions. Singapore had a lot of glamor. Many large American businesses had their Asian headquarters there.

Lee Kwan Yew and I got along reasonably well, at the beginning. The issues were primarily technical. I used Lee very often and when he caught on, he was very good. I had him talk about the "big picture." Lee Kwan Yew was really an international figure, and he knew the world well. He had very good ideas. American presidents like Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon used to seek his advice. Kissinger also used him as a sounding board. He was more articulate than either Johnson or Nixon - even in English. Actually, he spoke English much better than Chinese. Lee supported our efforts in Vietnam. He would call me in periodically and ask whether some action that the U.S. had taken meant that we would withdraw from Vietnam. He always opposed that, since he felt that we brought some stability to South-East Asia. He was always very clear on why we should not leave Vietnam.

Q: What were American interests in Singapore?

CROSS: We had several. First, we were discovering oil in quite a few places in the immediate area. None of it was in Singapore, but the drillers didn't want to headquarter in KL or Jakarta. They preferred Singapore, which was clean and safe and had good repair facilities, particularly for the vessels. So the oil business suddenly blossomed.

Then Singapore became interested in developing itself into a regional banking center. It had always been a safe haven for money from the rich in other countries, but Singapore really encouraged foreign banks to open regional headquarters. American banks became well represented.

Singapore developed a very sophisticated and highly organized foreign investment process. They organized industrial parks which were very efficient and attractive. That also attracted American business. When I arrived, there were only two or three electronic firms in Singapore working in Singapore; when I left there were eighteen. The first ones were given huge incentives; the next few were given more modest incentives and the last five were not given any. The last one in fact was told that it was the last one to be allowed to move into Singapore. Most of these manufacturers were working on sophisticated equipment, with semi-conductors having already moved to a place with cheaper labor.

I think our investment in Singapore grew geometrically while I was there; I think it was about \$2 billion by the time I left. The American population grew from about 2,000 to about 8,000 in two years. I think the embassy provided good support to American business and people.

I ran into some difficulties with former Vice President Agnew. He wanted to visit Singapore. He had been subjected to Kennedy's snobbery. The men who worked for him were sure that they were on the second team. He wanted very much to meet Lee Kwan Yew but had to invite himself to Singapore. On his first visit, he did have a meeting with Lee, which went smoothly. We played golf over my objections; Lee was a very good golfer and his minister of defense was almost a pro. I suggested that our army attaché be invited in my place; his handicap was much lower than mine. That didn't fly. In any case, I was scared to death by this golf match. I really got scared when the PAO came to me and said, with a big smile, that he had arranged for American TV coverage of the tee-off.

So we all went out to this beautiful golf course. Behind the tee, I saw the scaffolding for the TV cameras. It was decided that the minister of defense, Goh Keng Swee, and I would play Lee and Agnew. Lee started off by stating, "I'll show you the way!" He hit a strange drive about 150 yards off to the right in deep rough. I am sure that he had never done that before. Then Agnew teed off and hit a high fly that went into the jungle. The minister then hit a screaming drive that hit the trees off to the left. That left it up to me; I had never hit any shots like those. I started to drive and as I was doing so I heard the whirring of the cameras. My ball just bounced along the ground and stopped right in front of a very serious group of spectators who were politely not laughing. I think they were the chauffeurs. The camera had no other player to cover since the other three had hit balls where the cameras could not cover them, so I had to hit again on camera until I was finally out of sight.

I thoroughly blotted my copy book because my team, thanks to Goh who played well, ended up being ahead of the Lee-Agnew duo on the last hole. I had a very short putt - 2 to 3 feet - and if I had made it we would have won. But I was short and the two teams ended up in a tie. That didn't help my reputation at all because everyone in Singapore plays golf as if his life depended upon it.

I thought that Lee and Agnew got along well. Lee told him all about his views of our efforts in Vietnam and what he hoped the U.S. would do in the area - views that I had reported many times to the Department. It was good that Agnew heard them; he could confirm my reports.

Soon after that visit, I went to a chiefs of mission conference at Clark Field. When I came back, I was greeted by my DCM with a report that Lee Kwan Yew was attacking three sacred American institutions: *The New York Times* (they had decided to throw its stringer out), the Chase Manhattan Bank, and the CIA. Lee claimed that CIA and the Bank were engaged in supporting a newspaper - *The Singapore Herald* - that he wanted to close down. He wanted the Bank to foreclose on a small loan it had made to this newspaper to buy a printing press. Lee went through a mean, grinding attack in an effort to get the Bank to do his bidding. It came out later that Lee had gotten it into his head that the U.S. wanted to establish a newspaper in Singapore that might oppose him.

There was a lady in Hong Kong who was a member of a big and rich overseas Chinese family. That family ran a couple of Hong Kong newspapers. She had loaned the *Herald* a fairly large sum for those days - I think it was \$200,000. She was invited to Singapore where she had a meeting with Lee which lasted for about five hours - it was more of an interrogation than a conversation. She finally broke down when Lee accused her of subversion and demanded that she withdraw her support of the *Herald*. She finally agreed. The next day Lee called in the Chase Manhattan representative and asked whether the Bank would stick by its loan even if the lady withdrew her support. The Bank guy said that he couldn't answer because the Bank had specific procedures to decide such questions that he would have to follow. Lee viewed that as a refusal despite the representative's assurance that he could not say "Yea or Nay." He did note that there would be some question about the loan if the *Herald* was seen as unable to repay.

The next morning, Lee called in the European manager of Chase Manhattan and discussed this issue with him and Foreign Minister Rajaratnam for three straight hours. At the end, Lee Kwan Yew opened the drawer next to where he was sitting and pulled out a tape recorder. He told the Chase Manhattan guy that all of his comments had been taped. The manager had agreed that the loan might well be recalled if it did not seem likely that it could be repaid. Then he went to the door, and when he opened it, the room was filled with TV cameras and reporters. He told the manager that he wanted him to repeat everything that he told him. When the manager was finished, Lee told the media that they had just heard a sample of U.S. interference in the affairs of other countries.

I reported this story to Washington. The next day, at our staff meeting, I mentioned that I would try to get in touch with David Rockefeller and try to smooth the ruffled waters. I told the staff that we would not take a public position on this dispute; if we had to make a statement, I would make it on the basis of instructions from Washington. I knew that CIA had been caught twice in the last four years in operations and was afraid this was another but was officially assured it was

not. This tension lasted for a few days and seemed to be calming down. Then I got a message from the Department announcing that someone from the CIA was arriving, carrying a message from the then director, Dick Helms. The last time CIA was caught with its hands in the cookie jar, Dick Helms had promised Lee Kwan Yew that it would never happen again. The CIA agent did not have a personal relationship with Lee, and I think Lee knew perfectly well that whatever he was complaining about was not a U.S. operation.

Anyway, the CIA representative arrived and we met with Lee. Lee gave all his reasons why he thought that the operation was an American one. After that, tensions were reduced. Lee kept calling me in, producing evidence of the U.S. supporting newspapers abroad which was being provided to him by British friends, but was not at all apropos of his charges. It was obvious that all he was interested in was in closing the *Herald*.

One day, I got a personal message from the Secretary of State announcing that Agnew was coming to Singapore again. I replied to the Secretary that I thought this was not the time for the U.S. to be seen as making a gesture of esteem. I immediately got a reply telling me that he was coming anyway and that he could help me with "my problems" with Lee. I told the Department that I didn't have any problems with Lee; on the contrary, I had very good relationships with him. The problem was the U.S.

Agnew arrived and we had a meeting with Lee. Agnew told Lee that he had looked into his charges of a CIA operation and that he was convinced that there wasn't such a thing. Then he had to go on - and I can't imagine who gave him this suggestion - to tell Lee that a large government such as ours appreciated being told when something appeared to be going wrong.

About two months later I got a message telling me that the Department wished to transfer me. It wanted to change ambassadors. I got a separate message from Marshall Green suggesting that I accept the transfer without complaint because Lee Kwan Yew allegedly said he would prefer another ambassador, which, by the way, was probably true in light of his many public statements about the U.S. One of my staff, who had been working in the control room for the Agnew visit, had heard from one of Agnew's people that the former vice-president had been disturbed by the harsh exchanges that he had overheard me having with Lee. He was particularly unhappy about my opposition to his visit because he was concerned that Nixon would see it and come to the conclusion that Agnew couldn't handle even a minor problem. Of course, I think that Nixon could not have cared less what Agnew did or did not do in Singapore.

In the final analysis, I think Agnew was unhappy with me not only for my objections to his visit, but also because I had worked for Harriman. He had been given this information by one of his military attachés. That was the straw that broke the camel's back; I was viewed as being unreliable. So Agnew was responsible for my transfer.

Q: *Why did Lee take after the U.S.?*

CROSS: Inexplicable. I think he thought that the U.S. wanted to establish a newspaper which over time would mouth its "propaganda." Theoretically, that would give us influence in Singapore. The *Herald* had done some things which were pretty wild - for Singapore - and that

may perhaps have given Lee the idea that we were behind it. For example, the *Herald* mentioned that the PAP (Lee's political party) had helped certain people to avoid national service. The Singaporeans were very proud of their national service because it was an excellent way to integrate the society, both racially and economically, thereby creating a national identity and a sense of intra-state collaboration. It was impeccably run, as far as I could tell. In any case, the newspaper was accused of trying to undermine this system. That really irritated Lee Kwan Yew, even though I thought the newspaper was pretty mild. In the end, Lee just closed the paper. I mentioned earlier that I had talked to David Rockefeller about the Chase Manhattan loan. I finally found him in Latin America. He was besieged by journalists from all over the world who were obviously unhappy with Lee Kwan Yew's actions. I suggested that Rockefeller not do anything exceptional.

Q: Was there any thought that you knew of about the Bank leaving Singapore?

CROSS: No. I didn't think anything at all would happen. I didn't think Lee's wrath was directed at the bank but at the U.S. I thought after the furor calmed down, it would be back to business as usual. Lee would give his views on world affairs again to the CIA, to Agnew, to me - to anyone who would listen. Chase Manhattan might lose its loan, but the paper would be closed and the whole incident forgotten. The bank didn't suffer much otherwise except Singaporeans were nervous about dealing with it for a while.

Q: While you were ambassador, were you at all concerned by CIA and its activities?

CROSS: I thought the station had excellent relations with the police. But by the time I arrived, their best agents had been transferred; the Agency was not using Singapore as a regional base any longer.

Q: I would like to return to Lee's views of Vietnam. What did he see as the potential consequences of our withdrawal from there?

CROSS: He was very much taken with the "domino" theory. He didn't think that the Thais, or the Laos, or the Cambodians could resist the communists. He thought the Thais in particular could well change sides in a hurry and align themselves with the North Vietnamese and the Chinese. He didn't like the Malaysians and the feeling was mutual; and he thought that they too would cave. He didn't see the Indonesians as much of a bulwark. So he could easily foresee the whole of Southeast Asia falling to the communists. But he thought that if it looked like the U.S. would stay engaged, and if the South Vietnamese leaders remained in office, and if the U.S. military didn't leave entirely, we would be seen as having won the war. I go through this at greater length in my book.

RICHARD L. STOCKMAN
Communications Specialist
Singapore (1971-1973)

Richard Stockman was born in 1940 in Kansas City, Missouri. He went to seminary at Cape Girardeau in Missouri, and was then drafted into the U.S. Army in 1963, where he spent most of his tour in Germany. Mr. Stockman entered the Foreign Service in 1966 as a communications specialist. He served in Brazil, Honduras, Singapore, Togo, Switzerland, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Canada, and the Soviet Union. Mr. Stockman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

Q: *Well, then you moved from this not exactly heaven on earth to Singapore from 1971-73. Now that must have been a pleasant contrast.*

STOCKMAN: Well, it was for several reasons. The way the assignment came about was not exactly what we hoped for. My intent in those days, we were allowed to start bidding on assignments if you recall...democracy had set in in the assignment process...and I thought it would be a good idea to pick a Far Eastern assignment, one that was English speaking...and we had either Australia or New Zealand in mind...because it would help my wife improve her English and keep her in that environment. Latin America, of course, would throw her right back into her previous environment. We made the bids and Singapore was the result. It was very welcome for us.

Q: *Was it an embassy at that time?*

STOCKMAN: Yes, it was.

Q: *What was the situation in Singapore?*

STOCKMAN: At that point in time in my young career and family life, it was probably the beginning of what I considered the real education in the real world. Keep in mind in those days we were very, very much into Vietnam and Singapore was more than instrumental in this picture. Singapore, of course, was ruled by the one and only Lee Kuan Yew with his mission to set up the ideal city state. By all criteria I think even at that point he was very successful in doing the impossible. It was quite a contrast in living styles, of course, coming from Honduras to Singapore where you could almost eat off the streets. Our second son was born there and it was ideal for us for raising a family. Education was available. But we really did not get to know a lot of the people like we hoped to. We did get to know a few of the neighbors in our neighborhood. People, of course, other than a few Embassy officers, basically lived in large apartments. We had a detached house which was pretty nice and my wife got to know more people, I believe, than I did. However, professional people, dentists, doctors, etc. were very accommodating and we would invite them home from time to time. It was interesting to hear the local people talk about their conditions there. They were obviously a highly educated people, I think sophisticated by Far East standards. But they were a very regimented people. One of the sad things that one could see was the intense stress and pressure put on young people in this competitive world that they valued and treasured so much. It was not uncommon to hear of young suicides in those days. So I think it did tell you something about this stress that a city state could create.

Congestion? Yes, there was a lot of that. It was an island of about 10 by 24 miles in length, I think. The US military presence there was more or less isolated on one end of the island and it

was all in support of Vietnam. Lee Kuan Yew made it very clear that by no stretch was he going to let Singapore become a Hong Kong with all of its overtures. He certainly wanted his country and State to become a financial center and hoped to replace Hong Kong some day in that role. Who knows what will happen as we approach the reversion of Hong Kong to the Mainland in 1997.

But it was a very enjoyable assignments. The weather was almost overbearing with the humidity and the heat.

The Embassy, itself, was not large. It was constantly supporting VIP trips because it was a convenient stop off..

Q: It was good for shopping. Who was the Ambassador?

STOCKMAN: You know, I have a difficult time recalling who the Ambassador was. I don't know why, unless it is because we seldom saw him. Incredibly enough it was not staffed nearly as well as you would have thought Singapore would be in that particular time frame. It was by most standards a small embassy. The foreign service nationals equaled, if not out numbered us. It kind of told you the importance of Singapore in our scale of things.

Q: Were there any communications problems being in a place like that? You were pretty far away from everything.

STOCKMAN: I think it was the classic example of an operation that was difficult to staff. The actual physical conditions, the working environment, was pathetic. We were crammed into a cubbyhole at the top of the three story building. We were pretty much restricted in what we were allowed to do in terms of operations. The level, sophistication of the equipment was a real disappointment. I would classify it as an info type post rather than an action type post. It was a place that accepted a lot of visitors. For some reasons the communications office there had a lot of difficulty and hardship. People suffered illnesses. The fellow I replaced lost a son there from encephalitis, the mosquito bred disease. A lady had a real serious problem and had to leave prematurely. The morale was not too good.

ROBERT L. NICHOLS
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Singapore (1971-1973)

Robert L. Nichols was born in Wisconsin on August 4, 1924. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II in China and Asia. He received a bachelor's degree from Tufts University and a master's degree from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. His Foreign Service career included positions in The Philippines, The Netherlands, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore. This interview was conducted by Robert Amerson on August 30, 1988.

NICHOLS: Yes. I finally got my own post in Singapore, 20 years after coming into the Foreign Service. It seemed like a long wait, but it was worth it. It was an ideal time, you know. For years in the Agency, how we all suffered with the lack of funding flexibility. You couldn't move your funds around, but rather funds were locked into whatever was designated in your budget. I think one of the greatest things that ever happened to the Agency was Henry Loomis' decision to start the resource management system. It was initiated when I was in Taiwan, and we learned to use it there. You could do all sorts of creative things with it.

When I got to Singapore, I thought Singapore was terrific, because if ever there was a post that needed a lot of changes, at least as far as I was concerned, it was the USIS, Singapore. It was sort of steeped in the past; nothing had been changed in 25 years. Now with the RMS system, you could make changes and get all the support in the world.

Q: Did the change in China policy make a big impact in that regard?

NICHOLS: No. In Singapore, no. Actually, it was not related to the changes I wanted to make. When I got to Singapore, I didn't even think about China. I thought about what I could do with things like the library. The library was filled with students from a nearby school who came in to get into air-conditioning to do their homework. They weren't even using our books. That sort of thing completely turned me off. I wanted to make changes.

This was also the time of Allen Carter's Infomat in Japan. I thought all these concepts were interesting. I visited Japan wanted to see what Infomat was like. I had my own ideas, and I saw some good things happening in Japan, but I also felt there were a lot of things that just didn't apply or weren't good ideas for Singapore. But anyhow, I had a chance to do some things with Singapore and establish what was, I guess, the first "resource center" in the Agency. There is nothing very original about a "resource center" as such, but it was the first one in USIS. The Agency took on the name for various libraries elsewhere later on and some were modeled closely on the one in Singapore.

Q: Singapore must have been another kind of listening post, a visiting station for many prominent Americans. Did you have a flow of visitors?

NICHOLS: Yes, it was, but most of the good people we had coming through there were a result of the Star system. Remember the Star system? Ambassador Pat Moynihan of India initiated the Star system. What he did was get a lot of people that he knew, friends, into the AMSPEC program. Some of these people we got, and we could make selections under the resource management system of those we wanted. So we did get good people, some very interesting people during that period. Bucky Fuller--I can remember having Buckminster Fuller there and having top Singaporeans all sitting on the floor listening to him.

Q: He was known as innovative.

NICHOLS: Absolutely, full of fascinating ideas. Singaporean sitting around at his feet, literally at his feet. Then we had people like Edward Teller and Norman Podhoretz, who represented something else. For neo-conservative thinking, we had Norman Podhoretz. And, of course,

Edward Teller, that was my first exposure to him, and an interesting exposure, I must say. He got a lot of attention there. Whether we wanted it or not, we did get a lot of the people talking about U.S. policy in Vietnam, academic types, by and large, but people that were supportive. Singapore basically backed the United States on Vietnam. It was not a place where you really tried to push this, and I didn't try to emphasize it. I was trying to emphasize other things.

Q: What were the principal concerns of those leaders of Singapore about the United States in those years?

NICHOLS: That's a good question for me because of what I was concerned with in setting up our program there. In restructuring the library, I didn't think we should go with an oral sort of library, appealing to and open to everyone. I wanted a library that would appeal to certain individuals and groups in Singapore. I wanted to build a library based on the concurrence of interests, where our U.S. interests coincided with those of the Singaporeans. So that's why we built the resource center. We emphasized those areas and developed a specialized library. In other words, it concentrated on those areas and ideas which were of special interest to Singaporeans. So we had large collections in areas of business and education, and American foreign policy was heavily emphasized. Also there was a big section on economics.

Q: Not much concern about the big China question, then?

NICHOLS: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely. We had a section in the library on China itself. Singapore's population is about 75% ethnic Chinese, so there was an interest, although the Singapore government did not recognize the People's Republic of China. It still doesn't today, as a matter of fact. It says it never will until Indonesia does. Singapore does not recognize it, despite government control being largely in the hands of ethnic Chinese. The prime minister is Chinese. One of the biggest concerns in Singapore was fear of racial strife, concern about integrating a society which was composed of several racial groups, Malays, Indians, and Chinese. Therefore they didn't want undue influence from Peking, which they felt would subvert the ethnic Chinese population.

Q: Different conflicts. What was happening in the United States at the time? You were there from '71 to '74, which is the time of the change of administration, Watergate, and all that. How much impact did that make there?

NICHOLS: It had its impact, but the Singaporeans, first of all, just couldn't understand Watergate, I think like many countries. They just couldn't understand why we were so concerned about it. I couldn't believe it. I had a very hard time believing it myself. I couldn't believe a President of the United States would do these things and lie about them. I remember when I finally began to believe it was all true was when a person who certainly was a part of that administration, our area director for Asia, Kent Crane, paid a visit. He was staying at our house. We were having breakfast, and Kent saw the morning papers. There was some terrible story about what was going on in the White House. He said, "It's true. There's no question about it. That's exactly what's going on." It was some question about Erlichman, Haldeman, this and that. I've forgotten the story.

Q: Kent Crane, as I recall, was brought in by the administration.

NICHOLS: Absolutely. Kent Crane was Agnew's foreign affairs advisor. When Agnew made his first trip to Taiwan around New Year's 1969-70, Kent Crane was along as his foreign affairs advisor. That's when I first met Kent Crane. Little did I know he was going to become my boss a couple of years later. When he moved from the Vice President's office to the Agency. I think he saw the handwriting on the wall. Knowing Crane, I am sure he saw the handwriting on the wall over at the White House, and he wanted out, and someplace else.

Q: When he sort of nodded his head and said, "That's the way it is," he had seen it.

NICHOLS: Oh, yes, he'd seen it. I was almost sure. After hearing him, I began to believe it myself. It was a very disturbing thing. I left Singapore, as a matter of fact, on the day that the President resigned. It was also Singapore's National Day, so you don't forget that. That was the day I finally left Singapore.

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE
Ambassador
Singapore (1975-1978)

Ambassador John H. Holdridge was born in New York in 1924. He graduated from the US Military Academy in 1945 and served as a 1st lieutenant overseas until 1948. He joined the Foreign Service in 1948. His overseas posts include Bangkok, Beijing, Hong Kong, Peking, and Singapore. He was the ambassador to Singapore from 1975 to 1978 and to Indonesia from 1982 to 1986. Ambassador Holdridge was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.

HOLDRIDGE: I was assigned as Ambassador to Singapore. So I went home and had my little session up there in the Senate. The only guy that showed up was Sarbanes. So consequently my confirmation hearing was a snap and I showed up in Singapore in August 1975.

Q: You were in Singapore from when to when?

HOLDRIDGE: From 1975 to 1978.

Q: Everybody when they go out to a post has a sort of a check list such as, what are American interests and what do I want to accomplish. What sort of goals did you set in mind for Singapore?

HOLDRIDGE: The main thing I had to worry about in Singapore was to keep Singapore available to the U.S. Military for whatever facilities that the U.S. Military felt it needed. My big chore there indeed was to make sure that we could use Singapore's military airports as stopping places for flights on to Diego Garcia. The Middle East was beginning to loom as a real problem at this time. Iraq not so much, but Iran, yes. So Diego Garcia became very important and we

managed to work out an R&R agreement with the Singaporeans that people could come from Diego and spend a week or so in Singapore, not exactly the most exciting place for Americans on R&R. They would have preferred Patpong Road in Thailand. Singapore was available, and they could stock up on supplies there, aircraft could refuel and we also managed to provide dockyard facilities for U.S. ships. That had already been worked out, there was a small naval detachment there that handled repair work on U.S. warships and that has been extended into a more broad relationship, militarily speaking.

Q: I might just say for the record that Diego Garcia is a dot of an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean isn't it? Where we had at about this time or a little earlier, started a program of stockpiling equipment to meet emergencies in the Middle East.

HOLDRIDGE: That's right, we have these logistical support ships which are loaded with tanks and various kinds of ammunition and weapons and so on. So in case of some kind of emergency Diego can be used as a base for quick resupply of American units flown in from elsewhere to the Middle East.

Q: That was used extensively during the 1989 - 1991 period in the Gulf War against Iraq. What was your reading before you went out, I assume Lee Kuan Yew was the...

HOLDRIDGE: Lee Kuan Yew and I got along just fine. He and I saw things pretty much the same way. He called me over on one occasion, he was going to go to China and he wanted to know how he should act. This was in 1976, he was going to make a visit with his wife, a state visit to China. I gave him the advice that the thing for him to do was to stick to his principles. Don't water your principles down, stand by your guns. The Chinese would be happy to have you give in to whatever it was they wanted you to give in to, but don't, I said. They won't respect you, they'll take any kind of gratuitous gift that you give them but they won't respect you and the thing to do that you really need is to maintain your respect. So off he went, and about a month later he called me and said "I took your advice and it worked out fine."

Q: What was the situation in Singapore at this time? It had been essentially a city state for how long?

HOLDRIDGE: It got its internal self government in 1956 with a British Governor General still there and then it became a part of Malaysia. Malaysia was a creation of the British to try to balance off the racial issue in that part of the world. They called it communal balance.

Q: We're talking about racial being Malay versus Chinese.

HOLDRIDGE: With the Indians playing some kind of a minor role off there in the corner. So the point of the issue was into some way for Singapore to be merged, it didn't make much sense for an island of two hundred twenty-five square miles to go off on its own, so the British Foreign Office's hope was to work out some kind of arrangement where (originally it was Malaya when the British marched out in 1957) they thought that they would create Malaysia and balance off the Chinese in Singapore, who if added ipso facto into Malaya would have become the predominant race, by adding in British North Borneo and Sarawak along with Singapore to a

greater entity known as Malaysia. Well, Lee Kuan Yew blew that one out of the water about 1965. Malaysia had been established somewhere in the 1960s, and in fact the Singaporeans had fought in the confrontation with the Indonesians in Borneo or Kalimantan in Brunei and they had done alright, and Singapore had paid its dues but Lee Kuan Yew, a man of enormous capability but also enormous ambition, at that time began to make speeches about a "noncommunal" Malaysia. That was a real red flag waved in front of the Malaysians up in Kuala Lumpur. The government up there, the UMNO, United Malays National Organization, took this very dimly because if you talked about noncommunalism, this would give the Chinese a real say in the national political future. The way it worked out in theory, about fifty-one percent of the population of Malaysia is Malays, about thirty odd percent, it says here in fine print, are Chinese, and the rest are Kadazans and Indians and Westerners. But actually, if you were to take a census even now, you'd find that the Chinese might even be in the slight majority. With Singapore added on to Malaysia--Singapore's population at that time was about one million and three quarters, of which the majority by far were Chinese. This would tip the political balance in favor of the Chinese and the Tunku. Abdul Rahman, who was I guess still the Prime Minister of Malaysia at that time, wasn't having any of that. No Chinese was going to run the place. So Singapore was cordially invited out of Malaysia. I have seen a television clip of Lee Kuan Yew facing the press after this little event, and he was literally weeping. He said he never believed it would go so far, but this is what came out of that speech that began about a noncommunal Malaysia. So Singapore was forced to go in alone, and it's done very well in the meanwhile.

Q: Why did Singapore let us have essentially solid support for basically our military posture in that part of the world?

HOLDRIDGE: Lee Kuan Yew, although he is not a great admirer of American culture, is a great respecter of American power. He really is one of the few people that I know of that gives the United States credit for keeping the dominoes from falling. We stuck it out in Vietnam long enough to give the other Asian countries, Southeast Asia in particular, a chance to reform and refine their own political systems to the point where they could stand the test of time, which they have done in varying ways. But at any rate we kept the dominoes from falling and Lee Kuan Yew is very grateful, and he regards the U.S. military presence as a very useful balancing force. That is why he has made these facilities available to us.

Q: What was the political situation in Singapore?

HOLDRIDGE: There was a little bit of an effort on the part of a group calling itself the Barisan Socialis, a kind of left wing labor oriented party, to try to make a stand. There was an Indian lawyer named Jayaratnam who headed up the Barisan Socialis and I think he won a seat in the election. There is a parliament in Singapore, believe it or not, it's unicameral. There's no upper house, but they were a house, it meets regularly, dominated by the PAP and I think the one lone voice in the opposition was this man Jayaratnam, and that was intolerable to Lee Kuan Yew who brought criminal libel charges against poor old Jayaratnam which the Supreme Court upheld after the courts had gone through the routine of saying, yeah, he did commit libel. And poor old Jayaratnam was forced to cough up an enormous fine which broke him economically, and I suppose broke him politically. I think his son is still active in Singapore politics. Singapore is very concerned about what they would call the creeping vote of the opposition, they had only

won in one of the votes while I was there by seventy percent and that worried them and more recently its dropped down to sixty percent or maybe even a little bit lower than that. They are bound and determined that there will be no interruption of party politics of the sort that you may find in the United States, which would detract from the internal stability of Singapore.

Q: Did this inhibit your ability to get out and around? Could you go to this opposition?

HOLDRIDGE: No, well we had chats with people in the University of Singapore and with others who were members of the opposition, but they really didn't amount to very much. I can recall on one occasion, Patt Derian, the great advocate of human rights and democratic rights under the Carter Administration, came out after having lectured Suharto in Indonesia about the detention of communists left over from the 1965 coup period. Anyway, she came to Singapore and first of all she had a conversation with Lee Kuan Yew which I not only arranged but sat in on, it went on for the better part of two hours and she just blasted away at human rights values as she perceived them and Lee Kuan Yew, trying to suggest gently that all these guys that were being detained in Changi jail had to do to get out was just renounce the use of force in bringing about governmental changes. In effect, Lee was suggesting that there were other systems in government in that part of the world which seemed to work alright, and maybe she shouldn't be quite so down. But she was unconvinced. As we drove away from that interview, she turned to me in the car and said "You know, he's worse than the Argentine Colonels because he knows he's wrong." How wrong she was, he was convinced that he was right. Lee Kuan Yew called himself the last Victorian to me and he's also a Confucianist. He has tried to introduce the study of Confucianism into the Chinese schools in the sense of the values of Confucianism, the five relationships, and not trying to create chaos in the internal structure of the state so that you can have continued national development. Lee Kuan Yew and Patt Derian didn't see eye to eye, but I could move around and talk to people who were oppositionists. One of these was a former Chief Minister of Singapore, David Marshall, who when Singapore first began to exert its movement toward autonomy became Chief Minister under the British, and then when the PAP took over became an outspoken member of the opposition. When Patt Derian came to town she wanted to talk to oppositionists, so I got a whole bunch of them together at my Public Affair Officer's house and we had a little discussion. There was a very nice young lady from Singapore University (Chan Heng Chae, now Singapore's ambassador to the U.S., but then something of a critic) and three or four others and David Marshall. David Marshall astonished me by telling Patt Derian "You've got to understand, Ms. Derian, that in this part of the world there is another philosophy called Confucianism that looks more toward the continued order of the state, and this takes precedence over the individual rights of a person." She couldn't understand that, but I mentioned this to Lee Kuan Yew about a week later and he said "David?", and the next thing I knew David Marshall was appointed Ambassador to France. He was rewarded.

Q: I think of Lee Kuan Yew and his "keep Singapore clean" and then having our people of Diego Garcia sitting on this barren little island going to have R&R, I mean I know what R&R is. I had R&R from Korea as an enlisted man and I used to watch this in other places. How in God's name could you deal with the problem of young American lads going to have their fun and games in Singapore?

HOLDRIDGE: There was a hotel which was taken under the wing of our Navy unit where the people were quartered when they came on R&R, and I don't think anybody asked too many questions about who went in and out the front door, at what times of the day or night.

Q: You're talking about girls?

HOLDRIDGE: Yes, like girls. [laughter] And the Singapore government apparently did not raise any objections all the time that this was going on while I was there, there was never any difficulty. I used to laugh at the sole nightclub of any consequence in Singapore. It had the best dressed girls, the best looking girls in Singapore (next to the Singapore airline hostesses) but they were also the best dressed and the most dressed. Very little bare female flesh ever showed up.

Q: Were there any other issues that occupied your time before you left?

HOLDRIDGE: Oh yes. Narcotics

Q: Today is November 29, 1995. Let's talk about narcotics. What was the role of narcotics?

HOLDRIDGE: Narcotics were something that Lee Kuan Yew, then the Prime Minister of Singapore, absolutely abhorred and he decided he would take the most stringent measures to oppose it. As far as Singaporeans were concerned anybody caught with fifteen grams was to be considered a "pusher" and then took the long drop at Changi prison.

Q: You're talking about being hung?

HOLDRIDGE: Exactly. They picked up a number of people each month trying to smuggle drugs across the causeway between Johor Baharu and Singapore. There was a customs office on the Singapore side, of course, and a lot of young people on motorcycles or whatever got caught and they were disposed of in the way I described. As far as the average individual, anybody caught using the stuff was thrown into a detention camp for six months or so, or at least until he was judged clean, and run through a military drill--sort of a situation of boot camp. They were also given lectures and severe discipline to try to discourage people from using narcotics. I would say that Singapore is probably one of the most drug free areas in the whole world, but the problem didn't extend just to the Singaporeans. We had an American community there of some size. There was a Singapore American School, the SAS. Drug pushers would get this stuff that was coming in from the Thai-Burma border area refined into heroin, and it was very high grade. You could buy for, say, ten Singapore dollars a little glassine packet maybe three by five inches. That was making its way into the American school, and the Singapore narcotics people and the police got wind of this and cracked down. They found that there were about twenty-five or thirty or so young Americans who were involved in this, and the problem was what to do? Since they were running afoul of Singapore law, the answer was relatively simple: either they went to jail or they would be deported. If they were deported their parents had to go with them and that meant loss of job. There was no way out, that's the way it was.

Q: What was your involvement with this?

HOLDRIDGE: My involvement was that people came to me from both sides. Singapore wanted me to make sure that Americans understood the policy and that it was followed, and the Americans that were involved came to me and were bewailing the fact that their kids got caught and why should they pick on me when they didn't pick on somebody else and so on. Well, it was just one of those things. My job was to make sure that I did not interfere in Singapore's internal affairs by trying in anyway to defy the law. Fortunately I didn't have anything like the Faye case to worry about.

Q: You might explain just a bit about the Faye case, this is quite a recent manifestation.

HOLDRIDGE: Oh I forgot, if you got caught as a user they also gave you about ten of the best in the backside with a rotan.

Q: The Faye case was something that came up in the early 1990's where a young American boy defaced some cars, what had he done?

HOLDRIDGE: Well he had been out with a bunch of young people. Whether they were all Singaporeans or partly others from the SAS, I don't know, but they were breaking radio aerials off of parked cars and scratching the paint and otherwise defacing some of these vehicles. Of course in Singapore a motor vehicle costs you a bundle because of the import tax, so they're cherished. Consequently it was regarded with a considerably larger degree of severity than it might have been had you parked down there in a parking lot on Fourteenth Street and E, something like that.

Q: He was to be whipped?

HOLDRIDGE: He was to be given five strokes of the rotan. Of course all of the hand wringers in the United States wrung their hands and some human rights groups were up in arms, and the President wrote a letter asking for clemency. Eventually his sentence was reduced to three [strokes] I hope they were good ones, I wouldn't have minded administering them myself.

Q: It was not one that warmed up the indignation of many Americans. It did to those that abhorred any type of physical punishment but I think the young lad probably will not deface cars again.

HOLDRIDGE: I think he had to be very careful when he sat down, for quite awhile. [laughter] Anyway, I think I discussed also my chore of opening up access to Singapore's military facilities to the United States. The flight of C-130's or C-141's.

Q: These were transport planes?

HOLDRIDGE: Transport planes going through Tengah Airbase which was Singapore's military airbase at the time and going on from there to Diego Garcia, and on the way back also stopping and bringing R&R troops and picking up fresh fruits and vegetables. The U.S. Navy would stop there fairly frequently, and had access already to the Singapore former British naval dockyard. It

worked out very amicably and I had a very good, I thought, personal relationship with Lee Kuan Yew. Did I talk about Patt Derian?

Q: I'm not sure, why don't you go over it again.

HOLDRIDGE: Patt Derian was the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and she had been in various places in East Asia stopping before she got to Singapore and Indonesia and putting President Suharto's back up for the way the Indonesians had handled those involved in the 1965 coup. I think 30,000 were still under detention, many of them in the island of Buru, which is off on the Sunda Sea in the Maluku area. She'd really put Suharto's back up and then she came to Singapore (I think I did talk about this but I'll repeat it anyway), she talked to me and then she talked to other people in the Embassy on the question of human rights, and we described that Singapore was doing what it could to keep the crime rate down and to prevent the spread of narcotics use, and using what we might call authoritarian methods to do so but he was approaching this from the standpoint of the greater good of the population as a whole. Rather than curing the symptoms he was out to cure the basic disease as much as he could. I also explained the difference between the philosophies. The Western philosophy of human rights, the individual being all important as opposed to the Confucian idea, the stability of society, the absence of chaos, was the guiding principle. She arranged to see Lee Kuan Yew and I sat there for the better part of two hours while she and Lee Kuan Yew hurled verbiage at each other. She kind of astonished me half way through, the Prime Minister's Office was on the second floor of the Istana and she was a smoker and she said, "Isn't there someplace we can go where I can have a cigarette?" and he being the perfect host said, "Of course, we'll go up one flight." There was a dining room up above and he opened up all of the windows to the monsoon which was blowing outside, and we sat inside and she was able to smoke. But it went right past her, Lee Kuan Yew trying to convince her that for the well being of society and all, that the people who were being detained in Changi jail (now this doesn't include just narcotics pushers, there were people who were political opponents who had been identified with the Malayan communist party and who were indeed on the red revolutionary side of the spectrum, they were still in Changi jail and this was some years after they had been arrested) and as far as he was concerned, he said, all they had to do was to foreswear the use of violence in overthrowing the government or changing the government, and they would be released. That was not enough for Patt Derian. She said they should have been released anyway. Political prisoners, that was an abhorrence to her.

Q: Here you are, you understand where Lee Kuan Yew is coming from, you understand where Patt Derian is coming from, you're a diplomat and you're sitting there watching this, did you just sort of watch this verbal "ping pong" or did you try to put it in perspective while you were there? What did you feel your role was?

HOLDRIDGE: No way would I get in the middle of this one. [laughter] I thought I'd let them have their words. Actually as we drove away she turned to me in the car and said "You know, he's worse than the Argentine Colonels because he knows he's wrong." and that showed that she sat there for the better part of two hours and had never gotten the idea in mind that this man was sincere. He really believed in what he was doing.

Q: What did you do, just sort of wish her well and see her on her way as quickly as possible?

HOLDRIDGE: No. I wished she'd get out of town but she had a couple of other things. She wanted to meet an oppositionist, so I fixed her up with Jayaratnam, he was the leader of the opposition party, I guess it was the Worker's Party then. She was interested in torture, "Was there any torture?" And Jayaratnam as a lawyer should have known better, but he said "Well I've heard that there is torture." Hearsay of course, it would have been completely inadmissible in any American court of law, but she of course jumped on that. Then in the evening I had brought in a bunch of people who are also anti-PAP, People Actions Party, that doesn't mean that they were revolutionaries or anything of that sort. A woman professor from the University of Singapore and David Marshall who had been formally Chief Minister and had been a gadfly on Singapore politics for years. I do remember mentioning this to you. David Marshall was the one who brought her up short on saying that you've got to understand, Ms. Derian, that in this part of the world there is another philosophy which is predominantly Confucianism which does indeed put the well being of society over the well being of the individual. Again something that she found very difficult to accept. I mentioned this, that David Marshall had spoken in these words to Lee Kuan Yew at a reception a couple of weeks later, and as a consequence I believe David Marshall got himself out of the "dog house" politically and was appointed Ambassador to France. It got him out of the way and got him a prestigious job as far as Lee Kuan Yew was concerned.

Q: Isn't it difficult trying to get into the practice of professional diplomacy? Here you are and here comes somebody who is well plugged into the political circuit in Washington, who really doesn't understand the territory and yet you can say all you want but there's a certain point where you begin to sound like the advocate of the country where you are. You know that this very powerful political person will go back to the United States and say "That Holdridge has just gone over to the enemy." This is true in many countries, it's not just this one. How do you handle this? How do you prepare yourself before somebody like that comes and during the time they're there?

HOLDRIDGE: Well in effect, I "low keyed it." If I had anything to say, I would always put it in such a way that I hoped it was calculated not to get her "hackles rising" and let the others around there speak for themselves. Rather than my being an advocate for them I let them be their own advocates. And that seemed to have worked out. I don't know if there are any black marks. As a matter of fact, this is where I first encountered the hand of Warren Christopher, who I found at the time was almost in lockstep with Patt Derian when it came to human rights issues.

Q: He was Under Secretary?

HOLDRIDGE: Yes, and he backed her up on all sorts of things. I thought to an excessive degree. For a man that should have understood that while human rights is of course a very important aspect of our overseas diplomacy, it should not take precedence over everything else. Lee Kuan Yew was able to separate out in his own mind the narcotics, human rights elements of what was thrown at him by us from what the American military in particular, was interested in, which was access to Singapore's military facilities, and particularly in support of Diego Garcia.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover in Singapore at that point?

HOLDRIDGE: One little thing, and that is toward the end of my assignment in Singapore, who should show up but Vice President Rockefeller.

Q: Now Patt Derian was part of the Carter Administration, so this is part of the Ford Administration, so Rockefeller was before Patt Derian's visit.

HOLDRIDGE: Let me see, we were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence.

Q: Okay that would have been during the Ford Administration.

HOLDRIDGE: Yes, 1976. So Rockefeller showed up and I had prepared a very thorough briefing book for him on what he should do when he got to the airport, the issues which were likely to be raised and what he might say in response and so on. All of the things that I would have done for a Presidential visit, such as I did for the Nixon visit when Nixon went to China. The only problem was as I found out later, Rockefeller had dyslexia, he couldn't read very well and he wasn't much of a reader anyway. So I got out there to the airport, and here was the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, leading members of the Singapore government, and a large contingent from the American community arranged through the American Chamber of Commerce, all out there to meet Rockefeller. Again, the arrogance of the U.S. bothered me. It wasn't enough that there was a man from the Singapore air force who would be there with the paddles to tell the airplane where to go and where to stop. They had arranged, of course, an elaborate red carpet lined with little potted trees along either side of the red carpet and the airplane had to stop just so, so that when you opened the door and the ramp was put in they could come down and step on the red carpet. Well the Air Force wanted to do this also, they wanted to have their man on the ground to tell the aircraft where to stop and so they had an Air Force major there with his paddles and the two of them out there, the Singaporean and the American Air Force guy, got into this little hassle as to who was going to tell the plane to stop. The result was the damn thing overshot by twenty feet. [laughter] So then they had to reverse thrust on the ground, which is rough on the engines and rough on fuel, but they did that. They put on their reverse thrusters and the airplane was able to back up to the proper place and then of course Rockefeller came down, and hadn't read a damn thing that I had given him and stumbled through this whole thing of the proceedings of the reviewing of the honor guard and walking around. With him was his wife Happy, remember she had divorced from a previous husband, but with her, however, was her sixteen year old daughter from her previous marriage. There was to be a big dinner at the Istana that night, a formal dinner and everything was laid out according to protocol. All the place cards were set, round tables, there must have been thirty of the damn things, each seating ten. Then "little Ms. Rockefeller" decided that she didn't think she wanted to go. Well you know what would have happened in that case was that every place card would have to be moved. I went to the political aide to Rockefeller and said "She damn well better show up or this is going to cause an enormous flap if she doesn't appear. They've made all of these preparations and I think it would be a gross mistake in terms of our relationship with Singapore if she doesn't appear." Well, she did appear.

Q: I'm surprised that Rockefeller wouldn't have the equivalent to an aide. Someone with dyslexia who has reached a high position normally has a Foreign Service officer who goes around and who would basically read the stuff and then say these are the issues and that sort of thing.

HOLDRIDGE: Well the only person he had was one of the people from his own personal staff, that's no good. As far as I know, I was unaware of anybody else. Then of course the next day he departed and this also was in reverse order, the similar kind of disaster. First of all Rockefeller was a great collector of Chinese ceramics, and there was one place in town on Orchard Road that had beautiful Chinese ceramics, all of them probably smuggled in from China. So he went out on an early morning shopping trip to this place and bought all sorts of Chinese ceramics, and they were to be delivered to the airplane by the time that the airplane was to depart. I went down with my vehicle to pick up the Vice President to ride with me and to escort him out, with the flags flying and all the rest, to the airport. Here again, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and the members of the American community and high ranking Singaporeans were in attendance. It was a typical Singapore July. It was hotter than Hades, the sun just beating down, and of course you're standing there on this concrete ramp with the heat just radiating upwards. We got out there all right, but the only problem was first of all Rockefeller was late, he wanted to stop every so often and take pictures of the Istana and of street scenes, and every so often we would stop and he would either go out the window with the camera or get out of the car entirely. So that made us about fifteen or so minutes late, the Prime Minister standing out there fuming. Then on top of that, just as we were about to bid farewell to Rockefeller and his party with a great sigh of relief, his military aide came up to me and asked if we could hold the airplane because the artifacts or the Chinese ceramics which Rockefeller had purchased had not been delivered yet, and they were trying to hold the aircraft until these things would come. I said well maybe we can figure out some kind of mechanical problem to hold the plane for about fifteen minutes, but I said that I thought it really inadvisable for anything more than fifteen minutes. He took that aboard and went off and I went back and I heard the Prime Minister saying to the Director of Protocol, "George, I'll kill you!". Anyway, it wasn't George's fault it was Rockefeller's fault. At any rate five minutes went by and all of a sudden this little yellow station wagon came careening around the corner and went zipping out to the rear exit of the aircraft in which the Vice President was riding, and I watched as sort of a "bucket brigade" formed as these multiple artifacts were handed up into the "belly of the whale," at which time the airplane finally took off and I sighed this enormous sigh of relief to get these people off my hands.

Q: I suppose you had what is common in the Foreign Service known as a "wheels up" party.

HOLDRIDGE: Well I had to go back, we had enough stuff to worry about at this time* that I decided that it was probably better to go back to the office which at least was air conditioned. One little thing going back to Patt Derian, Lee Kuan Yew was so horrified at Patt Derian, he said "what can I do?" He telephoned me afterwards. He'd seen that this attitude was inflexible, she was just not understanding one damn thing and what could he do to try to get his message across? Well it happened that now-former congressman, Lester Wolf was also in town, and had tried through me, unsuccessfully, to get an audience with Lee Kuan Yew, and since he was a man who was out there working on narcotics and he had connections with human rights, (he was from the House Foreign Affairs Committee) I said why don't you see Congressman Wolf maybe he can carry the word back. Lee Kuan Yew immediately assented, so I went in with him and they

had an interesting conversation, about an hours worth, and that saved me with Lester Wolf and it also gave me a few points with Lee Kuan Yew.

Q: *You left there when?*

HOLDRIDGE: 1978.

EDWARD C. INGRAHAM
Deputy Chief of Mission
Singapore (1977-1979)

Edward C. Ingraham was born in New York state in 1922. He received his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College in 1942 and subsequently joined the war effort and served in the U.S. Army overseas between 1943-45. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947. In addition to Islamabad, his posts included Cochabamba, La Paz, Hong Kong, Perth, Madras, Djakarta, and Rangoon. He was interviewed on April 8, 1991 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

INGRAHAM: From Washington, I was assigned in '77 to Singapore as DCM.

Q: *Okay, you were in Singapore how long?*

INGRAHAM: From '77 to '79. I left prematurely.

Q: *Who was ambassador in Singapore?*

INGRAHAM: When I arrived, John Holdridge, an old, old friend.

Q: *He is an Indonesian hand too, isn't he?*

INGRAHAM: He is retired. He has been Ambassador to Indonesia and Assistant Secretary in EAP. He was the chief of mission in China before we had an ambassador. He was in China under George Bush at one time. He is a Chinese language officer.

Q: *He was in the NSC.*

INGRAHAM: John was a straightforward, hard working ambassador and a joy to work for. We had a nice little post going for us in Singapore. No big problems, but busy. We had lots of American businesses. They would have their headquarters in Singapore and operations throughout Southeast Asia.

Singaporeans were active on the world stage. Lee Kuan Yew loved being on that stage. They were also very sophisticated, very shrewd and they realized the future of Singapore depended on their making Singapore recognized in this world. Otherwise, little by little, they would disappear

into Malaysia or Indonesia unless they could establish a real Singapore personality. Which they did.

Q: How did you and the Embassy view Lee Kuan Yew?

INGRAHAM: We admired him greatly. You could talk to him. Lee was a very shrewd, smart person. He was quite enamored of his own intelligence, but in this case it was justified. He knew facts, relationships and was decisive making up his mind quickly. He was the boss. I remember people talking about an oppressive atmosphere in Singapore. Nonsense. It is the only country in all of Southeast Asia that has held free elections, and I mean really free elections, every four years from the very beginning. In between times Lee really rode herd on the country. But every four years everybody had a chance to say "in" or "out," and they always said "in." I can remember people saying the Singapore elections had to be dishonest because they have one oppositionist and some 70 government MPs. I would say, "This is a city government. It is like Chicago and the Daly machine that made the city run. This is the same sort of machine in Singapore, but honest."

One thing about Lee Kuan Yew that most people didn't realize...I would stroll down Orchard Road, the main shopping street, walk into a jewelry store and there would be an elderly, pleasant man working behind the counter. I would chat with him...it was Lee Kuan Yew's father. If you wanted Chinese cooking lessons, you signed up with Lee Kuan Yew's mother. This was when he was Prime Minister of the country. Talk about squeaky clean honesty! It was in a way an ideal society, sort of a platonic society. They were engaged in all sorts of social engineering. For example, if every Singaporean lived in a separate house, the whole island would have been paved over. It was a beautiful green island with a huge forest reserve in the center, park land, open space everywhere. To preserve all this, they decided they had to go up. So they built high-rises. Right now more than 75 percent of the entire population lives in government-owned high-rise apartments. They were taking Chinese out of little storefront shops, Malays out of Kampong, and putting them in high-rises. It was difficult but it was the best solution.

I remember talking to the Minister for Housing once, saying, "I am sorry to tell you this but in the '50s, '60s and even in the '40s we tried this same thing in New York--Stuyvesant Town, Peter Cooper Village, they started out fine but ended up disasters. You have to realize this." He said, "Hell, I spent six years in New York studying those places. We know what the flaws were." It is that kind of country.

Q: You left there in 1979.

INGRAHAM: Unexpectedly. Holdridge was transferred in the spring of '78. I was Chargé for about four months. Then in the late summer of '78 the new Ambassador came, appointed by Jimmy Carter. It was the sitting governor of South Dakota, Richard Kneip, who for reasons of South Dakota politics decided he wasn't going to run again. So he asked Washington for a job. He hadn't thought about ambassadorships. His wife once told me, "While we were offered various jobs in Washington [as a governor to another governor in a sense, although he always overplayed his intimacy with Carter] it seemed that we would have to have a very active social life and do a lot of entertaining if we took one of them, so we decided to take the job over here

instead." I gulped and thought, "Oh my God!" He was quite a disaster as ambassador. Happily, Singapore was not a country where we had any real troubles. The Singaporeans were sophisticated people, they understood why he was there. They were even a bit flattered that someone had asked to come to Singapore. We found ways of working around him.

I wrote an article on this for the Foreign Service Journal once. It started out rather early when his secretary came scuttling out of his office saying, "Hey, he just asked where Jakarta is!" The Ambassador's office in Singapore looks out over the Strait and the land visible in the distance is Indonesia. Very shortly, it turned out that he didn't know there were two different Koreas. One time he called me in and said, "Ed, I have these maps here. This one says East Pakistan and West Pakistan. The other one says Pakistan and Bangladesh. Bangladesh? What happened Ed?" Questions like that. He had never heard of Chiang Kai-shek. He didn't know who Gandhi was-- maybe he had heard the name somewhere. He had heard of Churchill but I don't think he knew of Attlee. This was a mind absolutely barren of any awareness of the entire outside world. Totally barren.

On his first call on Rajaratnam, the Foreign Minister, it became embarrassing because Rajaratnam would say, "Well, what about this?" The Ambassador would say, "Well..." and look at me and I would have to carry on. Then he would say, "Yes, that's right..." He was a man of a good deal of pride. He didn't like it. We got along in a rather rocky way. He hadn't the faintest idea what an ambassador did.

Apparently in South Dakota the perks of the governor are extraordinary--a summer palace, etc. I was the one who had to keep going in and saying, "Dick, I am sorry, you can't do it this way." I would try to find ways around it...then he would suspect I was undermining him...but I was just trying to keep him out of trouble.

For example, he wanted another secretary to handle his private affairs. Well you can't have a government secretary in the Foreign Service following his insurance policies, writing his checks, and handling his personal affairs. I had to find a way of getting around that.

Also he never entertained, just as in South Dakota, I guess. He had a large, lovely embassy residence (which those idiots in FBO are now going to tear down and put up apartments). Holdridge would entertain there probably five nights a week and sometimes breakfast as well. And the Embassy residence was a sort of center of activity for the American community, much of the business community. It was always there for the Singaporeans as well. Kneip simply closed it off. He had six of his eight children with him. They moved in and spent every night apparently watching movies, I don't know. He just never entertained. I had to do all of the entertaining. Fortunately we had a lovely house there as well, with a separate suite so anyone who came from Washington to Singapore would always stay with me. I was in the strange position of running the Embassy more or less behind Kneip's back.

I remember the day when Billy Graham, the evangelist, came to Singapore. He asked for a briefing at the Embassy. Kneip didn't like it, being a Catholic. Graham came to the Embassy and Kneip was quite disgruntled. Graham started asking questions of Kneip and Kneip very sourly said, "Ask him, he knows it all." I was surprised by Billy Graham, incidentally. He asked very

sensible questions. And he said, "What I really want to know about is local sensitivities and what I shouldn't do. What our policies are now. I don't want to get in your way and cause any trouble. I want to make the best impression I can for my cause." He was much more perceptive than I had expected. Kneip sat there frowning while Graham and I carried on the conversation.

Time and again, Rajaratnam or one of the people at the Foreign Ministry would get me aside at a cocktail party and say, "Well, what about thus and so?" Kneip was no dummy and he was aware of this. I tried; I think even he tried, but it just didn't work out.

He also had rather strange working habits. He would come in in the morning and would go home at noon for lunch. Sometimes he would come back in the afternoon and sometime he wouldn't. Part of it, I suppose, was frustration, because he couldn't figure out what to do. He would read the cables, but they were all from places with names like Kathmandu, and he didn't want to admit that he didn't know whether Kathmandu was a city or a country. His pride was being badly pushed around. So finally, he just snapped and bounced me out.

So I came back to Washington. The State Department was in a state of some embarrassment about the whole thing. They looked around for a job for me and sent me off as Diplomat-in-Residence at Lake Forest College. A very nice little liberal arts college just outside of Chicago where I spent a year.

While I was there I was brooding about the whole Kneip episode so I wrote an article for the Foreign Service Journal. I used pseudonyms, I called him Ambassador X.

Q: I recall when it came out. Everybody knew who you were talking about.

INGRAHAM: I guess I was naive, but I really didn't think they would. I thought some people in State would, and I hoped it would get up to the 7th floor. The article came out in the Journal and the first thing that I knew...whoever covers the State Department beat for one of the networks...George Gedda, I believe, was on the phone to me in Lake Forest. "Ed Ingraham, did you write that article?" I said, "What, what, what article are you talking about?" I should have said, "Of course I didn't write that article." I didn't deny it quite strongly enough. The next thing I knew it was on the front page of the Chicago Tribune and all over the country. A sort of nine-day wonder. After that, I thought, things being what they are...Dick Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary, was furious about the whole business because it made him look bad. He was very, very angry indeed at me. Higher up, somebody was on my side--I think it was David Newsom, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs at that time. So were a lot of the professionals in the State Department. Officially, the White House was most embarrassed. Without even being told, I realized this was the time to retire. So I came back to Washington after a very pleasant year at Lake Forest, spent the summer on home leave and retired in August 1980.

Q: Now we all know not to write articles. It was an excellent article, I might add. That came out when in case someone wants to look at it?

INGRAHAM: It came out in the Foreign Service Journal, the February 1980 issue.

BRUCE MALKIN
Commercial Officer
Singapore (1977-1981)

Bruce Malkin was born in Philadelphia in February 1946. He received his bachelor's degree from University of Pennsylvania. His career includes positions in Jamaica, Mexico, Singapore, and Washington D.C. Mr. Maklin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in March 2005.

MALKIN: My next assignment was to Embassy Singapore, which I received basically because the Commerce Department pushed me very hard in the assignment process to go to Singapore to do commercial work. During home leave that summer, we had our second daughter. We had the two girls, one of them was an infant and the other was three years old. I remember we flew on Pan Am 001 via Frankfurt, Tel Aviv (we stayed in Jerusalem for a few days), Tehran, and New Delhi. Finally we arrived in Singapore. So we had a very interesting trip halfway around the world with an infant and a three-year-old, which put another nail in our marriage coffin.

Q: You were in Singapore from when to when?

MALKIN: From the summer of '77 to the summer of '81.

Q: What was it like? Lee Kwan Yew was running everything I guess.

MALKIN: Yes, he definitely chaired the Benevolent Mandarin Program of Singapore, Inc. Politically, it was very well organized. Unfortunately, it depended on suppressing political criticism, press freedom, and an independent judiciary on political matters. Of course, the embassy was always concerned about the lack of a viable opposition party, treatment of opposition party leaders, a press and a judiciary that were not independent, but its efforts to change the system were unsuccessful. On economic and commercial policies, however, it was quite open. It was really a delight to be able to talk to business people in Singapore, and when they told you they would do something, they did it. Their word was good, which made working with them a pleasure. They were pro-American and anxious for higher technology.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

MALKIN: We had three ambassadors in Singapore during the four years I was there, including the infamous Richard Kneip, who had eight boys and was the ex-governor of South Dakota. He was not a diplomat or in tune with local politics, and it drove the DCM crazy. On the other hand, we also had the privilege of serving under two outstanding career ambassadors, John Holdridge and Harry Thayer.

Q: What were the main sort of interests that you were doing on the economic/commercial side?

MALKIN: I was promoting American exports and investments through Commerce Department programs I had learned during my earlier assignment in Washington. Again I worked closely with Commerce's Regional Trade Center in Singapore. I was trying to give American businesspeople information that would bring them to Singapore to do regional sales and manufacturing activities. I helped them find good local agents and distributors. Commerce was pretty good about putting together trade missions of small to medium sized businesses that normally would not go to places like Singapore unless they were brought in a group and hand-held. I would get them appointment schedules and arrange government meetings, which is the way I once was able to sit in on a meeting at the Istana Palace and meet PM Lee Kwan Yew. He liked American investors so much that he hosted them for a meeting in his offices there. I was on a first name basis with the Minister of Trade, Goh Chok Tong, who later became Prime Minister.

I researched and authored a lengthy airgram (remember those?) called "How to Do Business in Southeast Asia". Based on almost 50 interviews, I pointed out all the difficulties we had competing with the Japanese in Singapore and other Southeast Asian markets. It was reprinted by the Department of Commerce and used as a model for Commercial Officers to use and also as a handout for potential investors

Q: How about ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations)? Was that getting going while you were there?

MALKIN: It was just getting going. It had economic and commercial objectives, but functioned more as a political forum at the time. Later, it had a free trade area and other activities, but it was not very effective while I was there.

Q: Were we seeing – was Japan our big competitor?

MALKIN: Oh, yes. Definitely Japan. Japanese businessmen were willing to spend the time and money and had the patience to develop long-term connections with the agents, distributors and manufacturers there. More so than even the big American companies, which sent high level people once a year to visit. That just was not a sufficient effort to establish close links in the Singapore business community. There were about 40 American banks represented on the island, but many of them were doing very little business other than showing their flag to their competitors.

Q: I saw this back in the '50s when I was in the Persian Gulf Commercial Office. People just wouldn't spend the time.

MALKIN: Yes, you had to be there for the weddings and the birthdays and the dinners out with the guys and build up some rapport before they would feel comfortable doing big business with you. It's just the way the Chinese did business there. And Singapore's population was 85% Chinese, with the business sector even more highly run by Chinese Singaporeans.

Q: Did you find yourself running across any Chinese business customs that were hard for Americans to understand?

MALKIN: Well, if that's a euphemism for bribery...

Q: Not only for bribery, but for other things. For example, going to weddings, going to funerals and you know show yourself, or just the way deals are made, or anything like that?

MALKIN: Basically, it comes down to the fact that, yes, in Southeast Asia, especially with the largely Chinese contingent there in business, you really had to take your time and not be in a rush to set deadlines, goals, and objectives that were part of your corporate short-term strategy plan, but couldn't be achieved by the Singaporean in that time frame. Take the long view; be willing to invest and not make money for a while. In fact, the Japanese were giving away stuff just to get a toehold. They did loss leaders for a year or two or more if they had to. Then afterward they had a monopoly after every one else was driven out of the market. They recouped losses. They had other advantages we do not have, like the Zaibatsu, or multi-sector corporation. Their banks in the same corporate group would finance their deals; their ships would ship it; their suppliers would get the spare parts. That way they could lose on the initial sale and make it up on the spare parts, the shipping and the financing. They did not lose money in the end; maybe the direct seller did not make money but somebody in the group did.

Q: Did American investors invest?

MALKIN: Yes, there was a large business community because it is a regional hub and compared to Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta or Manila, it was safe, it was clean, communications were good and improving all the time, there were plenty of air connections for the region. Lots of things go through Singapore to get to other countries. The health conditions were excellent, the housing was excellent, the tennis was excellent, the swimming pools were excellent. You could get domestic help if you needed it. It was a very comfortable family-type place to live. As Commercial Officer, with all the new American companies coming in and the visitors to the existing ones, I was invited and going to two receptions an evening, four or five nights a week during the first year. I cut back after that. It was not good for familial relations.

Q: That reminds me, I talked to somebody that was there, I think an Economic Counselor in Beijing in the '90s and he talked about what he referred to as "death by duck". And this was they would have these delegations coming through almost on a daily basis and they would all have to go to a Peking duck restaurant, you know, which is fun for the first time, but the third time in a week it gets a little bit long.

Did you have any regional responsibilities there?

MALKIN: In practice, no, because we had Economic Commercial Officers in all the other capitals, and they were not delegating any power to Embassy Singapore. But much of what I wrote, I wrote in a way that was applicable to more than the Singapore market.

Q: How did you find the Department of Commerce? Were they supportive of you?

MALKIN: Yes, they were. Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service was formed in 1980, as you know, as a response to strong complaints by the American business community that State

Department officers were not doing enough to help them get business overseas. Even though I opted to stay as an Economic Officer with State, I was put on the Country Team for the remainder of my assignment so I could attend meetings with my Economic Counselor boss. I also closely coordinated my work with Commerce's Regional Trade Center in Singapore. They were very helpful and backed me up.

Q: Was China getting to be a major rival?

MALKIN: China was not a rival competitor with American firms in Southeast Asian markets then. American (and Southeast Asian) companies were excited about selling to China more than buying from it. Singapore was touting itself as a rival of Hong Kong. Most of the Americans would go through Hong Kong as a gateway to the rest of China, for reasons that are pretty apparent. It is well placed and well organized for that business. Singapore always seemed to be in rivalry with Hong Kong for the Chinese markets, and it was trying to attract more business, but it is not in proximity with Beijing and northern China. Singapore did have excellent financial and legal services. It was trying to convince Americans and other westerners that its companies could do the necessary paperwork better, cheaper, and faster in Singapore than Hong Kong could.

Q: How did you treat the bribery situation?

MALKIN: It's a law. I mean, we had a law on the books that American companies could not engage in bribery to do business. It is still ion effect, and rightly so. The only time we discussed it was when we found out that the French had a law subsidizing bribery payments as a business expense. Of course, the Japanese would do anything; it didn't matter, what ever it took to get the businessman on their side. They didn't have any qualms about using gifts and money as incentives to do business. However, I believe that bribery of Singapore government officials was quite rare, as they were carefully scrutinized and relatively well paid.

Q: At that point, was Vietnam at all a commercial entity?

MALKIN: Not really. This was '77 to '81 and, of course, they were just recovering from war and rebuilding their political and economic structures. I don't think it became much of an attraction to Americans until after we had an embassy established there some 8 or 10 years later.

Q: How about Indonesia? Were business people using Singapore as the center, but doing a lot of business in Indonesia?

MALKIN: The big business in Indonesia was oil and gas. The only big American companies were in the oil and gas fields in northern Sumatra, just about where the (2005) tsunami hit up there. Although partnering with an experienced Singaporean company was an excellent arrangement, if you really wanted to do business in Indonesia, you needed somebody pretty good in Jakarta, too. You can't do business in Indonesia from afar. There are too many people to take care of, too many middlemen and high level people. It was not an easy place to do business; it never was, still isn't.

JOHN RATIGAN
Consular Officer
Singapore (1979-1982)

Mr. Ratigan was born in New York, raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Yale Law School. After service in the Peace Corps and ten years in private law practice, in 1973 he joined the Foreign Service. A specialist in consular matters, and particularly immigration, Mr. Ratigan served as Consul Officer in Teheran, Cairo, Toronto and Seoul and from 1984 to 1985 as immigration specialist and Pearson Fellow on the Senate Immigration Subcommittee. In 1989 he again served on that subcommittee as immigration expert. Mr. Ratigan was interviewed by Ray Ewing in 2007.

Q: But your assignment to Singapore was neither political nor economic but multi functional.

RATIGAN: It turned out to be a bit more multi functional that I thought thanks to an ambassador who chose to make use of me in some non consular ways, for which I was very grateful. Singapore was a small embassy, and since I was the head of a very small section and thus on the country team it gave me a real introduction to how embassies work, and just the way foreign affairs is conducted in a not insignificant place in the world. I guess we should start with the first ambassador who was a political appointee and a politician. I suppose about maybe about four to six months after I got there, he fired his DCM. In personnel terms I am not quite sure how that works. I think it was that he requested his recall or reassignment. During the time I was there the DCM of course was a Foreign Service officer, and it was an interesting kind of study of the relationships between political appointees and Foreign Service officers and the foreign service bureaucracy. During my career I served with four political appointees, not including in Canada where they were in the embassy and I was consul in Toronto so it wasn't really a relationship that I had a chance to observe, but in other posts a total of four political appointees. I must say in three cases the relationship was as good as you would want in any circumstance, an excellent relationship that didn't seem to have any problems. But in this one, the relationship was good on the surface it seemed to me, but there were, you get a sense underneath that there were problems and that one of the problems was that I think the ambassador didn't read very much. I think he preferred to learn things by talking to people and in fact was an excellent communicator. You know, he would talk with people, he would learn things that way. But he also needed to read in order to effectively represent himself and the United States.

Q: Was he a good listener?

RATIGAN: Not particularly, I mean average. I am not sure he was really all that interested in diplomacy or not really very aware of the issues either of diplomacy or what they were in the Far East. So that I think that this became a bit difficult at times for the DCM to try and either educate him or fix up little situations that occurred along the way.

Q: If we could back up just for a second. You went to Singapore in January of 1979. So that was toward the end of the Carter administration.

RATIGAN: Right.

Q: So who was this ambassador and how long had he been there when you got there?

RATIGAN: The ambassador was Richard Kneip. He was a former governor of South Dakota, I think three time governor of South Dakota, elected by huge margins. I think known to Carter through days in the Governors conference and so forth. He, as I say, was an excellent communicator, but I think when the assignment was made I think that those who made the assignment realized that U.S. relations with Singapore were rock solid and that whatever, however he chose to conduct something it wasn't going to have much of an effect on the underlying relations.

Q: When did...

RATIGAN: Oh he came out probably in the summer before we did, which would be June of '78. He arrived, you know the Chinese as you probably know are great numerologists, and he arrived his family consisted of eight sons. Eight of course, is the ultimate lucky number in Chinese. Sons of course are the ultimate lucky offspring. So he arrived with his eight sons and his wife and got off that airplane, I mean all of the newspapers -- so I was told, I wasn't there at the time -- they had a picture of the family and the eight sons. Everyone sort of figured that the numerology of this appointment just couldn't possibly have been better. He was off to a good start.

I remember one particular staff meeting that we had where at the end of the meeting the ambassador sort of started a discussion about whether Asians were less caring about the value of human life than other ethnic groups or races. The DCM had more experience in Asia. The DCM at the time was Ed Ingraham, a very experienced hand in the East Asia area, and as the most experienced officer in the room I think the DCM began the response and said, "Not at all." Asians were, I recall the tenor of the argument but he certainly defended the human values of Asians. That was the kind of thing I think that gave me the feeling of certainly Ed was challenged in some of the situations to keep his calm. I think there were some situations where he simply wasn't able to conceal his lack of respect for the ambassador, although that particular situation, which I witnessed, was not one of them.

Q: Ingraham had been chosen by the ambassador?

RATIGAN: I don't know.

Q: They had both been there some time before you .

RATIGAN: Yes. Ed had been there for I think a longer time than the ambassador so I think the ambassador probably inherited him.

Q: You said the ambassador in roughly the summer of '79 asked for his assignment or recall. Would you say from your observation and perspective the differences were background,

personality, or in terms of how to run the embassy, management style, or were they about relations with Singapore and how to conduct them, or was it sort of a combination of things?

RATIGAN: I don't think it was so much about how to run the embassy. I think it was probably as much as anything Ed Ingraham having to tell the ambassador or feeling that he had to tell the ambassador what he should do and what he shouldn't do. I think the ambassador probably felt, and I don't have any evidence, but I think the ambassador probably felt that he could do pretty much whatever he wanted to do, not so much in terms of policy but in terms of his kind of his personal conduct and or what he said or how to handle situations or something like that. Ed may have not been able to hold himself back in some situations he felt needed to be handled in a certain way. The ambassador was a man who felt that he was pretty free, that he had rights to do certain things he wanted to do. There are a couple of stories. One thing he did while he was there was to have a local carpet-maker in Singapore make a carpet in the center of which was woven the I don't know whether it was the seal of the United States or the seal of embassy of the United States -- big, you know probably seven or eight feet across. He put that in the front hall of the residence, and of course packed it up when he went home, though I am sure the Embassy paid for it. Then also one night I accompanied him for some reason I don't really know, but I accompanied him when he was asked to preside at the grand re-opening of Robinson's Department Store which is one of the biggest department stores in Singapore. They had been shut down for huge renovations. So the ambassador was doing the ribbon cutting that night. So I went with him and we did the ribbon cutting, did the speeches, everyone was happy. Then the general manager took the ambassador on a tour of the store. At one point toward the end of the tour we stopped in front of a display of Chinese cuckoo clocks. Don't ask me what a Chinese cuckoo clock is, but you can get the general idea. The ambassador said, "Gee, I have a mantle piece over which that cuckoo clock, this particular one would just fit perfectly." Well of course the cuckoo clock was delivered to the residence the next day. When the ambassador later packed up the ambassadorial china and shipped it back to South Dakota the department administrative staff got into the act and advised him that they wanted the china back, or that he had the option to purchase it for a given price, which I understood at the time was the standard arrangement for ambassadors. So anyway that went on for a number of months, the department trying to get the china back or the price paid. In accordance with that I was asked to come in. I did an affidavit about that incident at the department store. Ultimately the issue was resolved. I think the ambassador must have paid something or other for the china. There were of course other incidents especially as his time in Singapore drew to a close. I don't want to go into those but it got to be, he seemed to reveal his dissatisfaction with the foreign service and his time with us I think in a number of ways.

Q: Your own personal relations with him were up and down?

RATIGAN: They were good actually up until the end, when as I say a number of things happened, but one of them was he was going back, I wonder when it would have been. Oh it was for the 1980 presidential campaign. So this was probably in May of 1980, something like that. He was leaving and he wanted a visa for his driver to come over and visit him in South Dakota. Being the consular officer I said, "Fine, we will issue a visa to your driver, but he is to understand that he is not there to work for you. He is not there to drive for you."

Q: A non immigrant visa.

RATIGAN: Yes, just a standard tourist visa. There wasn't the slightest doubt in my mind what he intended. He was going to tour the state of South Dakota on behalf of Jimmy Carter who was running for re-election and do his part to help President Carter of course. But the Ambassador didn't like my trying to advise him on what his driver could legally do. Anyway that was just one thing that turned into an irritant with him, but there were a number of others.

Q: After Ed Ingraham left as DCM, the ambassador stayed another nine months or almost a year. Did a new DCM come?

RATIGAN: We had a temporary DCM come out from EAP for a while, Dan Sullivan, who calmed things down and got things back to normal. But then we got a new permanent DCM. He was the director of East Asia at USIA, a man named Mort Smith. I thought he was terrific. He was excellent.

Q: He was chosen by Ambassador Kneip? They still have a good relationship.

RATIGAN: I am not sure how much input the Ambassador had, but I am sure some. Mort managed it well, though. I mean I am sure Ambassador Kneip met Mort or at least talked with him on the phone obviously, but I suspect at this point the department also wanted to make sure they had someone solid that they could trust out there as well. I think Mort Smith was an excellent one.

Q: You mentioned that I guess Ambassador Kneip allowed you to do things beyond the consular section other than going to Robinson's department Store. What sort of things did you do?

RATIGAN: Actually it was more his successor, Harry Thayer. When Ambassador Kneip left, Harry Thayer came on as the new ambassador.

Q: A career officer.

RATIGAN: A career officer yes, and an East Asia, China hand, spoke Chinese. But you know we had some long term internal issues, as so many embassies do, and in this case it was dissatisfaction between the FSN's and the American staff. The FSN's sort of presented some grievances or whatever. Anyway Ambassador Thayer asked me to chair a committee to deal with these kinds of problems. That was interesting. I will say right now I learned a lot from seeing things from both sides, and seeing kind of how maybe both sides didn't understand the needs of the other. Interestingly, I saw exactly the same sort of issue when I worked at two different law firms, the same sort of differences between the staff and the professionals. Very large, very hierarchical organizations, probably in this case even more hierarchical than the State Department in their operation focus. It was exactly the same in the law firms. You could see them not dealing with them as well as the state department tries to deal with similar issues. It was really quite interesting to see how they just kind of slough off these issues. So I did that. I chaired this committee on relations between the FSN's and the American staff. We came out with everything else some recommendations. The ambassador really implemented, accepted

most of these. Then I was asked to handle one of the most significant CODELs (Congressional Delegations) that we had in the time that I was there. I think the ambassador felt that way anyway. It was Doc Long, Representative Clarence Long, who was the chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee that dealt with the State Department.

Q: And probably all foreign operations, AID and issues like that.

RATIGAN: I think a notably irascible or potentially irascible fellow. He came out to Singapore.

Q: With a big delegation?

RATIGAN: Not so big, no. He had two or three guys. They would come into the residence and they would start making notes. You felt like the lights are burning too bright or whatever little middling things they were making notes about. But I think my sense was the visit went off well. We seemed to get along well. He was quite an interesting guy and never short on opinions. Actually as I think about it now, there were a couple of other Members on the visit. There was Representative Mickey Edwards of Oklahoma and maybe one or two other Members....

Q: Were you the control officer for several other delegations as well?

RATIGAN: A couple of others, yeah. One of them was Louis Stokes from Cleveland and I think one I don't really remember. So anyway in Singapore whenever you had a delegation Congressional or otherwise one of the interesting things to do was to tell them as you rode in from the airport, "All right, now I suggest you look at the street or the road and whenever you see a piece of waste paper on the road sing out." Well they never saw any. It is so clean. So that kind of got the visit off to an interesting start. That gave them kind of an idea what we were dealing with and got people engaged right from the beginning. I will say two or three years ago for our 40th wedding anniversary, my wife and I and my sister and her husband went to Thailand and then down the peninsula to Singapore. When we were in Singapore my brother-in-law was particularly, he had read all the stuff about Singapore and couldn't believe what he had read. One day he kind of broke off from our group and decided to go around and visit the slums in Singapore and find out what was really going on. He was very frustrated. He couldn't find any slums in Singapore. It is true. It was an amazing place.

Q: Americans and other foreigners have gotten themselves in trouble in Singapore over the years for not respecting or observing some of those mores or morals or regulations. Was that something that you had to deal with as a consular section on occasion?

RATIGAN: Sometimes. Singapore is a tough place. They don't fool around. By that I mean there is a death penalty for I think any amount of what they would call hard drugs and I think more than 15 grams of marijuana which is like half an ounce. So as a result the school, the Singapore American school would regularly conduct searches, go into kid's lockers to find, search the lockers to see if there were any sort of drugs like that. Anyone who was found or known to have any sort of drugs, they were on the plane that night. There was, nobody waited. Once anything was found the rule was you were on the plane that night. No ifs ands or buts about it. One of the most interesting problems of Americans in Singapore was a woman who was arrested on the

steps of the parliament building yelling and shouting and waving her arms and so on. She was picked up and taken out to Changi Prison which is a fairly famous prison. Now there is a new Changi Prison, but the old one was the site of the novel King Rat by James Clavell about life in wartime Singapore. But anyway, so I went out to visit this woman. She told me that she was Agent 001 and that she was licensed to kill, and that she was on her way to Spain to pick up some gold bullion at the treasury or something but the CIA was after her and was going to kill her, and also U.S. Treasury agents were after her to kill her. So I, of course, set about to set up her repatriation to the United States. I went out there, and she was a very large woman, probably six feet tall and over 250 pounds. When she came into the interview room she was escorted by about half a dozen Singaporean female prison matrons. They really looked like noting more than tugboats escorting the QE-II. So in any case she didn't want to leave. She was convinced that these agents were out there and they were wanting to kill her. So ultimately I met with a Singaporean police lieutenant. I told him that we could not send her back to the United States until she had given us permission to do so. He looked at me like I was the biggest fool in the world. Here I was this representative of this great world power and I was telling him that I could not send back one of our own citizens who was obviously mentally deranged back to her own country of residence without her permission. He could not understand this at all. In any case I won her confidence by bringing cigarettes out to her. We'd sit there puffing away and she would tell me one thing and another. I finally convinced her that she had to stick with me, and that I was the only one that could help her, and that she had to get home. Meanwhile I had arranged this with the department. So we finally managed to get her on the plane. We had to get an escort to travel with her, and she had to be sedated before she went because the airline wouldn't take her without sedation. But in any case it all worked out and she ultimately got back. But anyway I tell the story mainly for the reaction of the local policeman to our American rules about obtaining the individual's permission.

One other story I suppose, one night I got a call from the marine guard at the embassy telling me there was an American citizen who wanted to sleep in the embassy that night. So I went down and met this fellow who was a professional golfer. He had been staked by some investors back in Nevada to come and play on the Asian tour, develop his game by playing on the Asian tour. He wasn't doing very well. It seemed to me a classic case of culture shock. We sat on the front step of the Embassy and he told me that people were following him around. He would tell me his investors had hired people to maim him or wound him or somehow or other get back at him for basically wasting their money. So he requested to sleep in the embassy to get away from these people who were following him. There was of course no way that the embassy security officer or the Marine was going to allow him to sleep in the Embassy. So I took him around to some very western places, a modern hotel that we had stayed at before with good western food. He was ticketed to go out on the plane the next morning, so I basically kept him up until close to midnight and got him back to his hotel and off he went the next morning. I have never seen quite so much culture shock in an individual as in that case.

Q: You mentioned the consular section was pretty small. Did you have another American officer or just basically you and...

RATIGAN: I had a rotational officer, so I had three or four different officers. The one really substantive problem that we had at that time was Indo Chinese refugees, which of course was

in '79-'80, when they really began to leave Vietnam in large numbers. So we had camps in Singapore. What would happen to our refugees, the ones that we got were primarily ones whose boats failed. They would get off, most of them would head to Malaysia I think or Thailand of course. But sometimes the boats would fail, the engines would fail, and they would kind of start drifting at sea. When they would get into the sea lanes they would be picked up by commercial vessels and even U.S. military vessels on occasion who were ordered to pick them up when they saw them. So we ended up with these refugees who had been picked up by seagoing vessels that came into Singapore. So we had our hands full really in getting out to camp and interviewing them. The officer who really handled this for me at the time was an extremely capable young woman who later became quite well known in the department. Her name was Ann Hackett. She was a leading admin officer. Ann was a terrific refugee officer. When our operation was, our little consular operation was replaced by a formal refugee office in Singapore, Ann was replaced by seven people, and I think legitimately so. So that was the big problem for us.

Q: Ann Hackett worked for me at one point, before your time. She was a very fine officer. I didn't realize she had refugee credentials from Singapore. The camp was run by UN officials?

RATIGAN: It was run by UNHCR outside of Singapore. It was a pretty good camp actually. I forget what it had been used for before the refugees arrived, but there were some people in it.

Q: Singapore is a small country, city-state I guess you would call it. Did you get very involved with regional things related to Malaysia or Indonesia? You mentioned Vietnam refugees.

RATIGAN: We certainly were involved in that with the Vietnamese refugees quite a bit. We had an ongoing struggle with the embassy in Malaysia for jurisdiction over Brunei.

Q: Which was not independent at the time or we didn't have an embassy there?

RATIGAN: We didn't have an embassy there. So we had officers stationed there from time to time. I had known several who were there, but they reported to the embassy in Malaysia but they were basically serviced and spent their sort of R&R time in Singapore. So we thought, what is this, we are the appropriate embassy to have jurisdiction. It was a friendly rivalry, but it seemed like whenever you dealt with somebody from Brunei you would get a call from the DCM in Malaysia saying what is going on. But as I say, we got along with the U.S. embassy in Malaysia. But Singapore was a regional center in many ways, and there were a lot of region-wide operations going on there, whether governmental, or business or whatever. Singapore was a prominent member of ASEAN. We had I think we had the ASEAN post ministerial conference in Singapore one year, I am sure we did. But every year it was a big issue for which the ambassador would go to this post ministerial conference. I am never quite sure why they called it that.

Q: What was that, a conference of the American ambassadors after the ministerial?

RATIGAN: I think that must have been what it was. There were ministerial conferences among the ASEAN members and then usually the secretary of state or his or her designee would come out and speak. Then there would be kind of an informal chiefs of mission conference

simultaneous or immediately following that. One year it was in Singapore I am sure, and then one year it was in Bali. On the last day of the conference, the participants traditionally put on these skits and stage presentations. I can recall, but there are usually good stories about someone dressing up, I mean Colin Powell dressed up as some sort of cowboy, I believe, in a skit with the Japanese foreign minister, a woman, who was dressed up as a bargirl, or something like that – a proper bargirl, I am sure. But it got a fair amount of play in the press.

Q: But this was long after your time there.

RATIGAN: But it is a well established institution is what I am trying to say which is not overly formal.

Q: There is another organization that I think started well after the time you were in Singapore, the Asia Pacific...

RATIGAN: Economic conference. APEC, yeah.

Q: But that hadn't started while you were there.

RATIGAN: I think there were glimmerings. I just can't remember it. I can't remember because I also got involved with it when I was in Korea. I think that is when it really came together more. But that of course covered, I think it met a need that was such that it was bringing in people from all around the Pacific Basin. I think Chile is a member of APEC and some other South American countries bordering the Pacific as well.

Q: I think maybe the European Union gets involved somewhere.

RATIGAN: Yes, it is broader.

Q: Did Mort Smith continue to be DCM pretty much the rest of your time working with Ambassador Harry Thayer?

RATIGAN: He did. He worked for Ambassador Thayer. Mort was there I think until I left.

Q: Was there a combined political and economic section?

RATIGAN: There was. A combined political and economic section.

Q: Harry Thayer was in the senior seminar '79- '80. So he must have gone out as ambassador maybe at the beginning of the Reagan administration in '81.

RATIGAN: I think that is exactly right. I think he said he had come out of the senior seminar.

Q: I don't know how long he stayed there, but he actually replaced me as dean of the school of language studies at FSI in '87 I think. He may have done something else in between. Maybe going to Taiwan.

RATIGAN: He was in Taiwan, yeah.

Q: After Singapore or before?

RATIGAN: Oh I don't know. I thought I knew.

Q: OK, anything else we can say about your assignment to Singapore?

RATIGAN: I don't think so.

HENRY E. T. THAYER
Ambassador
Singapore (1980-1984)

Ambassador Harry E. T. Thayer was born in Massachusetts in 1927. He received his bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1951. He served in the US Navy from 1945-1946. His overseas posts include Hong Kong, Taipei, and Beijing. He was ambassador to Singapore from 1980 to 1984. Ambassador Thayer was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: Harry, I wonder if you could start with how you became ambassador to Singapore, where you served from 1980 to 1984.

THAYER: I had been country director for Chinese affairs in the Carter administration, '76 to '79. It was following that that I was appointed by Carter as ambassador to Singapore. I had a year out between the China desk job and the ambassador's job as a member of the Senior Seminar. But, in any event, I was appointed by Carter in 1980, and Carter sent my name up to the Hill. Since my hearing was not until after the election in 1980, my name had to be cleared with the Republican victors also.

Q: Were you actually out there at the time?

THAYER: No, I was in Washington. My name was sent up to the Hill in the autumn of 1980. The election was in November. My nomination cleared through the committee after the election, and the agreement of the Republicans was obtained that my name would go through. I'd go out as a Carter appointee but would stay on, at least initially, under the Reagan administration.

Q: How did this happen? Singapore is one of those places that's had a fairly substantial number of non-career officers. I would think that this would be an ideal place for one of the Reagan West Coast businessmen to go to.

THAYER: It's a nice post in many ways, and it does have a reputation of being an attractive post, but, in fact, until the first Carter appointee, who was a former governor of North Dakota, the post

had been filled by career officers right along. That notwithstanding, it was very shortly after I got out to Singapore--I arrived there in early December 1980--that I began to hear rumors and saw several newspaper references to different friends of President Reagan from California and Arizona who were telling people that they were going out as ambassador for Singapore. In fact, about a year after we arrived in Singapore my wife, in Washington on private business, ran into a man at a party who told her, not knowing she was the current Ambassador's (me) wife, that he was about to be named to the Singapore job. My wife quietly just took that aboard. So from the very start, as one must be in such a post, I was always ready at any moment to be recalled and replaced by a personal friend of the President. Nevertheless, I did end up staying there for three and a half years, which was longer than most people stay in any post.

Q: In the political climate, particularly at that time, it's amazing that you did.

THAYER: Well, there are various tales told about that. I did see one outrageous but somewhat amusing reference in the newspaper to the effect that we stayed there for three and a half years because we were renting our house to Michael Deaver, and if we came back, Michael Deaver would, of course, have to be moved out. Michael Deaver was in the White House, as you know, very close to the President and Mrs. Reagan. In any event, the explanation--and I have no idea if it had any basis or not--was that if a political appointee replaced me in Singapore, that meant I would come back, or perhaps would come back to Washington, and the Deavers would have to vacate their-- i.e., our--house. I don't know whether that story is true or not. I just saw it in the newspaper.

Q: It makes a certain logical sense.

THAYER: In any event, we did stay there. We did stay there until the summer of '84, a very good tour.

Q: In this period, from '81 to '84, what did you see, as you went out and as they developed, the American interests in that country?

THAYER: The instructions that I was given (by Assistant Secretary Dick Holbrooke and others) principally was to find out what the Singapore leadership, from Prime Minister Lee on down, was thinking. Our access, for a variety of reasons, had been very limited in the previous few years; Singapore was a very important player on the Southeast Asia scene, and we didn't know enough about it. At that time, ASEAN was still moving ahead. The Cambodian issue was of growing interest to us: finding some way of reducing Vietnamese and communist influence in Cambodia. Singaporeans were leading players in that game. Singapore also had a certain amount of influence with its ASEAN partners. (ASEAN eventually did much toward the non-communist Khmer getting their act together.) And beyond that, because of Lee's personality, other influence.

So one personal requirement was that I develop relations of confidence with the senior Cabinet people, deputy prime ministers Rajaratnam and Goh, and with the prime minister, if possible, so that I could, if nothing else, report what they were thinking. So that was the first thing.

But we had several interests that were important there. First, maybe not in priority order but could be arguably so, we had the use of Singapore's port facilities. We had no base there, but with our build-up then in the Indian Ocean, Singapore was an important stopping-off point, refueling point, for ships, a touchdown point for P-3s and others.

Q: P-3 being a sea surveillance aircraft.

THAYER: Right. They were flying out to Diego Garcia. So maintenance of good military relationships was important in those days. There were some rumors in the '80s, some noises about our establishing some kind of a base in Singapore, but there was no serious effort in that direction at all. Although, ten years later now, we do have agreements with Singapore for U.S. enhanced use of facilities in Singapore. So the military was one interest.

Another interest was our general and supportive interest in ASEAN, as I've mentioned. A third interest was a very large American private investment. I forget the numbers now, but we had investments in electronics, pharmaceuticals, Mobil had a big refinery, Exxon was active there. Singapore was a regional headquarters for a number of American corporations. The American business community was very large, and, therefore, promotion of American business interests there was important. Singapore was also economically very successful, and Singapore, not only the private sector but the public sector, the government sector, was also buying a lot. One of my big jobs was on the commercial side, trying to sell American aircraft-- 767s, 757s, 747s--getting a piece of the new mass transit system. These kinds of things were also important.

I would add to that that I had personal interest in developing, broadly speaking, a cultural relationship. Singapore traditionally, having been a British colony, sent its best students to be educated in Oxbridge, as they call it. The prime minister himself is a product of that system, and their best graduates at Singapore University were going to graduate school in the U.K. I thought it was very much in our interest to attract a better grade of Singapore students to American universities, because, among other things, Singaporeans were returning to Singapore and filling the important jobs in the civil service. It was important in the American interest, I felt strongly, that we have a larger cadre of American-educated civil servants in Singapore, thereby having a better understanding within the government of what made the Americans tick, more confidence in the American partnership, extending not only to the cultural sector but also to the commercial, military, and so forth.

So I made quite an effort to get bright Singaporeans to go to American schools. One of the things that I did was to lead an effort, do a lot of lobbying with the American Business Council--the equivalent of American Chamber of Commerce in other countries--to get them to put up some money, matching funds, to facilitate the Singaporean Presidential Scholars; that is, the leading scholars graduating from Singapore universities, getting scholarships from the Singapore Government to go to the States to do graduate work, whereas heretofore, they'd always gone to the U.K. The most prestigious scholarships had been going to send people to the U.K., and I wanted to get these prestigious scholarships, have some precedent set for their going to the United States.

This became very important to me when six months after my arrival I was invited to the Presidential awards ceremony where the President of Singapore Presided and all the Cabinet sat by as these Presidential Scholars, a dozen or so, were being "crowned" and sent off to the U.K. to study. While I saw scholarship after scholarship being awarded for study at Oxbridge or Manchester or someplace else, my American blood boiled, and that fired me up to raise the money from the American side to help and to press the Singapore side to cooperate.

Q: Who had been paying on the British side?

THAYER: The Singaporeans had been paying entirely, but I felt that by getting the American business community to get behind it and paying part of the way that we could demonstrate the seriousness of our purpose to the Singaporeans and get their attention; I felt also that a budget-conscious Singapore government would see that there would be several layers of benefits from regarding seriously an American bid to attract some of their best scholars. And so that was another facet of the work that I did.

Q: Why don't we follow through on that. How did that play out while you were there?

THAYER: While I was there, it took a while--a couple of years--to get the American business community sold on the idea. We--including USIS and the commercial officer-- worked hard to sell this first to the American business community. Then we needed to talk it through with the Singaporean side, the education ministry and so forth. Eventually, by the time I left Singapore, we still had not fully succeeded. But a year after I left, our first Presidential Scholar went to the United States to study, on the basis I had first conceived. I don't know how many have gone since, but we did have a breakthrough and had this precedent set that it was worth sending some of the best scholars to the United States. That was the message that I was trying to encapsulate.

So that was another small aspect. I bolstered this with giving public speeches about American education and comparing the American educational system, the number of Nobel Prize winners and so forth, to other countries, generally trying to enhance the regard which Singaporeans had in general for the American educational system. I should emphasize that since the best scholars often entered the civil service, their attitudes toward the U.S. made a difference to many facets of Singapore's foreign policy.

Also an important part of the American mission was the refugee issue, which was very significant--Cambodian refugees, Vietnam refugees, who were pouring down into Southeast Asia, to Thailand, to Malaysia, to Indonesia, to the Philippines, also to Hong Kong. We had a refugee office in Singapore, which was the basis for our operation at Galang Island in Indonesia. In working with the Singapore government, we also were strong supporters of the UN camp for refugees in Singapore. So that was another facet of my work.

Q: What was the political situation in Singapore while you were there?

THAYER: The political situation was very much an environment dominated by the People's Action Party, its leader was Lee Kuan Yew, then still Prime Minister and very much in the saddle. There was only one member of the opposition in a Parliament of roughly seventy-five

seats. It's a parliamentary system. Prime Minister Lee's cabinet, generally speaking, was made up of a so-called "second generation leadership", guys in their thirties and forties. Lee turned sixty while I was there. It was very much a parliamentary system dominated by an extremely strong prime minister. There was a president, but his role was mostly ceremonial. That continues to be the system today. Of course, Prime Minister Lee has withdrawn as prime minister. But the People's Action Party was dominant then as it had been since the late '50s and continues so today.

Q: How did you deal with the government, you and your staff?

THAYER: We dealt very smoothly at, I would say, all levels of the government. In the four years I was there, we had no serious problems, I'm glad to say--not because of my skill but because the environment for the relationship was very good. Our withdrawal from Vietnam was in the past. Lee had been a big supporter of a strong American presence in Southeast Asia. He continued to be when I was there. President Reagan was determined to build up the American military. Lee thought that was a great thing for the United States and for Singapore. Lee had met Reagan in the '60s when he was governor of California, had maintained something of a relationship with him, felt warmly toward Reagan. The Reagan administration stress on removing trade restrictions was something that Lee was very supportive of. Singapore is very much an open market.

So in various ways the goals of the two governments were parallel and we had no major problems, no major sticking problems. In years past, Lee had been very offended by some episode with the CIA, and after I left, one of our political officers was PNGed [*persona non grata*]. It had something to do with talking to the opposition.

But in my time there we simply didn't have major problems.

Q: Were you able to sit down and have long talks with Lee, or was he a fairly removed person?

THAYER: Lee was relatively inaccessible, and he was reputed, I think accurately, not to be too fond of diplomats. So building a relationship of confidence with Lee was a long-term effort, and it wasn't designed to put me in the position of dropping in for a drink every couple of days. It was designed to establish myself as a fairly reliable and sensible person that they could deal with, that Lee could deal with, that if he had something to say to our president he could say it through me with confidence; that if I had a message to deliver or something to say, I could be received with confidence.

But the need to build these relationships extended all over the Cabinet, including the top of the Foreign Ministry where we hadn't really had regular contact for reasons that it would take too much time to go into.

Q: Did you, by any chance, find that sometimes you have a second generation coming up, as you were saying, the people got independence, but then the younger generation coming up may have almost an anti-American feelings or they want to show that they're more nationalistic and American rubs their nerves raw? Did you find any of this problem there?

THAYER: We didn't really get that, I'm glad to say. There was a pretty pervasive attitude toward the United States as being a benign, if not always effective or reliable, partner, given the history of Vietnam and so forth. There wasn't a virulent kind of anti-Americanism. There wasn't any real strain of that. And I did spend quite a bit of time in one-on-one lunches with Cabinet and sub-Cabinet members, trying to probe their attitudes, the successor generation, and also with bankers, and others in the private sector, who tended to be Chinese, as well as the Malay element of the society. I really didn't find any significant anti-Americanism. That, of course, made the job a lot easier.

Q: You mentioned developing business interests. Was there concern that American businesses were putting an awful lot of investment into Singapore industry which would, in turn, be taking away jobs in the United States?

THAYER: There wasn't a concern reflected in my work or that impinged on my work. I remember early in my tour there had been difficulty in getting the American government to make a flat statement for the record that investment abroad was a good thing, to encourage American investment abroad. Our American Business Council wanted such a statement. In fact, if you look at the record of the early years, in '80 and previous to that, there was never a categorical statement--and I don't know if there is today--supporting American investment abroad. But it was clearly in our political interest to invest in Singapore. American businesses could decide for themselves whether it was in their economic interest to invest in Singapore, and they did invest in Singapore. So that was not a real problem.

Perhaps the most interesting issue at that time, as far as American investment and commercial relations, business relations with Singapore went, was that the Singapore government (led, in many respects, by Prime Minister Lee), was on a kick then of having Singapore emulate Japan. They had study missions going to Japan to see how they do business. They invited Ezra Vogel, who is the author of *Japan is Number One*, to come from Harvard to give seminars in Singapore. There was an awful lot of talk about what a great place Japan was to emulate. They were better businessmen. They knew how to make industries modern and efficient. Their quality control methods were better. Their sales were more aggressive. They were more flexible in serving their customers and so forth and so on.

A lot of it was true, but in the course of this, the strong points about the American economy--and American contribution to Japan's success--were entirely lost. The newspapers, being not entirely free and in many ways eager to support their prime minister, kind of exaggerated these statements, and the theme was picked up at other levels. In good-mouthing the Japanese, there was an implicit bad-mouthing of American business qualifications. And this bothered me. So I did a number of things that were directed at countering this: among other things, making speeches where I could, opening every American investment--a Hardee's restaurant, a new factory, a pharmaceutical plant--and making speeches on these occasions.

I was invited to give a speech to the Rotary Club, at the annual Rotary meeting, a consolidated Rotary meeting in Singapore, and I chose that forum in a big hotel room with a thousand people there, everybody having eaten too much and so forth, but I gave a very serious talk, which was

well researched by our economic and USIS sections, on the history of American quality control and modern industrial practices, demonstrating how those things that the Singaporeans were trumpeting as attributable to the Japanese, how they all had their roots among more forward-looking American companies well before the Japanese gained such strength. I never mentioned Japan in this, but this was a speech designed not for the audience so much as it was for the newspapers, and it got a very good newspaper play.

I also quietly, without any publicity, conducted the President of Singapore on a visit to about fifteen American factories in Singapore. (This had the advantage, *inter alia*, of cementing my relations with the Americans in the private sector.) We would spend a full morning or a whole afternoon talking to the American managers about that particular American investment; how they were training the Singaporeans, how much they were paying the Singaporeans, what kind of workers they were, what more the Americans might do in the way of investment in Singapore. The President was very much interested in this, he having been a former labor leader. So there were various opportunities to do something to promote American business interests.

Q: What was your impression of the American business community? Were they with you? Were they flexible as far as dealing with the Singapore society?

THAYER: The American business community was, I thought, very good, and very well organized. Incidentally, I found the same thing in Taiwan, which is a comparable place in terms of American investment. Very well organized. Their representatives, generally speaking, were intelligent, were sensitive to the special concerns of the Singaporeans, were good Americans and good guests. My relations with the American Business Council, as it was called in Singapore, were intimate. My econ/commercial chief was on the board of the American Business Council. I attended virtually every periodic meeting of the Business Council. Once every month or two months I had an open meeting at the residence in which I and my staff gave them a briefing on economic, political, all kinds of issues that the Embassy had some expertise in, that they might not have. When I went to attend the American meetings with ASEAN annually or went to Washington on consultations, I came back and would give a briefing to the business people on these meetings. My DCM, Mort Smith, followed by Ed Kempe, and my econ/pol counselor, Bill Spruce, gave me very good advice and made heavy contributions here.

The American Business Council not only was the American business community, it was also the same group of people who pretty much ran the American School. The American School was a very important institution for the Americans in Singapore and, therefore, very important to me and to my staff. The Singaporeans took the American business community seriously. They wanted more Americans there. The investment environment was very deliberately enhanced to entice the Americans to put money into Singapore.

The Americans sat on various committees that the government established, including the committees that set wage levels. So I would say not only were my relations with them intimate, but the Singapore government's relations with the American business community were intimate, and the business community had good access to the key Singaporean government people. The quality of the American business representatives, I felt, generally was very high, and to me it was

very much a plus of the job. Incidentally, the Prime Minister's wife, a lawyer, told me at dinner one night that she regularly read the American community's newspaper, a monthly, as I recall.

Q: How about your staff at the embassy? How did you find them?

THAYER: The staff at the embassy was very good. One of the reasons it was good is because Singapore has a reputation of being a desirable post, not because of the ambassador, but because Singapore is, in fact, a good place to live. The steady humidity and heat, unwavering, does get you down. It is isolated for those who can't afford airfare out of Singapore. But it's secure. The schools are good. The medical facilities are very good, etc. And so nobody had to be bludgeoned to go to Singapore. There were always good bidders for DCM jobs. We had a fine USIS contingent, had an agricultural officer and military attachés, plus a Coast Guard contingent that inspected ships being built in Singapore for American and other users. The staff generally was very good.

We had a larger economic and financial operation, Singapore being a financial center, than we did political. And we only had a couple of political officers. We had one officer who specialized in finance and various aspects of the economic scene, very high-quality officers. For me it was a marvelous learning opportunity because there were lots of brains around to pick. If ever you ran out of American brains, there was always this very bright Singapore civil service whose brains you could pick. So it was a great learning experience.

Q: Singapore has very tough laws on narcotics. Did you have any problem with Americans coming in? I'm talking about tourists and all getting involved.

THAYER: I should have mentioned that we also had a DEA office in Singapore.

Q: Drug Enforcement Agency.

THAYER: A Drug Enforcement Agency office--two fellows. Quite high quality. Worked well in the country team context. But they had a regional job. A principal job was exchanging information with the Singapore narcotics people and keeping track of this tremendous flow of ships and planes and so forth going through Singapore.

We had a couple of Americans arrested in Singapore on minor narcotics charges. It was pretty clear to me that one day we were going to have an American arrested on a major one, and the problem of the possibility of his being executed was going to be there, or flogged. But the Singapore government was adamant about narcotics, and we could only be supportive of that, and our relationship with them is very good on this front.

Q: Did you have any major problems while you were there?

THAYER: We did not have any major drug problem while I was there. On the other hand, we did have some very good cooperative drug busts with the Singaporeans.

Q: Were there any issues where you found yourself at loggerheads on world policy issues?

THAYER: We were not at loggerheads on really major issues. We had a problem on international copyrights, for example, which, as you know, is not unique to Singapore. But the Singaporeans were quite reluctant, while I was there, to move on the protection of American intellectual property rights, particularly books, for example. The American book publishers were up in arms about the Singaporeans. In fact, while I was there, they were very critical of the failure of the Embassy to do what they thought was enough in support of them. But I will say that within a couple of years, partly because of Secretary Shultz's intervention with the prime minister, that we did come to--after my departure--I think, a satisfactory agreement with the Singaporeans.

Q: Outside of just plain economic interest, I would think a country where many of the people had been trained in Great Britain, would have a respect for the rights of authors to receive the fruits of their labor. What was the rationale for not being very protective of this?

THAYER: As I recall, the rationale was that textbooks were often expensive and students shouldn't be asked to pay such huge amounts of money for textbooks if they didn't have to. I think that was the basic spoken rationale. I think there was kind of an underlying feeling of, "Well, hell, the Americans can afford it." This is not at the top so much as kind of the environment in which they're operating. (I handled book piracy for our then-Embassy in Taipei in the '60's, and the Chinese there had made the same argument about "poor students.")

Remember, audio tapes were also a big thing. I mean, the piracy of American music--you could go into a thousand different stores in Singapore and buy for two cents, roughly, tapes of almost anything, low-quality tapes, but without the slightest bit of royalties being paid. That was pretty upsetting to the American music publishers.

Q: Were there any other things we might cover before we move to your next assignment?

THAYER: I think it's probably worth saying that one sore point with the Singaporeans throughout my tour was that the Singaporeans did not provide refuge for boat people. Refugees would come down from Vietnam on their boats, and they would come into Singapore Harbor. On one--notorious--occasion before I got there, the Singapore authorities simply pushed off a boat--towed it back to sea and a person drowned, a big scandal. Singaporeans, I believe, eventually became willing to refuel the boats, but they did not let them stay in Singapore, and they were adamant about that. Particularly since we were pressing other ASEANs to receive first asylum cases, this was a bone of contention with us. The UN did have a camp in Singapore up near the border with Malaysia, but that camp was mostly for refugees in transit between first asylum camps elsewhere and transport to the U.S. or other countries.

Q: Did they make any contribution to some of the camps that were in other countries, or was any effort made to make the lot easier?

THAYER: They were hospitable to our headquarters in Singapore for handling our interests in Galang, Indonesia, and they were hospitable to the UN High Commissioner's operation there. So there was that positive side.

Q: *This was a very positive tour of duty in Singapore?*

THAYER: Yes

ALPHONSE F. LA PORTA
Deputy Director, Office of Malaysia, Burma and Singapore Affairs
Washington, DC (1982-1985)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: *How about Singapore?*

LA PORTA: Still uptight. It was always a sport, whether in Singapore or Malaysia, to talk about the political succession, particularly successors to Lee Kuan Yew and when that would come about. We'd all take bets on it and debate which generation of successors were you talking about. As in Indonesia, it was fashionable to speculate on post-Suharto Indonesia and how that transition would work out. I think that in Singapore Goh Chok Tong had emerged as Deputy Prime Minister and the succession to Lee Kuan Yew was pretty well set. There was some interesting speculation that increased in the late '80s and early '90s about Lee's son, who now will become Prime Minister. You had the emergence of a couple of very good kind of quasi technocrats. Tony Tan Ken Yam was finance minister. He's now the Deputy Prime Minister. Singaporean leaders under Lee's sharp eye, when he was Prime Minister or in the last decade and a half as the "senior minister," found that if they equip themselves well they have long track records. By and large they've all done pretty well in providing sound government.

Q: *Did we have the relationship of sort of very quietly using the expertise of the Singaporeans to repair ships and do a lot of actually military support activities?*

LA PORTA: Yes, indeed. There had always been the use of Singapore as an entrepôt for resupply and minor repairs. One of the issues during that period, in which we in State as well as DOD were directly involved, was the nuclear powered warship issue. It all came down to a matter of liability. The Singaporeans were entirely agreeable to allowing nuclear power warships to enter Singapore, but they had to improve some docking facilities in order to comply with nuclear safety requirements. There also had to be an agreement on liability between our two governments. That was probably the most difficult thing we had to face. Negotiations on the agreement went on for years as only the DOD lawyers could drag it out.

Q: Were we concerned about Islam, particularly in Indonesia, but elsewhere at that time?

LA PORTA: I don't think that it was a cardinal focus for us. I think that we felt that we certainly understood where the fundamentalist movement in Malaysia stood and the political aspects of it. I don't think that we saw radical or violent Islam really raising its head in Indonesia in any particular ways. While we were not entirely comfortable, we did maintain a very close watching brief on Muslim political parties and social elements and Islamic populations in the universities. We tried to do what we could to make sure that we had positive linkages there. Unfortunately, a lot of things that were disruptive to our relations with the Islamic community in Southeast Asia are still the ones that trouble us most today. Those are events in the Middle East. So every time whether it was the '57 War, the '67 War or one or another outbreak of Israel-Palestine difficulties, it always had a ripple effect on our relations with the Islamic communities in Southeast Asia. It is not correct to say, as I was writing to someone this morning in Jakarta, that Islamic extremism is or was entirely aided and abetted by external factors. Internal factors, such as Suharto's tight political control had more to do with Islamic political sentiment, but overseas developments were certainly an element. Where we were in the mid '80s on these issues was probably in a period of relative stability in the relationship. Things got much worse later on.

Q: Was there as there is in every administration, but this was relatively early in the Reagan administration, a battle over Secretary of State, George Shultz, to try to get him to go to meetings and do things in your particular part of the world?

LA PORTA: I think that Ronald Reagan, and I guess it is significant that we're speaking a week after his death and state funeral. We felt in State at that time that Ronald Reagan had a specific outlook. He had a Pacific outlook. He looked out at it from his ranch. He's buried within sight of the Pacific. I think that the Reagan administration, certainly far more than the Carter administration, had a view of the Pacific in the positive sense in saying this is an area of natural U.S. interest. The Pacific is an area of the future. What we used to write about was the tremendous economic potential of the Pacific and its meaning to the United States, whether it be Japan or China. You recall that a lot of the "Japan is number one" stuff started in that period. China was still very closed, but was beginning to be viewed for its true potential, which we're now seeing it in dynamic and very real terms. In other parts of the Asian economy, Taiwan was vastly increasing its industrialization and exports to the United States. Singapore and Malaysia began to be important entrepôts for U.S. electronic and other kinds of manufacturing. Even the Philippines was absorbing some new industrial activity during the mid '80s. We began to see a lot of thickening economic interests with Asia which led us not only to look at ASEAN regionalism in the economic sense, free trade zones and an ASEAN free trade area, but also, it impelled us to look at the establishment of other organizations. The U.S.-ASEAN Business Council was founded with USAID assistance at that time. It's not insignificant that Colin Powell is addressing the U.S.-ASEAN Council tomorrow night. Our ambassadors in Southeast Asia started their ASEAN road shows where they go around to all the capitals of ASEAN and then come to a number of important commercial cities in the U.S., ending up in Washington to lobby Congress on ASEAN Southeast Asian concerns. That effort started during the mid '80s. We in the State desk were very much a part of that.

Other organizations began to arise. Something called the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC), which was tripartite – academic, business and government. An organization in my view that hasn't fulfilled its potential, but still even today does some relatively useful economic work. You had also a third organization called APEC – the Asia Pacific Economic Council. This was a region wide thing and included South American countries as well as East Asia. APEC is made up of governments and they have an APEC summit every year. It's an important occasion for the leaders of all of the countries to get together once a year.

JOSEPH A. B. WINDER
Desk Officer for Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Affairs
Washington, DC (1983-1985)

Joseph A. Winder was born in New York in 1939. He received a BA from the University of Michigan in 1964 and his MBA in 1965. Mr. Winder served in the US Army from 1959 to 1962. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1966, he was posted in Santiago, Bonn, Jakarta, Bangkok and Tokyo. In 1999 Mr. Winder was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: What about Singapore?

WINDER: At that time Lee Kuan Yew was in control. There was a lot of mutual respect between George Shultz and Lee Kuan Yew. When they visited each other's country they always had in depth consultations and conversations. I went out on a trip one time and Allen Wallis, the under secretary for economic at State was there and he had a good meeting with Lee Kuan Yew. We really had excellent high level contact between the two countries. And we had basically no serious frictions or issues of any kind that I recall.

Q: You didn't have any students getting whipped and things like that?

WINDER: No. I can't recall when that incident was, but it wasn't on my watch.

Q: Looking back at the whole group, were we trying to build up a defense perimeter using these countries at that time?

WINDER: No. That is a little too strong a phrase. We were trying to continue to strengthen our defense ties with the military establishment of each country. We historically had very good military ties with Singapore which included ship visits. In fact, there was a U.S. Navy office in Singapore that did logistics and things of that kind. We were also trying to expand our ties with the Indonesian and Malaysian military that would provide for ship visits and perhaps even for repairs. There was some discussion of a repairs facility in Surabaya. Former foreign minister Ghazali Shafi, I recall, came once to Washington and we had a discussion of perhaps a repairs facility in Labuan, a Malaysian island off the coast of Borneo. There was a general discussion of threat perception, etc. A defense perimeter is far too strong a word.

Another aspect of the work of the office I might touch on briefly, had to do with the ASEAN. We at that time were the office that backstopped U.S. participation in ASEAN and the annual consultations with ASEAN that the secretaries of state had been going to for a number of years. So, I accompanied Secretary Shultz a couple of times on his trips to ASEAN. Shultz thought these trips were very important feeling that one aspect of foreign relations was tending the gardens, so to speak, and ASEAN was a garden that needed tending. So, he made time in his schedule to go out there and participate actively in the discussions. He was quite demanding in the preparation of speeches and briefing books. We had to work quite hard, actually, to satisfy his rather rigorous requirements. But it was a very rewarding part of the job because it was high level attention to countries that were important to us.

DARYL ARNOLD
Ambassador
Singapore (1987-1989)

A Californian, Ambassador Arnold was closely associated with President Reagan and other Republican officials. He served as member of Commissions dealing with agriculture issues in Japan and other Pacific Rim nations. In 1987 he was appointed Ambassador to Singapore, where he served until 1989. Ambassador Arnold was interviewed by Hank Zivetz in 1989.

ARNOLD: I arrived in Singapore in April 1987.

Q: In preparation for this interview I did some reading on what was happening in Singapore in that period. You were greeted about a month after you arrived with this so-called "communist plot". Do you recall that, particularly by those connected with the Catholic church? What was your impression, coming to a country and having this kind of thing happen?

ARNOLD: Well you know, there are problems you get in a foreign country when you have benevolent dictatorships, and that is what Singapore actually is, you can call it anything you want, but out of 81 members of Parliament, 80 are members of his party and there has never been another individual as prime minister in Singapore except him. It is certainly easier to run a country if you are benevolent. There are things that we disagree with, and one of those is detention without a trial. I had no problems if they arrested people for, in their eyes, communistic infiltration and overthrowing the government, however, in our country they have the right to have a trial. Singapore has, (it is British law), detention without trial and they would never try the people and they would decide when they would let them out.

Q: Not directly related to this case, but we will come back to it; were you there when they PNGed [declared persona non grata] one of our people?

ARNOLD: Hank Hendrickson. And very honestly, the one problem I had with the State Department, is that they are so fearful that somebody will attack one of their own that they will never accept that maybe they did something wrong. And that was the biggest problem I had in

this instance. Certainly not for what Hank was accused of, but in my estimation he certainly went beyond the areas he should have as a diplomat in the Foreign Service.

Q: Was Hendrickson a political officer?

ARNOLD: Yes.

Q: And the little bit that I got on this was that he addressed a group of attorneys.

ARNOLD: What happened was that Hank was very much a liberal in his thinking and he had great dislike for detention without trial, great dislike for limiting the freedom of the press, great dislike for the type of government that was being run in Singapore. In that empathy, he got friendly, and maybe too friendly, with people in opposition parties. He was making statements that were taken way out of context (and I don't want to hand Hank anything he didn't deserve - he was a fine officer) but such as, if he is sitting out and talking to somebody who is complaining about the government and saying "I don't like Lee Kuan Yew" and Hank might have said, "well, why don't you run for office yourself and get involved and get other people involved to try to get a good opposition party going?" And one guy said, "well, we don't have any money" and Hank said, "with people around here, money shouldn't be any problem". Hank was maybe, and here I say maybe, getting too involved with those people. One of the biggest ones, who was convicted for income tax evasion, was one of the two elected opposition parliamentarians. He got very close to him. The Government was following and possibly taping this one gentleman. And Hank got caught up in this taping, and when it got back to the prime minister, we think, they played this tape back obviously and here is Hank all over the tape talking to this person and , quote "interfering in their internal affairs" unquote. So the Government said.

Hank never gave a damn about trying to overthrow the government or never got involved in all the accusations they were making against him or offering them money. Hank would never be that type officer, he was way above that, he would have never gotten involved in that. What I am saying is that he went beyond where he should have gone and should not have taken sides between the opposition and the government.

Q: We don't get that many persona non grata cases and I think it would be interesting for any researcher to follow a case from start to finish.

ARNOLD: Let's get to the other side, that's more important. Why did they do this to him? They could have done it as gentlemen, they could have come to me and said "keep him quiet", they could have done a lot of things. Instead of PNGing him they could have called me and said "we want him out quietly" and I would have gotten him out. That was not the problem. The problem was that I was in Washington with the prime minister at the time, the foreign minister who was very close to our country, was in Italy lining up the next stop for the prime minister. The two people who were left in Singapore were, the first deputy prime minister and the minister of trade and development. Who happened to be the prime minister's son. The prime minister's son was in the original negotiations when we were trying to get intellectual property rights passed in Singapore. He was the negotiator for Singapore and he was asking for additional benefits under GSP.

Q: Intellectual property rights, the right of authors...

ARNOLD: To try to protect our movies, our tapes, they were copying our tapes, or movies, everything.

Q: In that part of the world they copy everything.

ARNOLD: Right. In Singapore we wanted them to stop copying, and we were insistent. The negotiations were concluded with the prime minister's son. They had GSP privileges and they wanted more tax-free benefits if they were going to pass an Intellectual Property Right Law. We negotiated and settled an agreement that gave them more benefits and they passed the law with the prime minister's son being the key figure. Under that agreement, and I am sure there are two sides to the story, under the GSP agreement, it was stated that either in 1992 or when a country reached \$8,500 in per capita income, it would no longer be entitled to GSP benefits.

Well there was a third thing. The president of the United States can cancel those benefits any time he wants to, in addition to 1992 and \$8,500, it was a gift we were giving to countries and if he wanted to cancel it, he could. Well in those negotiations it was never brought up that he could cancel them, it was never brought up about 1992 and \$8,500, they knew what those provisions were. So we gave them the added benefits, then we got into our big tax problems back in the United States and trying to see where we could get more revenue, how we were going to get more money, and so six months later, not only did they take away the added benefits we had given them, they took them all away. They said "you are now a developed country; we are graduating Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong". Well that made this young man, who was 34 years old, irate. And he went after Clayton Yuetter and George Shultz. He went after us because in his estimation we negotiated these benefits to get a law passed knowing that we were going to take the benefits away.

There is no question in my mind that Clayton Yuetter did not even surmise they were going to do that. If you look at the other side of the picture it seems that we just negotiated to get that law passed. Anyway he was irate. Now then he wants to get back at the United States, he is not necessarily a friend of the United States and he is not an enemy. He looks to Japan as to what they have done, he looks to the Soviet Union, they do business with everybody. When he is mad and the prime minister is overseas and the foreign minister is overseas and he is there in Singapore and he gets this tape of Hank Hendrickson and called my chargé when I was away with the Prime Minister. He said we have got your man and we are going to PNG him. The chargé said, "please wait, have you talked to the prime minister yet, he is with the ambassador. I will get the ambassador back home. Please wait before you go to the press, before you do anything." I got on an airplane and started back. When I got to Alaska I was called off the plane and was told it was too late. The prime minister's son announced to the press they had PNGed him. The prime minister called me in, but now it had gone too far. All the television went crazy, accused Hank of being a CIA agent, accused him of every bad thing, even to the standpoint that Hendrickson, who had had an illegitimate child when he worked in the Philippines, (his wife, was our economic officer), had adopted this illegitimate, half-Filipino girl, brought her to

Singapore as their own, announced over the television, the whole story about Hank and his illegitimate child in the Philippines.

Washington had asked to see if I could settle the thing down so I went over to the prime minister and said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I can't sit here much longer and take this. You are accusing Hank, you PNGed him and we are going to PNG his equal in Washington, but this thing has got to stop as I am not going to sit here and let you attack my officers. If you say they interfered, you've got to look to me. They work for me and not one of them would do anything without talking to me. You've got to get me. If you want to get somebody you better PNG me, not just Hank." He said, "Please, just take it easy, this is the second generation coming, the younger leaders who are going to take over Singapore. I've got to give them some space. Please don't say anything for a couple of days and I will see what I can do". Two days later there was a press conference with this young leader, the prime minister's son, and he said every bad thing he could, even to the standpoint of "they must be guilty, or why aren't they saying something?" I went back to the prime minister and said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I've got to know who is running this country; if you are running it I will listen to you, but if your son is --- you asked me not to say anything --- so I did not and our country did not, and I advised them of what we were doing and now your son accuses us of being guilty by not speaking out. I don't know how we are going to win this battle." Finally Parliament met for five days, they never did anything but American-bashing. I went over and saw the foreign minister, who was a good friend of mine and a friend of the United States (there were just the two of us, no officers were with us) and I said "Dhana, I've got to know what is going on here, how this thing is going to be stopped. The United States government is not going to sit here and continue to take this kind of American-bashing. Talking about burning down the embassy, pickets in front of my embassy, accusations of the CIA and the United States government, we can't continue this way."

He said, "OK, I will get up in front of Parliament and defend the United States", and so he did. He was berated by some people for defending the United States. So then the prime minister called me on the last day on the phone. He said "Daryl, I want you to come to Parliament tomorrow, and sit in Parliament." I said, "Mr. Prime Minister, that's putting me in a pretty bad light if I can be singled out". He said, "No, I am going to speak, I am going to get up and talk and I want you to be there to hear what I say." Of course I called Washington to say, "What shall I do?" And I got the answer, "You make up your own mind". [Laughter] They asked if I thought I could trust the prime minister, and I said I did. I think we are close enough friends so that I can trust him. They suggested that I try to talk to him to about not being on television and no questions, but just to sit there. So I told the prime minister that. He sent me over the speech he was going to make and said if there are any problems with it let him know and he will try to correct them. So I went over it and noted a few words we would like to see changed and sent it back.

I went over to Parliament and he gave the speech. As a benevolent dictator, once he had said "That's enough", that ended it. The situation was strictly based on his son's dislike for all the things we had done and his desire to get even.

Q: That sounds almost like the "Good guy, Bad guy" routine. I recall, this is digressing, where Khrushchev would create a crisis over Berlin and then months later he would settle the crisis. He

was the good guy, people forgetting that he started the whole thing. Similarly here I can see the son having a personal animosity, but why did this continue in the Parliament. It seems almost like it was being orchestrated?

ARNOLD: You're right, it was to some extent. First of all, I can understand where a son might call a father who was in a foreign country and give only one side of the problem, I want to PNG him and the father saying agreeing to it. I am sure he checked with his father before he took action. That's point one. But number two, they were within four to six months of an election. They practically had replaced every single old-guard leader in the parliament except for the prime minister and he will be stepping down in October, 1990. I think, and this is all conjecture, that the prime minister did not want to step on the second generation of leaders. The prime minister's son felt that they were a third world non-aligned country, and were not going to be dictated to by the United States government. I am not sure that the prime minister still had the power in his hand to stop it that he had had a little earlier. But that is a conjecture. There was certainly a split within the hierarchy of the Peoples' Action Party, no question about it, between the first and second generation leaders.

Q: Well, now in terms of the embassy's relationship with a variety of groups -- if you can't call them dissidents, I assume there are semi-opposition voices -- how did this incident, this Hendrickson thing, affect the embassy's relationship with other elements in Singapore society?

ARNOLD: For about two months it affected it, to the standpoint that I said, "Let's back off, let's try to stay away from those who have been accused and convicted of crimes, whether they did them or not. But let's ease back. But one thing we must do. You must meet with opposition parties, we would not be doing our job if we did not". So for a period of about two or three months it affected us in getting information from the opposition. It made other embassies nervous too, because they were doing practically the same thing. Consequently, it affected not only the United States embassy there, but also our allies and, of course, it made the Soviet embassy very happy to see them getting down on us.

Before I left we absolutely went back to doing what we were supposed to be doing, not interfering in internal politics, not getting into agreeing with them, but certainly we were meeting with them and questioning them.

Q: Another series of incidents occurred and I am curious whether they involved the embassy or not. These were the restrictions on the Asian Wall Street Journal and the Far Eastern Economic Review?

ARNOLD: There are two different stories on them. I could see their point on the Asian Wall Street Journal, I believe in the freedom of the press, but I could see their reasoning. On the Asian Wall Street Journal there were two people who locked horns and neither was going to give. What had happened was that the Asian Wall Street Journal had written about Singapore, about their second stock exchange, complaining about it, wrote quite an article about it. Lee Kuan Yew considers foreign press in Singapore as a privilege and not a right to be there, that is his basic standpoint. And so consequently when they wrote this article, he wrote a letter back to the Asian Wall Street Journal asking that it be printed. It contradicted what the paper had said. The Asian

Wall Street Journal refused to print his letter. He said, "Wait a minute, you are talking about freedom of the press, why won't you print my letter?" Our position and my orders were that from the standpoint that the Asian Wall Street Journal is a private periodical that they do not have to print anything they do not want to print, it is not a government newspaper. It is not owned by the government and they do not have to print the letter. Singapore's position was, "if you want to write things about us and you will not print our answers to them, that is not freedom of the press, so we are going to gazette the paper. If you print the letter you can remain." We were not sure that was the only reason, so I went to the Asian Wall Street Journal and said, "Hey, look at it, I really want to prove whether or not it is just not printing that letter is gazetting you, or whether they don't want you here because you are writing bad things about Singapore?" So I said, "Would you do this, if I can get Lee Kuan Yew to absolutely agree to reinstate you, will you print that letter?" They said, "No, because he attacked the person who wrote the article in the letter." I said, My God, you guys attack people on a daily basis, that should not be an issue". Anyway they refused to do it. So they are still out.

Now that is not true of the Economic Review. Davies knew all about this thing with the Wall Street Journal and he was really attacking Singapore, but anytime the government sent a letter he would print it. But he would go after them again. But finally it proved out that it was not the same argument in the Economic Review from the standpoint that he was not going to let them attack Singapore without rebuttal. It was the standpoint that it was a privilege, not a right, to be there. If you want to write about Singapore, stay out of Singapore, and get out of here. But we do not want to say that we don't believe in the freedom of the press, so we will gazette you and we will move you from 10,000 down to 400 and you can put your Asian Wall Street Journal and your Economic Review in all the libraries in Singapore. Well then Davies, said, "If you don't want my 10,000 copies you don't want my 400 copies" and he pulled them all out.

Q: I am curious. Singapore has been called, Singapore Inc.

How could it calculatingly offend two of the principle media instruments of big business. Wouldn't this have a chilling effect on people who wanted to invest? Didn't they think about this or didn't this happen?

ARNOLD: No, it did. They are so self-centered and so overboard on thinking about this little tiny country they feel that "everyone will attack us, everyone will pick on us" that if any item is critical they over react. Anything that happens in Singapore, whether it be a little law suit or something big, whatever it is that might affect Singapore or members of Parliament, they will go to great lengths to respond. It does not make any difference that they are totally dependent on business, obviously they have no natural resources in Singapore, yet we have a two and a half billion dollar trade deficit with them. Sure they are totally dependent on business. And it was not the business people that were involved, the business people were actually more on our side than on theirs.

Q: Let's project a little bit. In my research, I found that Lee was going to step down. Has he stepped down?

ARNOLD: No. He has already announced that this year, in September 1990, he will step down. It has already been determined that Goh Chok Tong, the 1st deputy prime minister, will take over for him.

Q: Whenever a man of this caliber, of this strength, leaves the scene, you can anticipate that things will not go smoothly. Who would you say constitutes the opposition in Singapore? Should there be a reaction to Lee's stepping down, and from which sources would it come?

ARNOLD: The country that concerns them the most is Malaysia. You probably know Malaysia supplies 50% of their water and they were kicked out of Malaysia in 1961 -- they don't like to say that, but it was done because of the Chinese influence in Singapore their great fear is Malaysia. They keep looking across that causeway. So if the opposition comes up, it will be people of the Malay ancestry.

Q: Are there enough Malays who live in Singapore?

ARNOLD: Fifteen percent of Singaporeans are Malays. And they keep on acting like they are one big happy family, but the Indians, the Malays, and the minorities compared to the Chinese do not quite feel that way. And so the opposition, is made up of Malays and Indians, rather than Chinese is where your opposition might come from, but they really are not organized. Remember they do have a secret ballot election. But if I give you seven days and you do not know when it is going to be held I can have everything prepared beforehand but you will have only seven days to start and finish politicking. You don't stand much of a chance to win.

Q: There still are secret ballot elections and people still have a chance to express their desires. But they won 80 of the 81 seats.

ARNOLD: Right, but they only won 64% of the vote.

Q: Which was a drop from what they had won before. This brings me to my next question. Singapore is one of the "Four Tigers" - so-called - and they have done very well economically, however, some criticism has been leveled from this country towards some of the others in this quartet, that their increase in economic growth has not been reflected in an increase in living standards on the part of the people. For example, in Taiwan, economic growth has not trickled down enough to influence the way most people live. Now in South Korea, they say, the standard of living has increased. What is the situation in Singapore?

ARNOLD: They did something that I thought I would like to see us do in this country. They have a thing like our Social Security program, it is a huge retirement program in which Singaporeans put up 25% of their money in retirement and it is matched by the employer by about 10% so that it is 35% that goes into the retirement fund. The prime minister was trying to increase the stature of all the poor people in Singapore, to get them out of the huts and the shacks. He built low-cost, high-rise apartments for the people to move into, but they still could not afford to and could not get into them. So the apartments were all standing empty. So then he said there has to be a way. There was another gentleman, Lim Kim Son, is his name, said, "Look at it, we've got all these empty apartments, we've got all this money to build things with, let's make

them into condominiums, let's sell these condominiums to Singaporeans". They said, "Where are they going to get the money?" He said, "We will loan them the down payment out of their retirement fund, and we will loan them their monthly payments out of the retirement fund. What is the difference when they get to be sixty years old, the retirement age, whether they have more retirement with which to pay rent or whether they have less amount of money but they own free and clear their own living facility?" So all the young people, who never think they will get old and retire anyway, and 25% of their salary is being taken away from them, said "Do you mean I can move into that place, I can own my own home and I will not have to pay, you will use my retirement fund and you will make the payments and if I want to I can rent it out, it will be mine?" The answer was yes. Eight-five percent of all Singaporeans today own their own condominiums, pride of ownership is so high so that now they are taking care of their own property.

I had employees living with me at my residence who moved their parents to their condominiums that they were buying. It was a marvelous thing to come up with. Can you imagine all the poor people in the United States into Social Security who could use that for housing. It is a heck of an idea.

Q: You are saying then there is generally support for the Lee administration.

ARNOLD: Certainly. The majority of the people support Lee, what they don't like is the dictatorial attitudes they get into in Singapore, but as far as a country, the people are very happy. You can't find poverty, there is no unemployment in Singapore. As I said 85% of the people own houses in Singapore.

Q: Was the embassy involved in any kind of human rights violations charges? If so, in what respect?

ARNOLD: Obviously we were concerned on the right of trial issue, the detention without a trial business. Even on the drugs situation, they have no drugs in Singapore, but they do it high-handed. If they find you are a pusher or find you with X amount of drugs in your possession they hang you. And if in fact they find you are a user of drugs they will immediately give you a urinalyses, and they will put you into drug rehabilitation without a trial, they will decided when you will get out. You can't do anything about it.

Q: In what form has the embassy become involved in human rights?

ARNOLD: Obviously we have all the human rights group coming into Singapore. We set up meetings with the Singapore authorities. With one of these men, whose name I can't remember, I tried and the Singapore officials would not meet with him. I finally went over to the Home Development Ministry and was told, "His mind is made up". I said, "Your mind is made up too, everybody's mind is made up. The only way to change minds is talking to somebody. Sure his mind is made up on the position of human rights, but your's is too. But why do you sit there and not allow these people to sit down and discuss with you the human rights issue even though their minds are made up. It just makes it worse on the United States and harder on everyone and if you are not going to talk to our Human Right Groups we will just take a worse stand against you.

What if you sit down and try to discuss the issues and hear why we feel so strongly about it." Of course we make a human rights report which they get very upset with. But in the area of freedom of the press, or detention without a trial, are major human rights issues in Singapore. On the other hand if human rights goes beyond that they have made a lot of great accomplishments. But you can't condone, in my estimation, the situation. Maybe in some countries we go too far in trying to impose our will on them. But I still think it is the job of embassies to do the will of Congress and the President of the United States, these are things we feel strongly about and had to continue to make it known. In everything we did we always mentioned human rights.

Q: Another issue, I am not sure you were still there, that may have exacerbated relations between Singapore and the United States was the issue over their refusal to float the Singapore dollar. They refused to lower the Singapore dollar as the United States dollar lowered; they foiled our effort to become more competitive.

ARNOLD: Actually that did not become an issue to any degree. Singapore was not a problem, other countries were. Singapore proved that the percentages were not so great. The reason was because when it was the other way around, when we were a very strong dollar, they did not go up to match that dollar the way that South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan had done. Consequently if you looked at the percentages that they were talking about in the other countries decreasing as the dollar decreased it did not make that much difference. Anyway it did not become quite the issue that it was in other countries. They had matched themselves pretty much to the United States dollar all along.

Q: By pegging it to the dollar they eliminated our advantage.

ARNOLD: There is also a disadvantage. If the dollar goes down its to our advantage and disadvantage if it goes up. But they were pegged all the way. Anyway it was not a big issue.

Q: As I understand it we were threatening to withdraw preferential trade status. Did we do that?

ARNOLD: That had already been done. That is what they had taken away totally. It did not make any difference.

Q: Let's range a little more freely here. Could you give us some of your impressions of the Singaporean leadership, starting with Lee.

ARNOLD: Sure. Lee Kuan Yew, a true benevolent dictator, believes in the people, works for the people and for his country. Would do anything for his country. Very much friendly with the United States, very close to the United States. The minister of finance, Richard Hu, very close to the United States, friend of the United States.

Q: Let's go back to Lee. Personally, what kind of man is he?

ARNOLD: Very friendly, we became very close. We would have dinner together. The only ambassadorial residence he had ever been to before since he became prime minister was ours, he came to our residence to have dinner with George Shultz.

Q: What is his background?

ARNOLD: He is an attorney. His wife is still an attorney and still runs a law firm, Lee and Lee with his brother Dennis Lee. Trained in England and was very much involved with the Communist Party when they first took over and saw that that was not for him. That was his first big fight, breaking away from the Communist Party and becoming an independent. He became very anti-Soviet.

Q: Are there any other parties in Singapore?

ARNOLD: There are many parties, but no Communist Party anymore. On the ballot there are generally six or seven parties.

Q: What did you call Lee's party?

ARNOLD: Peoples' Action Party - PAP.

Q: The Peoples' Action Party as I understand it has been in power since the creation of Singapore?

ARNOLD: Since it became an independent nation. It was part of Malaysia in 1960 and 1961, then it became an independent, somewhat independent, until 1965, when it became totally independent. Lee Kuan Yew was the prime minister in 1962 when he fought the Communist Party. At the time when Malaysia kicked Singapore out, Lee's party was under communistic influence, but then he started breaking away from them and it became totally the other way.

Q: Now what about the fellow he has pegged to be his successor?

ARNOLD: Goh Chok Tong. Remember we have eliminated all the first generation leaders, they are gone. The people he pegged, Tony Tan, who is minister of education - he is the one that Lee Kuan Yew pegged to be his replacement, but he was a first generation leader. He is still minister of education, but he is an older man. Goh Chok Tong is a younger man so they made him first deputy prime minister. I really think they are looking at Lee's son to take over, but he made some mistakes, such as picking on the United States and more importantly he said that no Malay should be high up in the military because they cannot be sure they could trust them in a battle. It made the Malays in Singapore irate; they were Singaporeans. He made too many enemies. He then was minister of trade and development. Gho Chok Tong, first deputy prime minister, very much of a moderate trying to keep the second generation of leaders calmed down. Trying to deal with the first generation. He is kind of a middle of the roader trying to keep both sides happy. I think a pretty good man. He doesn't have the charisma; he doesn't have the speech making ability Lee's son has. Lee's son, who is not pro-United States, is going to keep shoving Goh Chok Tong who is very much of a moderate person trying to keep both sides happy. We would play golf together and I found him to be a friend of the United States.

The second deputy prime minister Ong Teng Chong, is also head of the union. Even though they say they are unionized it is very difficult to have strikes.

Q: Is the union a government run organization?

ARNOLD: "Supposedly" it is an independent union, but the head of the union is the second deputy prime minister. Now is that independent or not independent? I don't consider it to be totally independent. But Ong Teng Chong is the second deputy prime minister and is not very powerful in any area. The next one in line and who I think will take over as first deputy prime minister is the prime minister's son. Now Brigadier General Lee who became a brigadier general at the age of thirty-four.

Q: This is a different son?

ARNOLD: No this is the same son I had problems with. He ran for Parliament. The other son is not involved in Parliament - that son, I think, will probably take over as minister of defense. That is when Goh Chok Tong becomes prime minister. If I had to guess, that Lee's son (the brigadier general) will take over as first deputy prime minister which will put him in line in five years or so to push Goh Chok Tong out, but I think he will move up. He is the one I would not consider a friend of the United States. One that would just as soon be close to the Japanese, seeing what they are doing and how they are progressing, they are the most powerful nation, and seeing the United States as dwindling. He takes with him the minister of communications, he takes with him the minister of law, he takes with him the second deputy prime minister, and also the foreign minister, Wong Kan Seng, he takes with him that contingency that element who are not aligned and want to show the United States and everybody else that they should not "mess with us".

Q: This raises another question. When you say "takes with him" and when you are suggesting that the conventional wisdom has the son taking the first deputy prime minister position, who's pulling the strings in the party? Obviously all these decisions are made within the party. Is there an eminence gris, someone behind the throne, someone whose word counts more than the others?

ARNOLD: Lee.

Q: That's still Lee after he is retired?

ARNOLD: He won't be retired. He will be retired as prime minister but he will still maintain senior minister position in the Parliament, he not going to drop out of Parliament, he is not going to drop out of being senior minister, he is going to drop out of being prime minister, so he will still pull the strings. The problem we are into here is that you can take the cabinet and say these people are on one side of an issue and these people are on the other side, they are trying to work things out and Lee Kuan Yew is the one that can make both sides compromise. I fear and feel that when he is not the prime minister and when they feel that he is getting older, that what will happen will be that the group that is following the son will become less and less friendly to the United States. However, I hope that the older parliamentarians will keep them under control until

they grow up a bit and recognize the importance of the United States. That is where the problems will be when Lee steps down from his job.

Q: Another possible problem is the continued viability of their economy. We see that economic strengths change, as we know the old smoke stack industries are no longer as important as they once were. What is the basis of Singapore's economic strength and will they be able to continue that into the 1990's?

ARNOLD: Yes, I think they will. The bigger thing is the oil refining business. The Middle East oil, the Indonesian oil, it all comes into Singapore and is refined there. When there was an oil glut they were not refining that affected them, but as long as there is not an oil glut and as long as they can keep on refining they will do well. So that is their number one business. The other thing is, of course, that they have become the second busiest port in the world because most Eastern shipping has to go past Singapore. Their port facilities are increasing rapidly and so they have 100% employment. Many companies would like to get into Singapore to do business but there is no more labor there. They had to make a decision that instead of bringing in day laborers from Malaysia where they have big unemployment they would do without new industries. So they are selecting which industries they want to come in; they will not give tax benefits to businesses they do not want in, and they won't allow smoke stack industries. Every computer outfit is there now, I think, electronics, that is what they are looking for. With 2.6 million people they are educating them very rapidly. They are building new universities.

Q: That is interesting, that recalls something I read about the harsh, terribly harsh, penalties to people who were in the country illegally. They obviously have very strong immigration laws. They do now want to have new people. This does say that there is a limit to their growth.

ARNOLD: They are limiting the growth on purpose. They have said "we have had to make a decision to limit our growth or whether we will allow in foreign workers." As you know, we are concerned about our bases in the Philippines and we are looking for alternate basing sites in the area. We have got to look for new sites. It is a matter of how long we can stay in the Philippines. Our problems in Singapore are not having facilities there, they are that they don't want to have American military people living in Singapore and influencing their culture.

RICHARD W. TEARE
Director, Office of Indonesian, Malaysian, Brunei, and Singapore Affairs
Washington, DC (1989-1992)

Richard W. Teare was born in Ohio in 1937. He received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1948. His career includes positions in Barbados, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, New Zealand, and Australia. Mr. Teare was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in July 1998.

Q: How effective do you think the Indonesian embassy was in Washington?

TEARE: Quite ineffective. I'm glad you brought that up because the contrast between Indonesia and Singapore could not have been starker. Singapore had, I think, only eight or nine substantive officers in the embassy but they were all of them hyperactive. They covered State, Pentagon, NSC, and the Hill with terrific energy and great effectiveness. Indonesia, on the other hand, was shy, shrank from confrontation, and sometimes took refuge in the language although I think that virtually everybody assigned here spoke English reasonably well. Indonesia simply wouldn't do it. They took refuge behind their lawyers, as I mentioned. I think they had a public relations firm for awhile. They were whatever the opposite of proactive is, usually inactive I guess...

Q: ...Moving on from taking 40 percent of your time let's move to Singapore and 30 percent. Singapore is a pretty small place. What were we concerned about there during your time of '89 to '92?

TEARE: There was one particular issue that had started rolling a few months before I got there and that was access for U.S. Forces to military facilities in Singapore.

In early 1989, while he was still Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew had come forward with a proposal that the United States use facilities in Singapore under terms to be defined. As I understand it his essential motive for doing so was that he wanted to take the heat off the Philippines. At that stage the Philippines was negotiating with us for a new military bases agreement replacing the agreement of 1947 and there was some significant opposition to our substantial presence at Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base.

I think Lee Kuan Yew's intention was to show the Philippines and the rest of the world, the rest of Southeast Asia at any rate, that they were not alone, that there was another country quite willing to host U.S. Forces. Not necessarily basing operational forces as we have in the Philippines but other facilities, lesser facilities, and to make some money in the process because Singapore always likes to do that. Off of ship repair, off of rentals, whatever it might be.

So by the time I got to the desk in September of that year negotiations were going on. I think they turned out to be more protracted than Singapore had imagined then. Our approach to things such as criminal jurisdiction and avoidance of the death penalty for our servicemen and so forth led to certain complications. But I believe by the late summer of 1990 we had the negotiations pretty well wrapped up including a classified Status of Forces provision. The agreement in the end was signed in Tokyo by Vice President Quayle and Lee Kuan Yew himself. I believe it was at the funeral of Emperor Hirohito...but it might have been the installation of Emperor Akihito, I've forgotten which. Anyway it was something that called for Quayle and Lee both to be there. President Bush did not go.

This is a little sidelight and it says something about atmosphere within the Bush Administration. Quayle's people, particularly someone on his foreign policy staff, checked with me and others beforehand because they thought that Jim Baker was trying to set Quayle up for a fall by having Quayle sign this document with Lee Kuan Yew. I think it also reflects a lack of sophistication on the Quayle staff. They didn't know that this Singapore thing was something important that all the Administration wanted.

Q: Jim Baker was our Secretary of State. It does point out that they didn't know what it was.

TEARE: That's right. They thought it was some sort of trap for Quayle that Baker was trying. But anyway, I think we convinced them rather quickly that there was no such problem. The agreement was signed and went into effect and has worked quite smoothly and indeed the installations that we use and the number of people we have there has grown. We now have the Commander of Naval Logistic Forces, West Pacific, COMLAW WESTPAC, which has a one-star Admiral at its head. We've got a year round Air Force Unit that supports F-16s which come in from Japan five or six times a year to conduct exercises with the Republic of Singapore Air Force. A couple of other things have gone on in or through Singapore that the world is not yet ready to have revealed. It has worked out quite satisfactorily.

In 1991, the Philippine senate rejected the new bases agreement with the United States and Mt. Pinatubo erupted practically wiping out Clark Air Base. By 1992 we were all gone from the Philippines. But we still have access to facilities in Singapore.

Q: You were part of the Asian Bureau. I would have thought there would have been a certain amount of relief to get out of the Philippines thing. Wasn't there at least on the State Department side?

TEARE: Yes, in a word, because relations with the Philippines over the bases had been a headache as I experienced myself from the early '60s on through the late '80s, although I was not working on Philippine affairs in 1989 to 1992.

Q: But you were part of the Bureau?

TEARE: Yes I was around the corner and attended staff meetings all the time.

Q: The bases are almost a complicating thing in our relations with the Philippines. If it weren't for the American military... although it had been important the time had come....

TEARE: Well I don't want to draw over-simplified distinctions. We in State saw the value of the bases and people in Defense, certainly the Commanders and the lawyers, saw the liabilities. It was never one versus the other. I had worked on the 1979 Amendment of the MBA so I knew the issues rather well and how they could complicate our lives. But a big difference, of course, is having bases of your own in another country versus using somebody else's bases in their country as a guest. That is what we wound up doing in Singapore....

Q: ...Back to Singapore. Did you find there the strict laws in Singapore regarding public conduct and everything else? Was this a problem for us either in the human rights field or just the flow of tourists and all that or not during this period?

TEARE: Not particularly. The prominent episode involving the caning of the American kid came along later. However, Singapore at least in those days, and I doubt it has changed much, was a very autocratic place and that included attention to the activities of foreign diplomats.

In 1988, I believe it was, Singapore had expelled U.S. embassy political officer Hank Hendrickson on what we regarded as trumped up charges. And when he went so also did his wife who was the chief economic officer. People seemed to forget that rather quickly, but I did not and I was always somewhat resentful of the Singaporeans. I think they overreacted. We expelled one of theirs in return, but only one. I'm glad we did that. I always had that in the back of my mind in dealing with the Singaporeans.

I think surveillance and the technical intelligence effort against us remains an issue there.

Q: How did we see things working out in Singapore? Lee Kuan Yew had retired, or at least moved up. Since he had been the presence for so long what was our feeling?

TEARE: Well, as usual, there are several strains in all of this. First of all, and maybe the most obvious, is that here was one guy who could contemplate his own departure from the scene. He took, I guess you could call it, a logical step to relinquish the chief of government position while he was still in good health, had all his faculties, and could arrange for succession the way he wanted it.

Goh Chok Tong who came in as Prime Minister was 15 to 20 years younger, a respected follower, a guy who was not going to kick over the traces. Lee Kuan Yew, meanwhile, stayed on in the cabinet as Senior Minister, more or less without portfolio, but still with very considerable influence. Physically he moved, I 'm not sure now whether he stayed in his original office or moved upstairs, but to this day, 1998, they are in the same building. Goh Chok Tong is on one floor and Lee Kuan Yew is on the floor above, and what does that symbolize?

At the same time it was widely considered that Lee Kuan Yew intended the Prime Ministership to pass after a few years to his son, Brigadier General Lee Shin Lun. Lun had risen to that rank before he was 40 and had retired from the military and had gone on to a cabinet position. But about that same time it was discovered that Lee Shin Lun had cancer and although I think he is now in reasonably good health this compromised his political future or threatened to. To this day Goh Chok Tong is still the Prime Minister and Lee Shin Lun is still round. I think he was already Deputy Prime Minister in addition to holding a portfolio. I'm not sure whether he is still Deputy Prime Minister today. I think he may have taken a leave of absence from that.

So how cynical was this, in fact? Was it really sort of a disguised form of familial succession? But never the less it was all done basically respectably. Lee Kuan Yew however continued to pull strings. He is credited with, after he left the Prime Ministership, the ban on chewing gum allegedly because he once heard of a subway car door being stuck on chewing gum. So he said there was to be no more chewing gum; it was illegal to sell it or import it. That's the sort of thing that can happen in Singapore.

We also noted that Singapore was actually experiencing a slight decline in population, or at least that emigration was running ahead of immigration. I remember in one of Lee Kuan Yew's annual addresses that he referred to this fact as, I think he call it, incomprehensible. But in fact there was good reason. It was a very repressive place and a lot of people wanted political freedom or intellectual freedom or simply a better atmosphere and they left. They didn't usually stay in

Southeast Asia. They would go to the U.S. or Canada, the UK or Europe, someplace, Australia, but out of Singapore. I think it was essentially for reasons of political or intellectual freedom.

There are also some exiles, self-exiles. People who didn't want to go back. Francis Yao, first in New Haven and then in Cambridge, was one guy I was in touch with. Another was a former high office holder, Mr. Dun An Yer, who is in Indiana, I think. There was a fairly lively but powerless anti Lee Kuan Yew...I don't want to call it a clique or even a network but individuals spotted around the world who had come up against him and lost - usually having their assets wiped out through judgments and libel suits. That is still the way politics is played in Singapore.

Q: Did you find that there was any particular problem dealing with Congress or the media for you on the Singapore issue?

TEARE: Not very much, no. I can't remember that that was a particular issue.

JON M. HUNTSMAN, JR.
Ambassador
Singapore (1992-1993)

Ambassador Jon M. Huntsman, Jr. was born in 1960. He is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. He served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce in International Trade Administration and in East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 1989 to 1991. He was ambassador to Singapore from 1992 to 1993. Ambassador Huntsman was interviewed by: Dr. Chung and Ruth Kurzbauer on February 25, 1994.

CHUNG: How did you end up as Ambassador to Singapore?

HUNTSMAN: While I served as Deputy Assistant for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, I got to view again first hand the work of Ambassadors around the entire Pacific rim theater. I became friends with a good many of them, person-to-person relationship. Yet, I didn't think I would ever be doing that. I still held them in very high regard and thought that at some point in my life this is what I would like to do. This was where you could really make a contribution. I retired from the Commerce Department in August, 1991 because I had promised the family business that I would take two or three years in public service and then would be back. I was of the opinion that if you spent more time than that, you lose your effectiveness because you have to bring something to the job. You can't just take a job without anything to give. You have to bring something presumably from academia, business, the legal field, whatever your background is, and use that in public service in order to make a contribution, to make a difference.

So after two and a half years I signaled to the Secretary of Commerce that I was going to return, and I did go back to the family business. I was given a senior management responsibility which sent me in a number of directions...overseeing international operations, and other management operations as well. I still continued to travel throughout the Pacific rim and to Europe and to then

Russia, where we had a venture in Moscow and one we were building in the Ukraine and also in India.

It wasn't until early 1992 that I was contacted about possibly serving as ambassador. There were a couple of people who were kind of chiding me and teasing me about serving as ambassador to Armenia. We had done a lot of relief work and knew the people in Armenia well. My younger brothers have traveled there around 30 times now and will be there next week taking a plane load of milk, rice and beans to help feed some of the people who simply are starving to death during the winter months. We would travel to Armenia and meet with a lot of our friends who were in senior positions--the foreign minister, the prime minister, etc. I would get teased a lot about serving as ambassador. The United States had not recognized Armenia formally at that point and, of course, I wouldn't be qualified to serve in Armenia. I had no background other than helping the people with humanitarian projects.

Then the conversation sort of turned toward...people were kind of pushing this along in the Bush Administration taking the idea of serving as a ambassador fairly seriously. Our two senators became involved. They tried to talk me into thinking about serving in some capacity. I had served, of course, with some senior people in the Bush Administration so they knew me and I knew them. They were willing to kind of get in there and argue in favor of sending a young person out to the right size country. I thought that this was silly, I should be older, but if an opportunity presented itself, I would really think about it. It would have to be the right country. I would not leave to serve in any country just to serve. My whole purpose of serving would be to go somewhere where you could make a contribution because you understand the people and their history, or there is a large economic and commercial component to the relationship that you can help because of your experience.

Singapore was presented almost jokingly at first, I was being chided by people in the Bush Administration and some of our leaders here in State. And then the talk became fairly serious. I let them know that I would have an interest serving if it in fact were Singapore. I had been there before. We had a venture there ten years ago which was what first took me to Singapore, and I knew the culture. One step led to another and I was called back to interview along with about 15 other people for the job. I was called back by Sam Skinner, who at that point was the President's Chief of Staff. It was his practice to interview ambassadorial candidates. I was put on a list along with lots of other people to be interviewed. I didn't think anything would come of it, but I did go back. He called me into his office, I remember it very well. He looked at my resume and then at me and I was very intimidated thinking, "This is the President's Chief of Staff, what am I doing here? I should be out doing what I have been doing the last six months, building the family business." I didn't think the job would ever come to fruition. He said, "Well, I have a son about your age." Then we got to talking about it and he said, "What do you think you can contribute to a position like this?" We got to talking and we became friends and he took me to the White House mess and we had lunch together after the meeting. It wasn't planned, it just happened because we kind of hit it off well. So we had a chance to talk in some detail about lots of things.

I went from there to interview with a couple of other people in the White House. What I had going for me were some people on the National Security Council Staff who I had worked with. A guy, Doug Paul, who at the time ran the Asia Directorate--in fact I talked about taking a job with

him after I left the Commerce Department, he wanted me to come interview. And Roger Porter, who was in charge of domestic policy in the White House, he was also a friend. People I had gotten to know during my years at the Commerce Department. So they were in there fighting for me. "Even though he is young, it might not be a bad idea. Singapore, after all, is a young country. There are lots of ministers there in their thirties and it has only been a country since 1965. After all he does speak Chinese and he has had some experience both politically and in the business world which would add immensely to the job because most of our relationship is based on trade and commerce."

That interview with the President Chief of Staff, did it, I am convinced because I got a call a week or two after that from the person who runs personnel in the White House saying, "The President is prepared to nominate you to become the Ambassador to Singapore." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I didn't know the President that well. We had met. I knew people around him who could vouch for me and that was the extent of it. I was up against people who knew the President well. I was coming in really as an outsider even though I had worked in his Administration. I said that I would be delighted to accept if the President wants to nominate me. She said, "Well, the President is going to be putting forward the paperwork and we will be sending you tons of paper that you will have to start filling out for the next month of your life."

So I got all the forms that one needs to fill out before one becomes an official candidate for an ambassadorship. Security forms that go to the FBI for a background check; financial disclosure forms and lots of other things that really took two to three weeks to fill out. Mounts of paper. I sent it all back and thought that this was only the first step, there were still lots of steps ahead that might ruin it. They had to send to the government for Agrément, and the government of Singapore could always turn it down. The State Department has to send your resume to the host government to see if they want you in the first place and they can always refuse a person and request another candidate.

Well, there was something going for me there too because I had worked closely with a fellow named Tommy Koh, who was the Singapore Ambassador to the United States and before that the Ambassador to the UN. I had developed a surprisingly close friendship with him. As head of Asian affairs at Commerce and would go around and speak to groups including the ASEAN ambassadors and we would have dinners together. We developed a great relationship. He always patted me on the back and say, "You will do nice things some day," in kind of a joking way. He had by that time gone back to Singapore where he was the senior person in the Foreign Ministry responsible for this kind of thing. I am convinced, even though I have no way of verifying it, that my name came in he told his colleagues that he knew me, had worked with me and could vouch for me even though I was younger than my predecessor, who was almost 80 years old, a retired governor. We got word back relatively fast. It was a very fast turn around from the Singapore government saying, "Yes, we will accept him."

Then it was the function of completing the Senator confirmation process. I took a couple of weeks to prepare for that learning about the relationship between the United States and Singapore, questions they might ask about me--what is a young person like you sitting here in front of the Senate? Don't you have better things to do? So I made it a point to go around and meet every Senator who would see me on the Foreign Relations Committee--Republicans,

Democrats, anybody. I got into see everybody with the exception of Paul Sarbanes, who would not see me. We later became very good friends, surprisingly. I went in to see Joe Biden, Alan Cranston, who was chairman of the Asian Pacific subcommittee, and a lot of others. As I told Senator Biden, "Please don't hold age against me. Look at experience. You were elected to the Senate when you were 30 years old. You couldn't possibly use age as an argument against me." And he said, "Absolutely not, I wouldn't think of doing that. I am going to base my vote on merit. I am going to look at your record and listen to what you say in the testimony that you give and the way that you answer questions and will make my vote based on that."

KURZBAUER: Not to keep you too long, Mr. Ambassador, although we wish we could go on for hours, but a question about the relationship between a career staff and a politically appointed ambassador. Did you find that there were any difficulties brought about by your being a politically appointed ambassador? A little bit of wariness perhaps as to what you really knew about the country or the diplomatic process?

HUNTSMAN: That is a very good question and one that was always on my mind. There is always a little bit of a strain when you begin the relationship simply because, in my case, I wanted to make sure that the career people felt comfortable with me. I wanted them to understand where I was coming from as a person, not as a political person, but as somebody who would be working with them as a colleague. I remember back during the Commerce Department days of being thrown in and managing a bureau of 40-60 career people. I made it a point the very first day, even as a relatively young person, to let them know that I was a political appointment but not a political person. I was there to work with them and would have an open door policy and anyone who wanted to come in and talk to me, good or bad, had that right, even if they had to go over their superior to do it. I wanted to make sure that I was fair, equitable and wanted what was in their best interest. I wasn't going to pull any political stunts. And I got along fabulously with the career people.

Then when I went over to the State Department I was primed by a lot of the Republican people who would come up to me and say, "Watch the State Department people, they will trick you every time." Former ambassadors who said, "You will like serving as ambassador, but never trust the State Department people. At the end of the day you have to make your own decision, never rely on their input. Don't trust their judgment. They will tell you one thing and do another thing." Well, I had known the Foreign Service people better than that. I had been around them and had respected them and the work they had been able to do. I had seen them from many, many years back, from a very young age, and thought that this wasn't the Foreign Service that I knew.

So when I got out to Singapore, I gathered in all the senior staff people around a table about this size and let them know in very precise terms what my management philosophy would be, what I wanted to accomplish as ambassador, and to let them know exactly what I felt about Foreign Service officers and my respect for them. I wanted to be seen as one of them and not as a political person, but a career person. I came to the job really with the background like many of theirs. I had lived in the region, I had studied the language, I had studied the region and because I had come from the business world didn't really make me in my own opinion 100 percent political. I told them that I felt more career than political and please accept that. And I thought

we would all get along fabulously well. And we did. I never had one person ever try to pull anything over on me. I never had one of them give me bum advice. I never had any of them pull the career/political kind of machinations. Never once was there any kind of tension because they felt I was a political person, because I didn't behave like a political person.

MS KURZBAUER: Another issue in the internal management of an embassy that has always interested me and from my own line officer experience, is the relationship, managing, working with Foreign Service support staff and the Foreign Service Nationals. Sometimes I have seen ambassadors who focus, of course, on the important relationships externally and also with their department heads, but there are other members of an embassy that work together to make it all happen. I wonder if you have any thoughts or experience there?

HUNTSMAN: We had a very talented embassy staff. We had a very talented group of Foreign Service officers who represented the State Department and a lot of other professionals who represented 14 other agencies. Beyond that we had 90 to 100 Foreign Service Nationals, who I thought really made a contribution. They were the unsung heroes of the embassy. When I first got there I told the senior staff that I was going to spend time walking around. It was my management philosophy at the Commerce Department, it was here, that I wanted to get around to know people and pat them on the back and tell them they were doing a good job or just learn a little about what they were doing. So my first day there I started on the first floor and looked into every office and met all the locals. Surprisingly it had been three years since they had met an ambassador. They hadn't seen an ambassador on their floor in years. I thought that this was terrific, we need to make them feel part of the embassy family. It took me a couple of days to meet all of them, but I did. I made sure that I had Foreign Service Nationals who were the designated spokespeople for the rest of the employees come into my office every now and again to articulate any concerns they had as a group. We also, for the first time ever, invited Foreign Service Nationals to join in on embassy events. I invited them to my home, just like the other professionals. They could bring their families and come over and spend some time at our house. We had interesting American performers, pop star performers, great singers, piano players, and I would bring them to the residence and invite everybody, not just the US employees, but the Foreign Service Nationals as well. And I think that went a long way in sort of redressing any friction that may have existed there before.

THOMAS F. JOHNSON
Public Affairs Director of APEC
Singapore (1993-1994)

Thomas F. Johnson was born in Illinois and was educated at Union College and the Free University of Berlin. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967 and has served in various posts in Paraguay, Germany, Liberia, Mexico and Singapore. In Washington, DC, Johnson served in the USIA as Inspector, Deputy Director of Acquisitions and Area Personnel Officer for Europe. Mr. Johnson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

JOHNSON: ... Then [Bill] and I flew to Singapore. Traveling with Bill Bodde was always a pleasure. He is a man of unlimited charm and inexhaustible chutzpah. His persuasive powers at the check-in counter got us upgraded to first class.

Bill and I were the first Americans to be assigned to the diplomatic staff of the Secretariat which was just moving into a beautiful suite of offices overlooking Sentosa Island. Bill's deputy was an Indonesian professor of economics. Taiwan (Chinese Taipei in APEC), Hong Kong, the PRC, the Republic of Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada seconded diplomats to the Secretariat. Each of us was responsible for a section or several working groups. More about that later. We established the No-Better-Offer-Lunch-Club, e.g. we'd go out to lunch every day together, unless you got a better offer from somewhere else. It was great comradery.

Q: Did you talk about politics?

JOHNSON: Nothing serious. I was careful not to involve myself in matters related to Taipei and Beijing. We made a lot of wise cracks about what was happening in one another's countries. There were the usual historical asides. For example I said to my PRC colleague one day as we were walking to lunch, "You know, China caused World War II."

"How?" he replied.

I responded, "After Japan invaded China the US imposed trade sanctions and the Japanese attacked the US to get us out of the way, which started the world war."

From behind me I heard, my Japanese colleague say, "I think that was meant for me." It was, but no offense was intended and none was taken.

Q: APEC stood for what?

JOHNSON: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. It's called the APEC forum.

Q: Let's go back a bit. Could you explain what APEC was and what it was doing and the sort of things we were interested in?

JOHNSON: APEC was founded in Canberra in November 1989 to reduce trade barriers. It was probably Australia's idea more than anyone's. The date coincided with a much more newsworthy event in Germany: the opening of the Berlin Wall. In the late 1980s Australia and New Zealand were feeling forsaken by the UK when London joined the European Common Market. Meanwhile Australia, already a regional power, was seeking to increase its influence and prestige in Asia. Canberra approached Tokyo in the hope of developing an all-Asian free trade area, or at least to reduce trade barriers. Initially Australia was not enthusiastic about the United States being a member of the organization because our economy was so large. The Japanese reminded the Australians that the US was its number one export market and it would not join an organization aimed a liberalizing trade which excluded the United States. Canberra caved in and invited Washington to be a founding member of APEC.

The Senior Officials of APEC divided up responsibilities into working groups to do such things as facilitate travel by business executives, reduce barriers to foreign investment, standardize tests so that consumer products that would be accepted in one country would be accepted in other countries, develop alternatives to fossil fuels, and foster the growth of small and medium size enterprises. Because the United States had open markets compared to most countries in Asia, APEC offered Washington the opportunity to gain equal treatment.

Q: Please name the countries that were members of APEC in while you were assigned to the Secretariat.

JOHNSON: Australia, Brunei, Canada, China, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the United States. After I left in July 1994, Chile was admitted in November of that year and Russia, Peru and Vietnam in November 1998.

Q: Is APEC a trade bloc

JOHNSON: No. Nor does it seek to achieve the sort of economic and political integration that the EU has accomplished.

Q: You mentioned the Senior Officials. Who were they?

JOHNSON: Mostly sub-cabinet officials and senior diplomats. They were in effect our board of directors.

Q: Who headed the Secretariat and how long was his/her term of office?

JOHNSON: The chief executive was the Executive Director. Bill Bodde was the first Executive Director. The post rotated among the economies on a yearly basis.

Q: What language or languages were used at APEC meetings?

JOHNSON: English was the agreed upon language, although in some situations translators may have been used.

Q: What was your office space like?

JOHNSON: The Singaporeans provided the Secretariat with an entire floor of a modern office building overlooking the harbor. I could see the famous British fort from my window. It was such a fabulous view that I probably spent more time gazing out the floor- to-ceiling window than I should have. After I left APEC the Secretariat expanded onto the floor below and eventually moved out to a new building on the campus of the university.

Q: How were decisions reach in APEC?

JOHNSON: By consensus. And by that I mean not every member had to be equally enthusiastic about every decision. Consensus was important in the Secretariat, even in the most mundane things. One day it was agreed (consensus) that the entire staff would have lunch at the cafeteria in our building. I hated the food at the cafeteria and announced I was going next door to a better place. Several colleagues sheepishly joined me, but I realized my assertiveness had irritated several Asian colleagues. The next time the staff reached a consensus to go somewhere, I went along quietly.

Q: How would you rate the enthusiasm of the member economies regarding APEC's new agenda?

JOHNSON: If you don't mind, I will quote from Bill Bodde's book View From the 19th Floor-Reflections of the First APEC Executive Director. "Most enthusiastic about institution building in APEC are: Australia, Canada, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States. In the middle, from hedged to reluctant support are: China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Hong Kong and Brunei. Resisting all efforts toward APEC institution building is: Malaysia."

Q: What were you doing? What did your job consist of?

JOHNSON: I was in charge of media relations and protocol. APEC was very newsworthy. I spent a lot of time with the foreign and Singaporean press. I was building a paper free library, so users could consult our documents online. I also created a modest publications program and wrote speeches for the Executive Director. I occasionally wrote items for him for the media, a magazine article for example. I edited reports by colleagues for inclusion in publications and larger reports.

I received visiting delegations, guided them around the Secretariat and arranged for them to meet staff. I was in charge of planning representational events. Sometimes I had a little fun with visitors from distant countries. After noting that looking south from our suite one could see into the southern hemisphere, and then I would raise my arm about 60 degrees and point out the equator. "See the faint green line across the sky?" I would ask. A few people took me seriously.

Q: Tell me about your editing the work of your fellow diplomats assigned to the Secretariat?

JOHNSON: Sometimes editing was a touchy issue. It was actually easier to edit the work of my Korean and Japanese than my Canadian and Australian colleague. Neither of the former was completely at home in English, so I could say to them, "Do you mind if I rephrase your submission so it reads....."

They would respond, "By all means. Just don't change the intent of what I say."

On the other hand, I received a text from my Australian colleague that started with a sentence which ran eleven lines. I persuaded her that not everyone was a fan of Thomas Wolfe and that I needed to break up her sentences. Some of the prose of the Canadian was so convoluted that it was incomprehensible.

Q: Who was your boss in Washington?

JOHNSON: Bill Bodde and I worked for Sandy Kristoff, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the East Asia and Pacific Bureau (EAP), but our more immediate boss in Washington was Phil Lincoln, Director of the Office of Economic Policy in EAP. Sandy was a hard-charging tough negotiator. She commanded great respect by everyone who knew her. Later she served in the White House for the National Security Counsel and then moved to New York Life as a vice president. Phil Lincoln was a soft-spoken China hand. He would call up occasionally and say, "If it's not too much trouble, could you do this for me." Phil was a wonderful guy who was killed in a traffic accident in China.

Q: How long did it take you to get used to the climate?

JOHNSON: Because of its proximity to the equator, Singapore does not have seasons. The temperature is in the mid 80s to low 90s every day. After a week or so your inner thermostat adjusts to the heat and humidity. Fortunately there is often a sea breeze. Paraguay was a lot hotter. Although it sounds paradoxical, it was easy to catch a cold in Singapore. Banks, shopping centers and particularly supermarkets way over-used air conditioning, so it was easy to get a chill. I often carried a cotton sweater with me.

Q: Was the social system over controlling?

JOHNSON: There was enforced savings and no real poverty. There were no homeless and no beggars. Singaporeans accepted a lot of government intervention in their lives for what they believed was the common good. You could get fined if you let water stand around potted plants because the water was a breeding ground for mosquitoes which carried malaria and dengue fever. I applauded the prohibition on the sale of chewing gum. One of the best selling tee shirts in Singaporean stores had in big letters across the front: Singapore is a Fine City and listed all the things one could be fined for. One day a colleague came into the office steaming mad. "What's wrong," I asked.

"This man was such a pig!" she sputtered.

"Did he throw a bag of garbage out the window?" I asked.

"No," came the reply.

"I suppose he tossed a newspaper onto the street and walked away," I ventured.

"No," she snorted. "He threw a cigarette butt out his car window!"

"You are quite right to be so offended," I rejoined. "That's the end of civilization as we know it."

Q: What your schedule like?

JOHNSON: We worked as many hours as necessary and took time off as it was available. It was not a high pressure job. We were twelve hours ahead of Washington which meant that Bill and I usually called the Department from our apartments during the evening our time.

Q: You were there before email. This was the beginning of the real explosion, and ability to communicate, wasn't it? I would imagine this was all part and parcel of what your organization was doing and was getting involved.

JOHNSON: Yes, the email was just starting. It really exploded in '95 or '96. We were still communicating by phone and telegram. One night about 3:00 am I was awakened from a sound sleep by the phone next my bed. A secretary in the Department declared, "I called your office and you're not there."

I said, "No, I'm at home. It is my nap time"

She said, "When are you going back to your office?"

I said, "In a few of hours."

She said, "That's a long nap."

Finally I growled, "It's three AM here, not PM, AM."

There was a long silence and then, "Oh, really?"

One does not offend clerks and secretaries because they can take their revenge in unexpected and untraceable ways, so I was as sweet as possible.

We cleared up a problem concerning travel orders, then I finished my nap.

Q: Did you have a pleasant apartment?

JOHNSON: Bill got me in the building where he was living. I had a one bedroom furnished apartment on the sixth floor just off Orchard Road in downtown Singapore. It was quite adequate for my needs, well located but very noisy outside. Fortunately my flat faced a quite residential area, not the busy street that ran in front of the building. Singaporeans hold their motorcycle races at 2:00 a.m.

Q: How did you adjust to being a bachelor again?

JOHNSON: It was hard. I had a very solid marriage and deeply missed Carolyn. I loved our kids and thought of them frequently. Evenings when I was alone my apartment were the worst, especially since most of my colleagues had their wives and children with them. Carolyn and Suzanne flew out to Singapore in the summer of 1993 for a several weeks. We vacationed on Bali and had a great time. Patrick, our older son, joined me for about a month in 1994 and did an internship at the Secretariat of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council. Patrick and I went to

Bali for an APEC conference. Erik, who had just finished a stint in the Marine Corps, was unable to take time out from his studies to come to Singapore.

Q: Did you have a car?

JOHNSON: No. I was terrified of driving on the left. Although Singaporean drivers were courteous, crossing the street was sometimes an adventure. I was happy to avail myself of the city state's well developed mass transit system and taxis. Except when it rained and everyone was hailing a taxi, cabs were not readily available.

Q: Did the tours of duty of you and Ambassador Bodde coincide from beginning to end?

JOHNSON: No he arrived in late 1992 and departed just before Christmas 1993. I stayed on until July 1994.

Q: Were you then the US representative to APEC for the remainder of your tour of duty?

JOHNSON: Yes, the same as other colleagues were representatives of their economies. We used our functional titles and mine was Director of Public Affairs.

Q: When Ambassador Bodde departed, who was your APEC boss?

JOHNSON: Bill was replaced by a very senior Indonesian diplomat, Ambassador Rusli Noor. Well into his 70s, he was very courtly and articulate. He and I got along very well. When my time in Singapore was up he asked me to extend until he moved on in six months but that was not possible.

Q: Did you do much entertaining at home while you were at APEC?

JOHNSON: Without Carolyn it would not have been much fun. Moreover since I couldn't grill in Singapore, I had no way to hide the fact that I am a miserable cook. When I hosted a reporter it was a restaurant. Nearly all the entertaining was done in restaurants.

Q: What was your relationship to our embassy?

JOHNSON: I had a desk in the political-economic section, and in the rare instances I needed to send a classified cable to the Department, I typed the document myself and delivered it the communications and records room. Dennis Donahue, the Public Affairs Officer, and I became friends. When Dennis was out of town I supervised his staff and signed the USIA cables. However I never attended a country team meeting because I had to maintain my distance organizationally from the embassy. My boss was in the State Department in Washington, not the US Embassy Singapore. I should note here that Skip Boyce, who was chargé most of the time I was at APEC, and Larry Greenwood, the Political-Economic Counselor, were extraordinarily supportive our mission to APEC.

Q: What was life in Singapore like?

JOHNSON: Soon after I arrived a reporter asked me if I knew the difference between Singapore and yogurt. I pled ignorance.

“Yogurt has culture.”

I walked over most of the island, at least the urban area. The variety of architecture was remarkable. The government preserved a lot of the old houses and ensured that many traditional areas, such as on one bank of the river front, warehouses and other commercial establishments were recycled into restaurants and pedestrian areas. I loved walking through the old neighborhoods. The island state has a symphony orchestra. It wasn't great but I attended a number of their performances. It also has a few good museums. One musical, Les Miserables- a road show- drew large and appreciative audiences. Cinemas showed first run films uncut. Singaporean friends took me to “Schindler's List”. During the most tragic scenes there was laughter in the audience. I was furious at the show of insensitivity, until my host whispered to me that Chinese sometimes respond to shocking situations with laughter.

Video tapes were subject to the machinations of the government's morals squad. Nudity was blanked out, although you could read on the box what was happening. Obscenities were covered with silence, although you could read lips or consult the guide on the box. Fortunately Skip Boyce had a collection of feature films on tape which he shared with me.

The city state's greatest source of culture was its unending assortment of inexpensive restaurants. The cuisine reflected the three cultures of the nation: Chinese, Indonesian and Indian. Best of all were the open air restaurants overlooking the Straits near the Changi Airport. I spent many happy evenings at the East Coast Seafood Center. Incidentally although lights on the Indonesian islands of Batam and Bitam twinkled in the distance, diners could not help notice that merchant ships anchored in waters patrolled by the Singaporean Navy. Piracy still is a major problem in the Straits of Malacca.

Q: Did you do much official travel while assigned to APEC?

JOHNSON: I was not on the road as much as the officers who coordinated the activities of the working groups, but I managed to get to China twice and to Indonesia several times. I represented the Secretariat at a conference to promote the growth of small and medium size enterprises. Shenzhen was just across the border from Hong Kong. I represented the Secretariat at this conference of small and medium-sized enterprises. The chief of the Chinese delegation to the conference happened to be a Chinese Senior Official to APEC. He asked to see the remarks I had prepared to give to the meeting the following day. I allowed him to read the remarks which I had cleared with Bill Bodde. A few hours later he asked me to come to his hotel room and announced objections to several things I planned to say. I responded that I would rephrase some points but not others. After I gave my presentation the following morning, he lashed out at me during a plenary session. Most of the delegations were clearly embarrassed by the Senior Official's attempt at censorship. I soon learned that in the PRC control of information is part of daily life and foreigners are not excused from control.

I should add that the Chinese were wonderful hosts. I was asked to stay after the conclusion of the conference to help write the final report. I waited in my hotel room most of the day for a call from the conference coordinator. Finally late in the afternoon he phoned me that the draft was not ready but that he would like to take me to dinner. That night he took me to a private room in a large restaurant where we had a sumptuous meal with the other conference staff. I suspect my presence legitimized the cost of the banquet for everyone. I don't know if a final report was ever written on the conference.

A few months later I represented the Secretariat at a conference in Beijing. The Chinese threw a lavish banquet in the official hall next to the entrance to the Forbidden City. The Deputy Trade Minister came by the table where I was sitting with delegates for several other economies. He greeted each of us warmly and selected morsels from a tray of exotic dishes and placed them on our plates along with a commentary on the importance of fine food in fostering international understanding.

However the following morning our hosts had a little fun at my expense. At the beginning of each meal one of the Chinese who were running the conference appointed a delegate as "guest of honor." I suddenly found myself the honoree at breakfast. With everyone looking at me the first delicacy was placed on my plate, a shimmering three by three inch square of coagulated pig blood. Still suffering the effects of libations consumed at the previous evening's banquet, I stared at the undulating mass for several minutes before whispering to my host, "I am really sorry, but I can't eat this." He smiled slyly and had the waiter bring me a bowl of rice soup. Score one for China.

One morning we visited a university outside Beijing. Our guide took me aside and showed me a small plaza between two buildings. He explained that during the Cultural Revolution students belonging to rival factions of the Red Guards fought pitched battles for control of the small piece of real estate. Pointing to places on the ground he said softly, "People died here and here and here. Can you understand that?"

I replied that I could not.

"Thank you for your honest answer," he responded, "Neither do I." Apparently he had witnessed the fighting.

Q: Did you get to Vietnam or Thailand?

JOHNSON: Shortly after I arrived in Singapore I attended a meeting on information technology in Bangkok. I had an opportunity to travel to Vietnam as a tourist but chose instead to go scuba diving with our naval attaché and a friend from the German Embassy to Sipadan an island paradise off the coast of Borneo. It was by far the best diving I have ever enjoyed.

Q: I gather that one of the functions of APEC was to encourage the sharing of information. Given the diverse array of cultures in the organization, was that difficult?

JOHNSON: I think there were four levels of information sharing. First, there were the presentations by heads of delegations at plenary sessions. These varied widely in relevance and in quality. Second, there was the give and take between Senior Officials in closed door meetings. I never attended one of these confabs but I gather the Senior Officials were fairly candid with one another. Third, there were the thousands of private conversations between delegates outside of meetings and these exchanges were very useful. Finally, the economies provided the Secretariat with data to be included in published reports and placed on the web site. The quality of the statistics varied greatly from economy to economy. The US, New Zealand, Australia and Canada are open societies that gather data and release it freely. Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand are still developing their capacity to collect economic data, evaluate it and publish it. China has traditionally been reluctant to release data, in part because of its definition of state security and in part because Chinese at the province level do not tell everything they know to the central government. Other countries fall into or between these overly simplified categories.

Q: What was the high point of your tour of duty at APEC?

JOHNSON: Ironically it was in Seattle and not Singapore. The US year in the chair of APEC was coming to an end and the final meetings, including a leaders' summit, was hosted by Washington. (Note: leaders, not chiefs of state or heads of government. It was all part of the agreement that brought China, Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong into APEC.)

Following the Senior Officials Meeting President Clinton hosted a meeting for the "leaders" on Blake Island. It was a perfect day and the meeting went beautifully. The city of Seattle went all out to accommodate the press corps of 2,000 covering the APEC meeting. Volunteers staffed a huge press center. Even the local topless bar got into the spirit with a sign: "Welcome APECPECKERS".

I went home to have Thanksgiving dinner with my family, and then flew back to Singapore. Bill Bodde, my American boss, was leaving at the end of the year. There was a round of farewells for Bill. I shot a panoramic view of the harbor from his office which we had framed and the staff gave him as goodbye present. Bill was known for having an eye for a trim Oriental leg. My fellow diplomats, at least the guys, gave him a well turned table leg with a plaque commemorating his appreciation for Asian beauty.

Meanwhile there was no response to numerous cables to Washington asking that I be extended until the following July. Ambassador Rusli Noor was adamant that I stay and I was more than willing. I was resigned to leaving although it would have left no American in APEC. Finally on December 20, I got a message that Assistant Secretary Winston Lord had ordered that I remain at the Secretariat until the following summer. Although I sorely missed my family, I had a job to do and I looked forward to working for Ambassador Rusli Noor.

Q: How did you find the Asian press?

JOHNSON: The Singaporean press, of course, is rather tame. Singapore, which is a one party state, has a definition of democracy which is certainly more limited than ours. If you want a nonexistent art form, it's the political cartoon in Singapore. Dissent is unwelcome in a society

that thrives on the “common good” and consensus. However at a UN Day dinner I heard a former cabinet member rail against censorship in the name of the common good.

While I was in Singapore, a couple of Singaporean officials leaked an economic forecast and were jailed, although the data was positive.

I got along very well with the Asian press and had several very good contacts among the Singaporean press corps. I talked to the press frequently and arranged for Bill Bodde and Rusli Noor to give many interviews. They had an Asian business television network that was based in Singapore. Bill, a former newsman, was an outstanding spokesman for APEC. The shy Rusli Noor was less comfortable speaking into a microphone or doing an interview in a TV studio.

The Asian press showed much more sustained interest in APEC than American media which remained more focused on Europe.

Every Friday evening reporters and a few of us public affairs officers met at a bar. Until it had a fire, we convened at the Second Story, a pub in an old Chinese row house. Then we moved our gatherings to the Key Largo, a bar-restaurant in a remodeled tea house on the river front. The Key Largo décor was based on the Humphrey Bogart film. One night the management was short of waiters so we were given our own bar with two taps. We were to run our own tab with a 20% discount for a lack of service. We had a grand time and left a large tip to cover possible over drafts.

I departed the Key Largo that night with an Australian reporter who was so drunk that I was afraid he would wander into the river and drown, so I attempted to propel him home. He was a neighbor. No cabs were available so we set off on foot. Passing under an underpass a figure stepped out of the darkness. “Oh shit, we are going to be mugged,” he bellowed forlornly.

“But we are in Singapore and mugging is not allowed,” I slurred hopefully.

“Are you gentlemen driving this evening?” came an officious voice out of the night.

“We’re saved. It’s a fucking constable,” screamed the Australian relieved.

“No officer, we are walking,” I said as soberly as possible. I pulled out my keys as did my companion. “See no car keys.”

The policeman stared at us sternly. “Stay out of the street,” he declared in parting.

During my time in Singapore the biggest story concerned Michael Fey, an eighteen year old American who was caned for stealing a stop sign and defacing cars. Vandalism of automobiles was a fairly serious offence in Singapore. A car is a major investment in Singapore. A normal sedan costs about \$30,000 and the permit to drive it an equal amount. Stealing stop signs was also a grave infraction. Upwards of 200 journalists, mostly Americans, were assigned to the story. It was ridiculous. I was very glad I had nothing to do with that. Dennis Donahue, the PAO at the embassy, was the US spokesman.

Q: Do you think caning is cruel?

JOHNSON: It is not a lot of fun for the person who is caned but that is its purpose. Caning serves as a deterrent to crime and is only administered to men under 60. I thought it was absurd for President Clinton to involve himself in the case. Clinton should have said, "Take your whacks and stop whimpering, you little bastard."

Incidentally the Singaporeans have draconian laws regarding drug dealing and drug abuse on the island nation is far below that of other Asian nations such as the Philippines. A half ounce of hard drugs or three ounces of marijuana can lead to the gallows. While I was in Singapore a Dutchman was arrested for possession of more than a kilo of raw heroin. He was on his way from Bangkok back to the Netherlands when his plane was diverted to Singapore because of weather or mechanical problems. Drug dogs found the heroin in his suitcase in the baggage hold. He was arrested, tried, convicted and hanged. Given the misery and death that heroin use causes, it is hard to have much sympathy for that Dutchman.

Q: How did you find the Taiwan – People's Republic relationship play out within your staff and within APEC?

JOHNSON: As I already noted it was a topic of great sensitivity. One day I was writing an article for a magazine about APEC, and needed to use the term "government" in reference to Chinese Taipei. Normally in APEC we spoke of members as "economies" rather than countries or governments. I went to my Chinese colleague, Yang Yafei, and asked, "May I in this one instance use the term "government" for Chinese Taipei?"

Yang looked at me intently and replied, "Of course, local government."

Defeated in my effort to make the article more readable I wrote "economy" instead of government or local government.

Q: So you had to sort of denationalize.

JOHNSON: Absolutely, absolutely. It had to be economized and denationalized and "degovernmentalized."

Q: Were there other things you had to watch out for?

JOHNSON: The real mine field concerned the three Chinas, particularly Beijing's sensitivities regarding Taiwan. Shortly after he became Executive Director Bill Bodde innocently put out a list of national days. It did not take long for the PRC to object strenuously to the list because it included the national day of Taiwan. Bill, a very skillful diplomat, accepted responsibility for the gaffe and issued a list of days to avoid trying to do business in the member economies, without identifying the national days. On another occasion a colleague thoughtlessly put up a display of desk flags of the APEC economies. The flag of Republic of China stood in the place for Chinese Taipei. The exhibit was quickly removed.

Q: Why was Hong Kong a member of APEC?

JOHNSON: When APEC was founded in 1989 Hong Kong was still a UK crown colony.

Q: Who brokered the entry of the Peoples Republic of China and Taiwan into APEC?

JOHNSON: South Korea. Apparently it was a masterpiece of diplomacy. Incidentally the Taiwanese, Hong Kong and the PRC diplomats seconded to the Secretariat got along famously.

Q: How did the inclusion of three Chinas play out in the media?

JOHNSON: The Singaporean press and nearly all the international correspondents were aware of the inter-China sensitivities and phrased their questions accordingly. However when Winston Lord, the Assistant Secretary of East Asia and the Pacific, held a press conference at the Secretariat a Taiwanese journalist, who I suspect was carrying water for her government, asked a very provocative question that I thought attempted to get Lord to say something that would have been offensive to the PRC. Lord handled the situation beautifully and sidestepped the land mines the reporter had put in his path. I had words with the journalist afterwards and told her that I thought her loaded question was unethical. Perhaps I was being overly sensitive.

Q: Tell me about your relations with other members of the staff.

JOHNSON: Almost without exception we got along with one another very well. When Rusli Noor moved up to be Executive Director, he was replaced as Deputy Executive Director by a senior Japanese diplomat Sujuiro Imanishi who had studied at Dartmouth and been Consul General in Houston. We didn't socialize with one another after hours but I often joined him for a late morning coffee. We were the same age and, unlike most Japanese, he talked about World War II freely. I said to him one day, "You know when I consider the US conduct of the war I am really deeply troubled by one action. I refer to the American-British bombing of Dresden in February 1954. It was senseless slaughter of innocent, perhaps a war crime." He listened intently and I should have shut up but I continued, "One the other hand, I can think we Americans can make a case for the destruction of Hiroshima."

Suddenly the temperature in the room dropped the about 20°. He looked at me very icily and said, "I'm not listening."

I said, "I'm sorry but I am not sure I understand you."

Imanishi repeated his words slowly, "I'm not listening."

I responded, "I guess the conversation is over."

Later I learned Imanishi came from an old samurai family.

Q: Did you ever talk to Imanishi about the war again?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. But we got along fine.

Q: Wasn't there a Japanese on the professional staff?

JOHNSON: There was indeed. Shuji Miyazaki, who belonged to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) was in charge of the research and analysis section of the Secretariat. Shuji was junior to Sujuiro Imanishi, who was later Deputy Executive Director and eventually Executive Director. Although the more junior officer worked for a more powerful ministry than the senior officer, they respected one another. I much enjoyed Shuji's company at lunch and he was a real pleasure to work with.

Q: How about your colleagues on the professional staff?

JOHNSON: As I noted earlier, we were a merry bunch. I particularly liked the Korean, Park Jin-Ho, a very jovial ex-army officer. We called him "Dr. Noodle" because no matter where we went to eat, he nearly always ordered noodles. He heard Bill Bodde and me talking in a worried tone about some bad economic news from North Korea (which is not a member of APEC). Park told me later, "Don't worry about the North Koreans. We can handle them. What we don't want is another Germany."

"Germany? What are you talking about?" I asked completely perplexed.

"You know how much reunification has cost the West Germans? Billions and billions! Do you know what would happen if the North Korean government collapsed? We can't afford to have millions of poor North Korean refugees," he declared.

Q: How about the Canadian? What was he like?

JOHNSON: I have forgotten which ministry Peter Richards hailed from. Peter oversaw the efforts of a working group on human resources development. I don't think that working group produced much of substance while I was with the Secretariat. Peter was a congenial guy with an infectious sense of humor. He took great satisfaction in needling me about the things Canadians enjoy blaming us Yanks for. Sometimes at lunch he and Graeme Pirie of New Zealand would gang up on me. I responded that they represented the axis of marginal powers. It was all good fun.

Q: Did you have to be careful about kidding your Asian colleague?

JOHNSON: There were certain topics that were off limits for political reasons. Asians did not think Anglo-Saxon vulgar humor was funny and irony went right over their heads. I never heard an Asian colleague swear.

Q: You have not said much about the Australians, although they initiated this thing, the Australians. In a way, they've always been sort of the odd duck. An essentially occidental

country, full of energy, but rather small in population, in the Orient, trying to be a leader. How did that work?

JOHNSON: Well, once the United States joined APEC as a founding member, Australia was very helpful. The US and Australian delegations worked closely with one another. For the most part, our interests coincided. The Australians certainly played a very prominent role in many of the working groups. I have forgotten which ones they were most interested in. As a major coal producer, they were certainly involved in fossil fuel discussion and of course as big meat and grain exporter the Australians wanted to liberalize trade in agricultural commodities.

Merry Wickes, an Australian diplomat, was assigned to the Secretariat. Merry coordinated the meetings of three working groups: Transportation, Tourism and Telecommunications. Merry had an exhausting schedule and was on the road most of the time. She was very ambitious and worked hard. Merry kept the High Commission in Singapore well informed on what we were doing.

Q: Didn't you and Ambassador Bodde regularly brief your colleagues at our embassy on what was happening in the Secretariat?

JOHNSON: I am not sure about Bill, but I did not go out of my way to keep Larry Greenwood and Skip Boyce up to date on our work. We dealt directly with Washington and, besides, they had a full plate dealing with bilateral issues.

Q: How about New Zealand?

JOHNSON: The Kiwis played an important role in APEC. They even managed to stay out of the shadow of Australia, a nation to which they often play second fiddle internationally. We had an embarrassing incident at a Senior Officials Meeting in Jakarta. The Indonesians of course hosted the meeting at a beautiful hotel. In the ballroom, where the plenary sessions were held, the Indonesians had hung a huge banner with the APEC logo, a map that included all the member economies. I had just had the logo redone but apparently APEC Jakarta slipped up because shortly after we entered the room I gently nudged my boss, Executive Director Rusli Noor, and said, "Sir, don't look now but there is something missing on the banner."

"What's that?" he responded.

"New Zealand," I said.

"Oh God," the old diplomat declared. What should we do about it?"

I said, "If I were you, I would quietly apologize to the New Zealanders for the mistake and nobody will notice. Afterwards you can burn that banner." And so the Indonesians had the right person speak to the right person on the New Zealand delegation. The Kiwis took the gaffe in good humor. I think they were used to it.

Q: What was your New Zealand colleague like at the Secretariat like?

JOHNSON: He could be a pain in the ass. He had been Consul General in San Francisco and was always complaining about things going wrong in the United States. Finally in exasperation I told him, "Graeme, if you stop bitching about how evil the US is, I will try to forget for a moment how irrelevant New Zealand is to the world."

I don't think I ever heard him criticize the US again. Actually we got along with one another very well. Graeme had one of the hardest jobs at the Secretariat. He coordinated the input of the "Eminent Persons Group"- a council of advisers. He had to finesse input by some large egos. The poor man developed a condition that made him painfully sensitive to heat, which was not a good thing to have in Singapore.

Speaking of heat, our Australian colleague told me she was allergic to bright sunshine, not a good condition to have in a place one degree above the equator. When she did get her ambassadorship, I understand it was in the Middle East.

Incidentally, the Australian Public Affairs Officer at the Australian High Commission and I were good friends. He was married to an Indonesian, and he converted to Islam. He was probably the only Aussie I ever knew who did not drink.

Q: Were any Singaporean diplomats assigned to the Secretariat?

JOHNSON: Not while I was there. However we had about a dozen support staff. Agatha Choong, the Executive Director's secretary and office manager was a professional of stellar quality. The other secretaries, clerks and drivers were all first-rate. I should also note that we had a very able librarian, an Australian, who worked for me.

Q: What was it like dealing with the Chinese?

JOHNSON: I assume by Chinese you refer to all three economies. The Foreign Service Officers they sent were exceptionally able. They were a real pleasure to work with, lunch with and, on occasion, have a beer with. Yang Yafei, the PRC rep, coordinated the work of the Marine Conservation, Fisheries and Regional Energy Cooperation working groups. Max Li was the chief administrative officer at the Secretariat and Terry Lee was organized our all important data base. What was really interesting was how smoothly the three men worked together.

Q: How did you find the Mexicans and Chileans when they came in? Because talk about strangers in a strange land. Most of the other members had been dealing together for centuries but all of the sudden there's Mexico and Chile (and then later Peru). Some of them had Japanese immigrants.

JOHNSON: Well, Mexico joined APEC after I left the Secretariat. Historically Mexico's main link to Asia was the colonial galleon trade between Acapulco and Manila. Chile was interested in Asia primarily as a market for its copper. Still later Peru joined APEC so that made three Spanish speaking members. Even after they entered APEC their commerce remained predominantly in the western hemisphere.

Q: How about the Philippines? They were going through a lot of unrest, they were having real problems.

JOHNSON: The Philippines was very interested particularly in telecommunications and in anything that could contribute to the modernization of its economy. Manila sent very qualified representatives to APEC meetings. The Philippines didn't have a diplomat seconded to the Secretariat when I was there, but one came later.

Q: I was in Korea and we used to get those calls in the middle of the night. I don't sleep with pajamas, and sometimes getting up to answer the phone it would be cold in the winter and I was trying to make decisions while I am shivering away. Were there any particular economic or commercial issues during the time you were there that sort of engaged everybody?

JOHNSON: Well, I think the biggest issue was how fast APEC was going to grow, and we were getting ready for the 1994 Bogor Leaders meeting. According to the Bogor Declaration, the leaders announced their goal of achieving "free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific by 2020. ...the pace of the implementation will take into account differing levels of economic development among APEC economies, with the industrialized economies achieving the goal the goal of free and open trade and investment no later than 2010 and developing countries no later than 2020." We are only four years away from the first deadline and fourteen years from the latter. We will see whether the objectives contained in the Bogor Declaration were overly ambitious.

During my tenure we were preoccupied with getting the Secretariat up and running. One thing that we did do -- and this is to Bill Bodde's eternal credit -- is we established an internal communication network, sort of an email type. Bill oversaw the very nonpartisan, fair letting of that contract. I've forgotten who went to, but it took up a lot of time and has provided a very important tool for the infrastructure.

Q: Did you find that APEC overlapped or was in collision with or any problems with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)?

JOHNSON: No, ASEAN is primarily a political organization, and APEC has ASEAN as its core. All members of ASEAN were in APEC. I think ASEAN today includes Burma and Burma is not part of APEC. ASEAN has its headquarters in Jakarta, which I visited and met with several officials. With the advent of the war on terrorism APEC has become more politically oriented but that occurred long after I left. One organization that we dealt with a lot, and after I retired in 1994, I ended up going to work for, was the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). PECC was, and I assume still is, APEC's think tank.

Q: Did you receive many visitors from embassies of non APEC members?

JOHNSON: Yes. The Mongolians visited the Secretariat on several occasions. Unfortunately Mongolia, although Asian, has no coastline on Pacific. One day Rusli Noor and I were in his office with some Mongolians and Rusli pointed to a map and noted that his home consisted of an

archipelago of more than 9,000 inhabited islands. I remarked facetiously, “Well, why don’t we trade one of the Indonesian islands for a few thousand square kilometers of the pasture land in Mongolia and that would qualify the Mongolia to join APEC.”

I could see Rusli wince. Mongolian seized upon my wise crack as a great solution. I spent the next fifteen minutes trying to explain to them that it was not a very funny joke. The Mongolians left a bit crestfallen.

The South Africans and the Israelis were also quite interested in APEC. Both realized they were not eligible for membership but interested in APEC’s efforts to liberalize trade and investment. The South Africans lamented that the African nations could not cooperate as the economies of the Pacific Rim.

Q: What was Viet Nam’s relationship to APEC?

JOHNSON: It wasn’t a part of APEC. I guess there was a Vietnamese embassy in Singapore, but I don’t remember ever meeting a Vietnamese official in Singapore.

Q: What was the policy on bringing in new members?

JOHNSON: I believe after Mexico and Peru joined, there was a moratorium on bringing in new members. Part of the problem was there was only so much room of the table. And as we got more and more delegations, instead of having three people abreast, you had two people abreast or just one person. The Secretariat delegation sometimes sat fifteen deep, which reminds me of something that happened to me during a conference in Jakarta. On about the third day of a conference, I was really tired and the Japanese delegation was presenting a detailed proposal which I was sure I could get the text of. I was sitting in the third row of the Secretariat delegation and it would have been awkward for me to excuse myself so after adjusting my glasses low on my nose so it was hard to see my eyes, I dozed off. Suddenly I was awakened by a tap on my shoulder. It was an aide to the Deputy Foreign Minister of Indonesia who was chairing the meeting. I thought I’m in trouble. The aide said, “The minister wants to see you.”

I crouched down and made my way to the chairman.

He said, “I have to brief the Indonesian press at the end of this session and I want you to provide me with notes.”

I responded, “Yes, Mr. Minister, but we have another hour and a half to go.”

He smiled and observed, “You know what’s going to happen.”

I said. “All right. Give me a half hour.”

I wandered sleepily to the office set aside for the Secretariat and hammered out a dozen talking points regarding what I assumed would happen in the next 90 minutes along with some standard APEC catechism. Since the press was not allowed in the plenary sessions it was hard for me to

go wrong. Of course I didn't go to the press briefing which was in Indonesian. The Deputy Minister thanked me later for my work.

End of reader